

# ***WINE*** ***in the BIBLE***

**A Biblical Study on the Use of  
Alcoholic Beverages**

**by**  
**Samuele Bacchiocchi**

**FOREWORDS**

**by**  
**Prof. Robert P. Teachout**  
**Dr. Ernest H. J. Steed**  
**Dr. George W. Reid**

**B**iblical  
**t**erspectives  
4990 Appian Way  
Berrien Springs  
Michigan 49103, USA

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

***THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC*** is a timely symposium that defines the biblical principles to make good musical choices.

***THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*** refutes the common arguments used to negate the continuity and validity of the Sabbath.

***IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION?*** unmasks with compelling Biblical reasoning the oldest and the greatest deception of all time, that human beings possess immortal souls that live on forever.

***THE MARRIAGE COVENANT*** is designed to strengthen your Christian home through a recovery of those biblical principles established by God to ensure happy, lasting, marital relationships.

***THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS*** offers a scholarly, and comprehensive analysis of the biblical teachings regarding the certainty and imminence of Christ's Return.

***FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*** presents the results of a painstaking research done at a Vatican University in Rome on how the change came about from Saturday to Sunday in early Christianity.

***THE SABBATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT*** summarizes Bacchiocchi's extensive research on the history and theology of the Lord's Day and answers the most frequently asked questions on this subject.

***WINE IN THE BIBLE*** shows convincingly that the Bible condemns the use of alcoholic beverages, irrespective of the quantity used.

***CHRISTIAN DRESS AND ADORNMENT*** examines the Biblical teachings regarding dress, cosmetics, and jewelry. An important book designed to help Christians dress modestly, decently, and reverently.

***DIVINE REST FOR HUMAN RESTLESSNESS*** offers a rich and stirring theological interpretation of the relevance of Sabbathkeeping for our tension-filled and restless society. Translated in 15 languages.

***HAL LINDSEY'S PROPHETIC JIGSAW PUZZLE*** refutes with compelling logic the senselessness of the predictions made by writers like Hal Lindsey. It received the 1987 *Associated Church Press Award*.

***WOMEN IN THE CHURCH*** shows why Scripture supports the participation of women in various church ministries but precludes their ordination to the representative role of elder or pastor.

***THE TIME OF THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE RESURRECTION*** examines the time element of the Crucifixion/Resurrection as well as the meaning of Christ's death.

***GOD'S FESTIVALS IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY. Vol. 1: The Spring Festivals; Vol. 2: The Fall Festivals*** examine the historical development and theological meaning of the ancient Feasts of Israel.

**Each of the above books costs \$20.00, mailing expenses included. To order them, call (616) 471-2915 or mail your prepaid order to:**

**BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES**

**4990 Appian Way. Berrien Springs, MI 49103, USA**

**Web Page: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com>**

**E-mail: [sbacchiochi@qtm.net](mailto:sbacchiochi@qtm.net) or [samuele@andrews.edu](mailto:samuele@andrews.edu)**

**Cover photo  
by  
Donald May**

**Cover layout  
by Daniele Bacchiocchi**

**© Copyright 2001  
by  
Samuele Bacchiocchi**

**To purchase a copy of this book  
call (616) 471-2915 or  
mail your prepaid order  
(\$20.00, postpaid)  
to  
BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES  
4990 Appian Way  
Berrien Springs  
Michigan 49103**

**Phone (616) 471-2915  
Fax (616) 471-4013  
E-mail: sbacchiocchi@qtm.net  
or samuele@andrews.edu**

**Web site: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>**

**DEDICATED**  
to all Christians who find  
in the Scripture the moral conviction  
not only to abstain themselves  
from intoxicating substances,  
but also to help others  
to do likewise

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Forewords</b> .....	7
<b>Preface</b> .....	11
<b>A Preview of the Book</b> .....	19
A Look at the Drinking Problem .....	19
Moral or Medical Issue? .....	20
Notes to the Preview .....	27
<b>1. A Look at the Drinking Problem</b> .....	28
A Christian Responsibility .....	28
Three Major Views.....	33
The Moderationist View .....	33
The Abstentionist View .....	34
The Prohibitionist View .....	37
Conclusion .....	38
Notes to Chapter 1 .....	39
<b>2. The Meaning of “Wine”</b> .....	41
Secular Use of the Word “Wine” .....	43
The Meaning of “Wine” in English .....	43
The Meaning of the Latin Vinum .....	45
Secular Usage of the Greek Oinos .....	46
Secular Usage of the Hebrew Yayin .....	49
Biblical Usage of <i>Yayin</i> and <i>Oinos</i> .....	50
Conclusion .....	59
Notes to Chapter 2 .....	60
<b>3. “Wine” In Biblical Perspective</b> .....	63
Biblical Approval of Unfermented Wine .....	64
Biblical Disapproval of Fermented Wine .....	74
Conclusion .....	84
Notes to Chapter 3 .....	85
<b>4. The Preservation of Grape Juice</b> .....	87
The Ancient Art of Preservation .....	87

The Preservation of Fermented Wine .....	91
The Preservation of Grape Juice .....	95
Conclusion .....	107
Notes to Chapter 4 .....	108
<b>5. Jesus and Wine .....</b>	<b>113</b>
The Wedding at Cana .....	114
New Wine in New Wineskins .....	121
Is Old Wine Better? .....	124
Was Jesus a Glutton and a Drunkard?.....	127
The Communion Wine .....	131
Conclusion .....	144
Notes to Chapter 5 .....	145
<b>6. Wine in the Apostolic Church .....</b>	<b>151</b>
Acts 2:13: “Filled With New Wine” .....	152
1 Corinthians 11:21: “One is Hungry and another is drunk” .....	155
Ephesians 5:18: “Do Not Get Drunk With Wine” .....	160
Admonitions to Abstinence .....	167
Conclusion .....	184
Notes to Chapter 6 .....	185
<b>7. A Look at Some Misunderstood Passages .....</b>	<b>192</b>
Deut 14:26: Drink “Wine and strong drink” .....	193
Prov 31:6: “Give strong drink . . .” .....	201
Hosea 4:11: “Wine and new wine take away the understanding” ...	204
1 Tim 5:23: “Use a little wine for the sake of your stomach” .....	208
1 Tim 3:8: “Not addicted to much wine” .....	213
Conclusion .....	220
Notes to Chapter 7 .....	221
<b>8. Ellen White and Alcoholic Beverages .....</b>	<b>225</b>
Ellen White’s Theology of Abstinence .....	226
Consequences of Using Alcohol .....	234
Conclusion .....	242
Notes to Chapter 8 .....	243
<b>9. Alcohol in America .....</b>	<b>248</b>
The Consequences of Drinking .....	250
Alcohol and Health .....	255
Conclusion .....	260
Notes to Chapter 9 .....	261

# FOREWORD

by

**Dr. Robert P. Teachout**

Both God's holy character and his wonderful Word, the Bible, have always trumpeted the same vitally important message in every age. Instead of being ambiguous and misleading as so many claim, God's Word teaches total abstention from intoxicants: God created grapes and their natural beverage, grape juice, for man's benefit and enjoyment. However, God never intended for man to use intoxicating wine as a beverage at all.

The Old and the New Testaments agree completely on this message. If that is so, then why do modern translations, commentaries, and Bible dictionaries distort this message and give appearance that God approves of wine? The answer is both relatively simple and relatively complex.

God's originally clear message has been distorted by the very scholars whose job has been to convey the proper sense of the original Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament texts to us in modern English. Part of the problem has been ignorance and adequate research. Part of the problem has been also that scholars too have biases, and those biases can definitely affect the outcome of one's research unless the scholar is very conscientious and careful. A good example where both problems have occurred and affected seriously the interpretation of the Bible is the subject of God's approval or disapproval of alcoholic beverages.

What amazes me is that the message of this book which you are about to read is essentially old news. To a great extent, the conservative Bible scholarship of a century ago had already accurately concluded that God never approved of alcoholic beverages for His people's use. In the world in which we live, it is hard to believe that conservative scholars and preachers of a past generation would, unitedly, do such a good and thorough job of demonstrating the clear and consistent Bible teaching on this subject. Yet history proves that to be true. Early in the twentieth century, for a few years, prohibition was the law of the land for the entire nation of the United States of America as a direct result of the effectiveness and godly zeal of these men.

---

It has been a real delight for me to read through the manuscript of this book by Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi. His work is very valuable addition to the growing availability of books which restore and substantially build upon the truths known a century ago. What my own research has done for the Old Testament scriptures, Dr. Bacchiocchi has done for the New Testament. He has done a thorough and convincing job of examining the actual truths of the biblical teaching on this subject. He has also answered carefully and well the objections of those who disagree with his position.

I have personally never met the author of this work. We come from different theological traditions. However, I am impressed with his scholarship, with his biblical presuppositions as evidenced in this work, and with his conclusions. I am grateful that the biblical position of total abstinence will become better known through this book.

Robert P. Teachout, Th.D.

Professor of Old Testament, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

Author of *Wine. The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence.*

## FOREWORD

by

**George W. Reid**

Two developments in American life both justify and underscore the importance of Dr. Bacchiocchi's contribution in this volume. These are the rising concern with health and a resurgence of what the liquor industry is labeling neoprohibition, a movement spearheaded by organizations alarmed by the heavy toll alcohol inflicts on contemporary society.

Ironically, both of these movements have appeared in a largely secular framework, the testimony of Christians having been muted, either by indifference or by the misconception that although the Bible speaks against gross abuse, it approves the moderate use of alcoholic beverages, or at least has no coherent witness about such use.



---

This book challenges both contentions. Through careful examination of the applicable passages of the Scripture, Dr. Bacchiocchi, drawing upon linguistic, exegetical and historical sources, throws light on the meaning of the texts, demonstrating that the Bible indeed addresses the issue. And this is accomplished in readable style free from excessive technical jargon.

The insights of this book will profit every reader, deepening understanding and providing answers to troublesome questions that continue to plague Christians and non-Christians alike in today's alcohol-accepting environment. It can be recommended to all who have interest in finding the most rewarding way of life, but especially to those intent upon knowing and pursuing the will of the Creator.

George W. Reid  
Director, Biblical Research Institute  
General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

## FOREWORD

by

**Dr. Ernest H. J. Steed**

The Bible is a divine revelation, an authority on all matters concerning lifestyle. This perspective has been constantly challenged. Despite these unworthy efforts the Bible continues to declare even to this generation God's principles of life, love and truth.

We cannot adequately evaluate moral ethics and spiritual commitment without Biblical principles. God has not left His creation to wonder in a quagmire of ifs and buts. Through revelation He has declared and demonstrated human worth and purpose with a grand unfolding of life and its primary objective.

In this setting Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, a noted Biblical researcher, historian and professor at Andrews University, has through the following pages pulled back the cloak of deception called moderation in its contrast to the Biblical call for non-involvement with any intoxicant. He spotlights

---

wine—the genuine, in its unfermented goodness—and wine—the fermented, the bulwark of evil to corrupt and destroy. Through excellent scholarship and an understanding of Biblical languages he establishes abstinence as a sound Biblical principle.

To discover revealed truths it requires prayerful and thoughtful study of the scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Those who recognize God’s spiritual directives, find that in the Bible abstinence stands in opposition to moderation, unfermented to fermented wine, even as good is in opposition to evil, clean to the unclean, and holy to the unholy.

Temperance, like all Biblical principles, has been attacked from within and without. Through neglect, insult and ridicule Satan has given many weak knees in his effort to undermine this foundational truth so essential to Christian growth. It is good news that temperance means a return to moral power through Jesus Christ to resist or overcome every false craving and desire.

This volume restores the veracity of temperance to victorious living. It appeals to every Bible believer to make every day an overcoming event. Living thus becomes a witness and a preparation to meet the Lord unashamed at His soon return.

Teachers and students, preachers and lay members need the review set forth by Dr. Bacchiocchi, to meet the false claims of those who would undermine the Truth and the benefits of saying “No” to alcohol and “Yes” to a life of abstinence. It is time for people everywhere to weigh the evidence of Bible Truth for real life. This could be equal to anything one does to discover the genuine from the counterfeit. Then through perfect example, the world will behold the beauty of the better way as Christ lives His way through you and me to His glory.

Dr. Ernest H. J. Steed  
Chairman , Center for Prevention,  
*Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency.*  
Honorary President and Special Consultant,  
*The International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism  
and Drug Dependency, Washington, D.C.*  
Former World Director,  
*Temperance Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day  
Adventists and Special Assistant to General Conference President.*

## PREFACE

Someone asked me, “How do you decide on which subject you are going to write your next book?” Usually my decision is based on a very pragmatic consideration, namely, the relevance of the subject to the members of my own Seventh-day Adventist church and to Christians in general. In the case of my latest book *Women in the Church*, for example, my decision was largely determined by a felt need to better understand the validity and value for our contemporary society of the Biblical teaching on the role of women in the church. The response to this study from readers of all Christian persuasions has surpassed my fondest expectation. A good number of theological seminaries have adopted the book for teaching purposes.

The story behind the present book, *Wine in the Bible*, is somewhat similar. Recent studies, statistics and discussions have impressed me with the magnitude of the raging epidemic of alcohol use in American society in general and in my own Seventh-day Adventist church in particular. In the American society alcohol has become its number-one public enemy, costing over \$117 billion a year, disabling over 1,000,000 persons, and claiming at least 100,000 lives, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined.<sup>1</sup> The real human cost of alcohol transcends these statistical figures of dollars, disabilities and death. No one can count the real cost of alcohol to our society in terms of retarded children, violence in the home, child and spouse abuse, divorce, rape, robberies, murders, sickness and death.

In my own Seventh-day Adventist church, long known as a champion of temperance and abstinence, alcohol consumption is steadily rising. I have been made forcibly aware of this trend by such things as: frequent pleas for help from pastors and members facing drinking problems in their own congregations; published surveys in our church paper, *Adventist Review*, indicating that 58 percent of Adventist youth are experimenting with alcohol and 17 percent of Adventist College students are habitual drinkers;<sup>2</sup> lectures given on our college campuses on alcohol recovery by visiting non-SDA experts;<sup>3</sup> classes on substance abuse taught on our campuses; counseling

---

centers set up on our campuses specifically to help students with drinking problems; the establishment by our General Conference of two organizations to meet the challenge of the steadily rising drinking of alcohol within the church: (1) a Study Commission on Chemical Dependency and the Church, and (2) the Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, besides a series of articles in our church paper on chemical dependency and ways to cope with it.<sup>4</sup>

**A Personal Sense of Responsibility.** Confronted with the massive data on the ill effects of alcohol not only in society at large but also in my own church, I felt that in good conscience I could no longer ignore the problem. In my earnest desire to help in the fight against America's number-one public enemy, I began reading books and articles dealing with theological, social and medical aspects of alcohol.

I soon became aware that Christian churches bear considerable responsibility for the alcohol epidemic. Through their beliefs, teachings and preaching they are able to influence the moral values and practices of society more than any other institutions. What pastors preach from their pulpits on the subject of drinking determines to a large extent the stand Christians take toward alcoholic beverages. A majority of the 100 million drinkers in America are churchgoers who have been taught that the Bible sanctions a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. Moderate drinking has led over 18 million Americans to become immoderate drinkers, for alcohol is a habit-forming narcotic weakening one's capacity for self-control.

**Abandonment of Abstinence.** Since most evangelical churches have contributed to the current alcohol epidemic by gradually abandoning their stand for total abstinence and by adopting instead a moderationist position, I became interested in finding out what has caused the change. Why, for example, have the Methodist and Baptist churches, whose strong stand for abstinence contributed mightily to the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States on January 16, 1919, gradually adopted, at least in practice, a moderationist position since the repeal of Prohibition on December 1933?

A major factor appears to have been a weakening of the conviction that total abstinence is a clear Biblical principle to be respected like other God-given principles. Even Billy Graham, a teetotaler, said: "I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism . . . Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That wasn't grape juice as some of them try to claim."<sup>5</sup> No longer having a Biblical for total abstinence, evangelicals who, like Billy Graham, still recommend abstinence, do so for social or medical reasons.<sup>6</sup> Such reasons, however, do not provide a compelling motivation to

---

remain or become abstinent. As long as Christians believe there is nothing wrong Biblically and morally in the moderate use of alcoholic beverages, they they are not likely to feel compelled or convicted to be totally abstinent.

**Uncertainty Among Adventists.** Seventh-day Adventists have not been immune to the weakening of conviction regarding total abstinence experienced by other evangelical churches. During 1988 I was privileged to speak at numerous Adventist gatherings in North America and overseas, where I shared the highlights of this research. To my surprise I found that some members and even some pastors think that certain Biblical passages allow for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. Consequently, they feel that it is better to promote abstinence on the basis of social and medical considerations.

Uncertainty on this subject is sometimes apparent also in SDA literature. For example, a 1982 special temperance issue of *Adventist Review* affirms: “Total abstinence is but one of a number of areas where the Bible gives no explicit directive.”<sup>7</sup> This sense of uncertainty on the Biblical basis for total abstinence can easily lead Adventists to adopt a more permissive attitude toward the use of alcoholic beverages. Some members and pastors are concerned over this trend, and often seek for help.

**A Plea from a Church Member.** Among those who have approached me for help to understand certain Bible texts relating to wine, one person deserves special mention. His name is Yvon Caza, a well-read, intelligent, active and dedicated Canadian Seventh-day Adventist. Caza reminds me of the persistent widow of Christ’s parable (Luke 18:1-8) who kept coming and pleading with the judge until he finally gave in and vindicated her against her adversary. Somewhat similarly, Caza has communicated with me on numerous occasions, by letter and by phone, urging me to research and write about the Biblical teaching on alcoholic beverages. The reason for his urgent plea was the uncertainty existing in the minds of some church members on this subject.

Caza’s insistence and persistence have paid off. To him I owe a debt of gratitude for challenging me to give priority to this research and for providing valuable comments on the manuscript. Initially I was reluctant to undertake this research because, like most Christians, I was under the impression that the Bible sometimes does allow for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. I doubted that my study of the subject would be of much help. Reluctantly, I decided to lay aside another project, and to dedicate a seven-month leave-of-absence from my teaching at Andrews University to research what the Bible really does say on this subject. I felt that, if nothing else, the experience would broaden my understanding of the subject and

---

better equip me for helping those Christians who seek to understand the will of God in this matter.

**Personal Discoveries.** Looking back over the months spent examining the relevant Biblical passages and the studies done by recent and past scholars, I can truly say that this has been for me a real eye-opening experience. I will briefly mention some of the personal discoveries that stand out in my mind.

I was surprised to learn that the four related words—*wine* in English, *vinum* in Latin, *oinos* in Greek and *yayin* in Hebrew—have been used historically to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. When I applied this finding to Biblical references to wine, I was pleasantly amazed to find that the positive references to “wine” have to do with unfermented and nonintoxicating grape juice, while the negative references concern fermented and intoxicating wine.

Another surprising discovery was finding Bible passages which condemn not only the abuse of wine but also any use of it at all. We shall see in Chapter 3 that there are several passages in the Old and New Testaments which condemn wine per se, irrespective of the quantity used.

The study of the preservation of wine in the ancient world was also very enlightening. To my surprise I discovered that the ancients were far more knowledgeable in the art of preserving fruits and wines than we generally assume. As Chapter 4 reveals, ancient writers tell us that the preservation of unfermented grape juice was sometimes simpler than was the preservation of fermented wine. Various techniques, as we shall see, were used to preserve grape juice unfermented.

My study of the major wine-related stories and sayings of Jesus, reported in Chapter 5, was also very revealing. As I examined each passage grammatically, contextually and historically, I saw clearly that none of them indicate that Jesus used alcoholic beverages or sanctioned their use for His followers.

The most startling aspect of this whole research was the study presented in Chapter 6 on the apostolic admonitions to mental vigilance and physical abstinence. To my surprise I found that some of the clearest apostolic admonitions to abstinence have been translated with the mere sense of “temperance” or “sobriety,” presumably to save the day of moderate drinking. Such inaccurate translations have misled many sincere Christians to believe that the Bible teaches moderation rather than total abstinence.

---

Two things impressed me in reading the medical reports on the physical effects of alcohol. First, as Chapter 9 indicates, alcohol harms practically every major organ of the body. Second, some medical studies show that there is no such thing as moderate safe drinking, because even one drink can put some brain cells temporarily out of commission, impairing attention, judgment, concentration and emotional balance. Medical research help us appreciate why Scripture warns us not even to look at wine (Prov 23:31).

**Style.** I have endeavored to write this book in simple, non-technical language. In those instances where I have used technical terms, I have defined their meaning. To facilitate reading, each chapter is divided into major parts, and subdivided under appropriate headings. A brief summary is given at the end of each chapter. Unless otherwise specified, all Bible texts are quoted from the Revised Standard Version, copyrighted in 1946 and 1952.

**Acknowledgments.** It is most difficult to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many persons who have directly or indirectly contributed to the realization of this book. Indirectly, I feel indebted to the many authors who have already written on the subject. Some of the most valuable research was published in the nineteenth century and has long been out of print. These studies, though old, have been of immense value to me. Reading old and recent studies on the subject has stimulated my thinking and broadened my understanding, even though I could not always agree with the views expressed.

Directly, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Thomas Baker, Yvon Caza, Mrs. Hedwig Jemison, Dr. C. Mervyn Maxwell, Dr. George W. Reid, Dr. William H. Shea and Dr. Ernest H. J. Steed, each of whom went beyond the call of duty by reading, correcting and reacting constructively to my manuscript.

Very special thanks go to Dr. Bert Beverly Beach, my former teacher in Italy, currently director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Through the years Dr. Beach has taken a personal interest in my research and ministry. His willingness to take time in his most busy schedule to improve the text and make valuable suggestions will long be remembered.

I also want to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Leona Glidden Running, my former Hebrew teacher, and for many years Professor of Biblical Languages at Andrews Theological Seminary. She has given unstintingly of her time and skill to correct the manuscript and to offer most helpful comments. Words are inadequate to express my gratitude for her valuable service.

---

My family also deserves special acknowledgment. My wife Anna and our three children, Loretta, Daniel and Gianluca, saw little of me during the latter part of 1988 while I was researching and writing this book. Without their love, patience and encouragement it would have been most difficult for me to complete this research in so short a time.

**Authors of Forewords.** A word of explanation about the authors of the three forewords to this book may be helpful. Among the many authors I have read in preparing this book, the one who stands out for having made the greatest contribution to the study of wine in the Old Testament, is Prof. Robert P. Teachout, Professor of Old Testament at Detroit Baptist Divinity School. In 1979 Dr. Teachout presented a 462-page Doctor of Theology dissertation on “The Use of ‘Wine’ in the Old Testament” at the Dallas Theological Seminary. A brief and popular edition of the dissertation, entitled, *Wine. The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence*, was published in 1983. To purchase a copy of this book mail your pre-paid order (\$5.00, postage paid) to the author at 15218 Hanfor, Allen Park, Michigan 48101. For a microfilm reproduction of the dissertation send to the same address \$35.00.

In view of the great admiration I hold for Prof. Teachout, I sent him a typeset copy of this study a few days before Christmas 1988 with the ‘unreasonable’ request that he read the manuscript and, if satisfied with its contents, to write a foreword by January 15, 1989. I held little hope that on such short notice, and in the midst of the Christmas season, Prof. Teachout would be able to fulfill my request. What a pleasant surprise it was to receive his gracious foreword two days before the deadline. His willingness to take time away from his family in the midst of the holiday celebrations to offer me this service, gives me reason to be eternally grateful to him.

While Prof. Teachout stands out in my mind as the one who has made the greatest contribution to the study of wine in the Old Testament, Dr. Ernest H. J. Steed stands out for having made the greatest contribution to the cause of temperance in recent years within the Seventh-day Adventist church. He has served for 14 years as director of the General Conference Temperance Department. During those years he led out as Executive Director of the International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (ICPA). He is currently serving as Chairman of the Andrews University Institute on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, which was established in 1984 at his urging. Dr. Steed has had the privilege of explaining the Biblical principles of temperance to presidents, ministers of state, kings, queens and other dignitaries around the world. Because of his unflinching commitment and dedication to the cause of temperance in general and abstinence in



---

particular, I consider it a great honor that Dr. Steed graciously consented to write a foreword for my book.

The third foreword is by Dr. George W. Reid who is currently serving as the Director of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church. A function of BRI is to examine theological studies produced by Adventist lay members and scholars. In view of Dr. Reid's responsibility as Director of BRI and of my profound respect for his mature judgment based on his unswerving commitment to the authority of the Bible, I sent him the manuscript few days before Christmas for his evaluation. I expressed my wish that he would write a foreword, if he was satisfied with the methodology and conclusions of my research. What a joy it was for me to receive his gracious foreword just the day before I took the typesetting to the printer. Words fail to express my gratitude to Dr. Reid for his willingness to take time in his most busy schedule and in the midst of the Christmas holiday to read, comment and write a foreword to this book.

When I sent out the manuscript to the three mentioned gentlemen, I held little hope that, on such a short notice and in the midst of the Christmas season, any of them might be able to read sufficiently of the manuscript to write a foreword to it. What a pleasant surprise has been to receive a foreword from each of them. Their willingness to take time away from their families during their holiday celebrations, gives me reasons to be eternally grateful to them.

**Author's Hope.** It is my fervent hope that this study, the fruit of dedicated research, may help many Christians of all denominations better understand and accept the fact that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically harmful, but also Biblically and morally wrong; it represents the violation of a principle given to us by God for ensuring our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

To fight effectively against America's number-one public enemy, we need today to develop an entirely new cultural attitude toward alcohol by recognizing it for what it is—a dangerous drug. I believe that such a new cultural attitude toward alcohol can best be developed by recovering the Biblical imperative for abstinence. Only by accepting this Biblical imperative are Christians likely to feel morally compelled to abstain from intoxicating substances and to help others abstain likewise.

---

---

**NOTES TO THE PREFACE**

1. See Chapter 9 where the sources of the statistical information are given.

2. Carlos Medley, "GC Wages Combat Against Chemical Dependency," *Adventist Review* (October 29, 1987):6-7. A new survey of 5,500 readers of *Adventist Review*, sponsored by the Health and Temperance department of the General Conference of SDA, confirms the previous study done on youth. The preliminary report based on 2200 respondents indicates that 15 percent of Adventists between the ages of 30 and 40 find it acceptable to drink alcohol on social occasions. The final report is scheduled to be published sometime in 1989.

3. See, for example, my reflections on the lecture of Father Joseph Martin delivered to the students and faculty of Andrews University on March 30, 1986 (*Student Movement* [April 6, 1986]:3-4).

4. The articles appeared in the November 5, 12, 19, and 26 issues of *Adventist Review*.

5. "Carter Will Restore Confidence, Graham Says," *Miami Herald* (December 26, 1976), section A, p. 18.

6. Editorial, "Graham on Drink: Don't," *Christianity Today* (February 4, 1977): 63.

7. James Coffin, "Does the Bible Condemn 'Moderate' Drinking?" *Adventist Review* (February 22, 1982):4.

## A PREVIEW OF THE BOOK

A comment I often hear when meeting readers of my books in different parts of the world, goes something like this: “I enjoyed immensely your book on . . . , but I must confess that I haven’t finished reading it yet.” Reading only a portion of a book often means missing what could be the most important part of its content and failing to gain a complete picture of the subject presented.

Partly out of consideration toward those readers whose busy lifestyle makes it difficult to read a book through systematically to the end, and partly out of a desire to give at the outset an overview of the issues discussed, I decided to try something new. Instead of giving a summary of this book at the end by way of conclusion, I am presenting a preview of its content at the beginning. The concept of a preview is hardly new. The underlying assumption is that if a person likes the preview, he or she will be motivated to purchase the product. Applied to this study, it is my hope that an introductory preview will accomplish two objectives: (1) provide an overview of the various issues examined and conclusions reached; (2) stimulate readers to read the whole book to gain a fuller understanding of the many issues discussed.

This book addresses from a Biblical perspective the most prevailing, costly and destructive habit of our society, the drinking of alcoholic beverages.

**A Look at the Drinking Problem.** The study begins in Chapter 1 with a look at the drinking problem in America today and our Christian responsibility toward it. The drinking of alcoholic beverages by over 100 million Americans is rightly regarded by social analysts as America’s number-one public enemy. This “beloved enemy,” as Jack Van Impe calls it,<sup>1</sup> claims at least 100,000 American lives per year, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined.<sup>2</sup>

The economic cost to the American society of the use of alcohol is estimated by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism at \$117 billion a year.<sup>3</sup> This staggering figure includes the cost of premature deaths, reduced production and special treatments.

---

The real human cost of alcohol, however, transcends any statistical estimate of deaths, disabilities or dollar figures. A 1987 Gallup Poll indicates that 1 in 4 families are troubled by alcohol.<sup>4</sup> This means that more than 61 million Americans are affected by some alcohol-related problems such as retarded children, divorce, violence in the home, crime, sickness and death.

**A Christian Responsibility.** Christian churches bear considerable responsibility for the inestimable human and economic costs of alcohol, because through their beliefs, teachings and preaching they are able to influence the moral values and practices of society, possibly more than does any other institution. For example, in the early part of this century evangelical churches played a major role in influencing the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States on January 16, 1919, outlawing the “manufacture, sale or transportation” of alcoholic beverages.

Since the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, however, most churches have abandoned their stand for total abstinence, encouragin “moderation” instead. Unfortunately, moderation has led over 18 million Americans to become immoderate drinkers,<sup>5</sup> because alcohol is a habit-forming narcotic which weakens one’s capacity for self-control.

The moderationist position rests on the belief that Scripture condemns the *immoderate use* of alcohol but approves its *moderate use*. This belief is in turn based on the assumption that the Bible knows only of fermented wine (“one wine theory”) which it considers as a divine blessing to be enjoyed with moderation. According to this theory, any condemnation of wine in the Bible refers not to the *kind* of wine, but to the *amount* consumed.

**Moral or Medical Issue?** By maintaining that the Bible sanctions the moderate use of alcoholic beverages, moderationists have led people to believe that drinking alcohol is not a *moral* but a *medical* issue. It is not a transgression of a God-given principle, but a habit which can harm one’s health, if abused. The elimination of any sinful connotation from the use of alcohol has had an enormous influence on the drinking habits of millions of Christians. It has provided Christians with an alleged Biblical and moral justification for drinking alcohol, thus depriving them of a Biblical and moral conviction for abstaining from intoxicating beverages.

In view of the immense influence the moderationist view has had on the drinking habits of millions of Christians, the major objective of this study has been to examine its fundamental assumption, namely, that the Bible sanctions a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. Since this assumption is dictated by the belief that the terms for “wine” in the Bible always mean “fermented wine,” I began this investigation by ascertaining the Biblical and historical usage of such terms.

**The Meaning of “Wine.”** The objective of the survey conducted in Chapter 2 was to ascertain if the terms used for “wine” in the Bible denote exclusively fermented wine or inclusively either fermented or unfermented wine. I traced the usage of the word “wine” backward, from English, to Latin, Greek and finally to Hebrew. The survey shows that the four related words—*wine* in English, *vinum* in Latin, *oinos* in Greek and *yayin* in Hebrew—have been used historically to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. This significant finding discredits the claim that the Bible knows only fermented wine, which it approves when used moderately. The truth of the matter is that the Bible knows both fermented wine, which it disapproves, and unfermented grape juice, which it approves.

**“Wine” in Biblical Perspective.** Building on the conclusions reached in Chapter 2, I proceeded in Chapter 3 to examine the reasons for the Biblical approval and disapproval of wine. What I found is that the positive references to “wine” have to do with unfermented and unintoxicating grape juice. Because of its natural and nourishing properties, grape juice was fittingly used to represent the divine blessing of material prosperity (Gen 27:28; 49:10-11; Deut 33:28), the blessing of the messianic age (Joel 2:18-19; Jer 31:10-12; Amos 9:13, 14), the free offer of God’s saving grace (Is 55:1), the wholesome joy God offers to His people (Ps 104:14-15; 4:7), and the acknowledgment of God through the use of grape juice as tithe, offerings and libations (Num 18:12; Deut 14:23; Ex 29:40; Lev 23:13).

On the other hand, the negative references to “wine” have to do with fermented and intoxicating wine. Some of the reasons Scripture condemns the use of alcoholic beverages are that they distort the perception of reality (Is 28:7; Prov 23:33); they impair the capacity to make responsible decisions (Lev 10:9-11); they weaken moral sensitivities and inhibitions (Gen 9:21; 19:32; Hab 2:15; Is 5:11-12); they cause physical sickness (Prov 23:20-21; Hos 7:5; Is 19:14; Ps 60:3); and they disqualify for both civil and religious service (Prov 31:4-5; Lev 10:9-11; Ezek 44:23; 1 Tim 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8).

**The Preservation of Wine.** A major objection against the view that Scripture approves the use of unfermented grape juice is the alleged impossibility in Bible times of preserving grape juice unfermented. Thus, I devoted Chapter 4 to probing this popular assumption by investigating the testimonies of ancient writers regarding the art of preserving fruits and wines in general and grape juice in particular. To my surprise I discovered that the ancients were far more knowledgeable in the art of preserving fruits and wines than is generally believed.

---

Contrary to popular opinion, the problems the ancients encountered in preserving fermented wine were as great as, if not actually greater than, those faced in preserving unfermented grape juice. To prevent fermented wine from becoming acid, moldy, or foul-smelling, vintners used a host of preservatives such as salt, sea-water, liquid or solid pitch, boiled-down must, marble dust, lime, sulphur fumes and crushed iris.

In comparison to preserving fermented wine, preserving grape juice unfermented was a relatively simpler process. It was accomplished by boiling down the juice to a syrup, or by separating the fermentable pulp from the juice of the grape by means of filtration, or by placing the grape juice in sealed jars which were immersed in a pool of cold water, or by fumigating the wine jars with sulphur before sealing them. The use of such techniques clearly indicates that the means of preserving grape juice without fermentation were known and used in the ancient world. This conclusion is indirectly supported by the teachings and example of Jesus.

**Jesus and Wine.** The next logical step was to examine the major wine-related stories or sayings of Jesus since these are commonly used to prove that Christ *made, commended, used and even commanded* the use of alcoholic wine. In Chapter 5 I went into considerable detail to examine these claims. The conclusion of my analysis is that they are devoid of textual, contextual and historical support.

The “good wine” Jesus *made* at Cana (John 2:10) was “good” not because of its high alcoholic content, but because it was fresh, unfermented grape juice. This is indicated by external and internal considerations. Externally, contemporary authors, such as Pliny and Plutarch, attest that “good wines” were those which did not intoxicate, having had their alcoholic potency removed. Internally, moral consistency demands that Christ could not have miraculously produced between 120 to 160 gallons of intoxicating wine for the use of men, women and children gathered at the Cana’s wedding feast, without becoming morally responsible for prolonging and increasing their intoxication. Scriptural and moral consistency requires that “the good wine” produced by Christ was fresh, unfermented grape juice. This is supported by the very adjective used to describe it, namely *kalos*, which denotes that which is morally excellent, instead of *agathos*, which means simply good.

The “new wine” Jesus *commended* through the parable of the new wineskins (Luke 5:37-38; Mark 2:22) was unfermented must, either boiled or filtered, because not even new wineskins could withstand the pressure of the gas produced by fermenting new wine.

---

The self-description of Jesus as “eating and drinking” (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34) does *not* imply that He *used* alcoholic wine, but rather that He freely associated with people at their meals and elsewhere. The phrase “eating and drinking” was used idiomatically to describe Christ’s social lifestyle.

The “fruit of the vine” Christ *commanded* to be used as a memorial of His redeeming blood (Matt 26:28-29; Mark 14:24-25) was not fermented wine, which in the Scripture represents human depravity and divine indignation, but pure unfermented grape juice, which is a fitting emblem of Christ’s untainted blood shed for the remission of our sins. This conclusion was established through a study of the language of the Last Supper, the Jewish Passover wine, the Passover law of fermentation, the consistency of the symbol and the survival of the use of unfermented grape juice at the Lord’s Supper. Most telling is the fact that Josephus calls the freshly squeezed grape juice “the fruit of the vine.” This establishes unequivocally that the phrase was used to designate the sweet, unfermented juice of the grape. The evidences submitted shows that Jesus abstained from all intoxicating substances and gave no sanction to His followers for using them.

**Wine in the Apostolic Church.** The way the Apostolic Church understood, preached and practiced the teachings of Jesus and of the Old Testament regarding the use of alcoholic beverages provides a most valuable verification and clarification as to whether Scripture teaches moderation or abstinence. In view of the fundamental importance attached to the witness of the Apostolic Church, my next logical step was to examine in Chapter 6 the apostolic teachings regarding the use of wine in particular and of intoxicating substances in general.

This investigation proved to be the most rewarding. Contrary to the prevailing perception, I found that the New Testament is amazingly consistent in its teaching of abstinence from the use of alcoholic beverages. The very passages often used to support the moderationist view, under close scrutiny were found to negate such a view, teaching abstinence instead. For example, the irony of the mockers’ charge that on the day of Pentecost the apostles were drunk on *gleukos*, that is, on the grape juice which apparently was their common beverage (Acts 2:13), provides an indirect but important proof of their abstemious life-style and inferentially of the life-style of their Master. There would have been no point in the mockers’ attributing to unfermented grape juice the cause of the disciples’ strange actions, if it was not common knowledge that the apostles abstained from intoxicating wine. The intended jib was that the disciples were such naïve simpletons they got drunk on grape juice!

---

Similarly, Paul's reference to drunkenness at the communion table of the Corinthian church (1 Cor 11:21) offers no support for a moderate use of alcoholic wine, for two reasons. First, whatever was done at Corinth was a departure from the instructions Paul had delivered to the church (1 Cor 11:23); thus, the Corinthians' conduct constitutes a warning rather than an example for us. Second, a study of the meaning of the verb *methuo* ("satiated") and of the implications of Paul's admonitions, clearly suggests that the problem at Corinth was indulgence in eating rather than intoxication with alcoholic wine.

I found one of the most powerful Biblical indictments against intoxicating wine in Ephesians 5:18, where Paul condemns wine as the cause of debauchery and shows the irreconcilable contrast between the spirit of wine and the Holy Spirit of God. To my great surprise, however, I found that most English translations and commentaries have chosen to translate or interpret Ephesians 5:18 by making "drunkenness" rather than "wine" the cause of debauchery. This was surprising to me because not only the Catholic and Protestant Italian translations, with which I am most familiar, but also numerous other ancient and modern translations, all translate Paul's text as saying that in the very nature of wine is debauchery. It seems that some English translators had such a predilection for wine that they decided, to borrow the words of Ernest Gordon, to "save the face of wine while condemning drunkenness."<sup>6</sup>

The translators' bias toward wine became most evident in the study of the apostolic admonitions to abstinence, expressed through the verb *nepho* and the adjective *nephalios*. The first meaning of the verb is "to abstain from wine" and of the adjective "abstinent, without wine." Yet these words have been consistently translated with their secondary sense of being "temperate, sober, steady," rather than by their primary sense of being "abstinent." Such biased and inaccurate translations have misled many sincere Christians into believing that the Bible teaches moderation in the use of alcoholic beverages, rather than abstinence from them.

It was equally surprising for me to discover that the fundamental reason given by Peter and Paul for their call to a life of mental vigilance and physical abstinence is eschatological, namely, preparation to live in the holy presence of Christ at His soon Coming. This reason has added significance for Christians like the Seventh-day Adventists, who accept the Biblical teachings on the Second Advent literally rather than existentially, that is, as a future realization of our present expectations rather than a present experience of the future. To abstain from intoxicating substances represents a tangible response to God's invitation to make concrete preparation for the



---

physical return of Christ. The analysis of the apostolic teachings regarding alcoholic beverages presented in Chapter 6, the longest in the book, provides in my view the most compelling defense of the Biblical principle of abstinence from intoxicating beverages.

**Some Misunderstood Passages.** To be fair to those who find support for their moderationist position in certain Biblical passages, I devoted Chapter 7 to an extensive analysis of five of such passages. The study of each text in the light of its immediate and larger context, the historical customs of the time and the overall teaching of Scripture, has shown that none of them contradict the Biblical imperative for abstinence. On the contrary, some of them indirectly but conclusively support abstinence.

Proverbs 31:6, for example, suggests in an ironical fashion that alcoholic beverages are only suited for killing the excruciating pain of someone who is dying. Similarly, Hosea 4:11 provides no justification for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages for two reasons. First, because “wine and new wine” are mentioned figuratively, as representative of the good gifts God had provided to the children of Israel, gifts which they had used for idolatrous purposes. Second, even if “wine and new wine” were alcoholic, they are condemned in the text for taking away understanding, irrespective of the quantity used.

In a different yet equally convincing way, 1 Timothy 5:23 supports the principle of abstinence in two significant ways. First, the advice, “No longer drink *only* water,” implies that Timothy, like the priests and Nazirites, had abstained until that time from both fermented and unfermented wines, presumably in accordance with the instructions and example of Paul. Second, the apostle recommended to Timothy to use only a *little* wine, not for the physical pleasure of the belly, but for the medical need of the stomach. Ancient writers such as Aristotle, Athanaeus, and Pliny indicate that unfermented wine was known and preferred to alcoholic wine for medical purposes, because it did not have the side effects of the latter. In the light of these testimonies and of the other Biblical teachings regarding wine, it is reasonable to assume that the wine recommended by Paul for medical use was unfermented grape juice.

The conclusion of this whole study on the Biblical teaching regarding the use of alcoholic beverages can be summarized in one sentence: Scripture is consistent in teaching moderation in the use of wholesome, unfermented beverages and abstinence from the use of intoxicating fermented beverages.

**Ellen White and Alcoholic Beverages.** In view of the major influence exerted by Ellen G. White in the adoption of the Biblical principle

---

of abstinence from alcoholic beverages by the Seventh-day Adventist church, I felt it appropriate to examine in Chapter 8 her understanding of Christian temperance in general and of abstinence in particular.

The study reveals that for Ellen White the message of temperance was a fundamental part of the gospel and of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Such a message entails teaching people moderation in the use of healthful things and abstinence from the use of harmful things such as alcoholic beverages.

Ellen White deeply believed that total abstinence is a principle clearly taught in the Scripture by warnings and examples. Disregard for this principle represents a violation of the law of God. Obedience to this principle, through Christ's enabling power, contributes to the restoration of God's moral image in us. This restoration is an essential part of our preparation for Christ's return.

Ellen White discusses at great length the harmful effects of the use of alcoholic beverages upon the individual, the home and society at large. The ill effects upon the drinker are mental, moral and physical. As for the home, the use of alcoholic beverages often deprives families of their basic necessities, and fosters violence and the abuse of children. With reference to society, Ellen White finds alcohol consumption to be an incentive to crime, a major cause of accidents and of public-health problems. The theological convictions and practical counsels of Ellen White on the use of alcoholic beverages stand out, in my view, for their Biblical consistency and their practical relevance to our time.

**Alcohol in America.** To help the reader appreciate from a social and medical perspective why the Bible condemns the use of alcoholic beverages, I have devoted Chapter 9 to a brief survey of the social and medical consequences of alcohol consumption in American society. The survey indicates that the cost of alcohol use to the American people is appallingly high, not only in economic terms (\$117 billion per year), but also in terms of human pain, misery, violence, child and spouse abuse, divorces, crime, sickness and death. It is inconceivable to think that at least 100,000 human lives are lost every year in America alone because of alcohol-related problems.

If America wants to deal effectively with the tragedy of alcohol, it must develop an entirely new cultural attitude through the aggressive promotion of abstinence. Christians can play a vital role in this endeavor, if they recover the Biblical imperative for abstinence. It is only when Christians recognize and accept the fact that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically

---

---

harmful, but also Biblically and morally wrong, that they are likely to feel compelled, not only to abstain from intoxicating substances themselves, but also to help others do likewise.

### NOTES TO THE PREVIEW

1. The phrase “beloved enemy” is used by Jack Van Impe repeatedly in his book, *Alcohol: The Beloved Enemy* (Royal Oak, Michigan, 1980).
2. The figures are provided by the 1986 report of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, as quoted in “Coming to Grips with Alcoholism,” *U.S. News & World Report* (November 30, 1987):56.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 57.
5. Ibid., p. 56.
6. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 31.

# **Chapter 1**

## **A LOOK AT**

### **THE DRINKING PROBLEM**

Few issues have proven to be so divisive to American Christianity in particular and so destructive to our society in general as the drinking of alcoholic beverages. During the course of American history, virtually every denomination has debated whether or not a Christian should drink alcoholic beverages. A significant outcome of these debates was the establishment of several temperance movements such as the American Temperance Society in 1826, the American Temperance Union in 1836, the National Prohibition Party in 1869, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in 1874, and the politically oriented Anti-Saloon League in 1893. These movements, which were enthusiastically supported by several evangelical churches, eventually achieved Prohibition by the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States on January 16, 1919. This Amendment outlawed the “manufacture, sale or transportation” of alcoholic beverages.

With the repeal of Prohibition on December 5, 1933 by the adoption of the Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution, the drinking levels of Americans began to rise again, bringing with them a trail of sickness, poverty, crime and death. Today alcohol use in America has become endemic. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, nearly 18 million adults in the U.S. are problem drinkers and of these more than 10 million are suffering from alcoholism.<sup>1</sup> “Alcohol is a factor in nearly half of America’s murders, suicides and accidental deaths. In all, it claims at least 100,000 lives per year, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY**

Christian churches bear some responsibility for the alarming drinking problems of our time, because through their beliefs, teachings and preaching they are able to influence the moral values and practices of society, possibly more than any other institution. What pastors preach from their pulpits, and what Sabbath or Sunday school teachers teach in their classes regarding drinking, determines to a large extent the stand church members take toward the use of alcoholic beverages.

Those who teach that moderate drinking is a Christian liberty sanctioned by Scripture fail to realize that moderation is the first step toward immoderation. First, because alcohol is a habit-forming narcotic and second, because even moderate drinking diminishes our capacity for judgment and self-control.

In his book *God is for the Alcoholic*, Jerry Dunn, an authority on dealing with alcoholics, tells the story of a man who often came staggering to his Open Door Mission for alcoholics in Omaha, Nebraska, shaking a finger to his face and saying: “Jerry! It’s all right for me to drink. The Bible says so! I dare you to show me anywhere in the Bible where it says that I can’t drink.”<sup>3</sup>

**Temperance Movement.** The history of the temperance movement in America indicates that the cause of total abstinence was most enthusiastically embraced and promoted by those evangelical churches which stood for total abstinence such as the Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, New School Presbyterian, Salvation Army, some holiness movements and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their fervor was inspired by the conviction that Scripture teaches abstinence from intoxicating beverages rather than moderation in their use. Other churches which did not share the same conviction such as the Episcopal, Lutheran, German Reformed, Old School Presbyterian were, as John Merrill observes in his article on “The Bible and the American Temperance Movement,” published in the *Harvard Theological Review*, “least enthusiastic about the temperance movement.”<sup>4</sup>

The rise in the per capita consumption of pure alcohol from less than 1.5 gallons per year during Prohibition to about 3 gallons per year today,<sup>5</sup> could well be inversely related to the decline the temperance movement experienced during the same period of time. Such a decline appears to have been influenced by the gradual abandonment by most churches of their belief in total abstinence as a Biblical teaching, at least in practice.

**Biblical Criticism.** An important factor which has led most churches to abandon their Biblical position for total abstinence has been the growing impact of Biblical criticism, which has weakened both the authority of the Scripture and the person of Christ. The Scripture came to be viewed, in the words of John L. Merrill, as “a product of its own cultural environment,” and consequently its teachings on drinking came to be regarded as less important than contemporary, moral progress and perceptions.<sup>6</sup>

**The Person of Christ.** The person of Christ was also weakened by attributing to Him the limitations of human knowledge. Christ allegedly drank fermented wine because He did not understand its harmful effects. In the words of one writer, “the limitations of Christ’s human knowledge were

---

such that He could not know (as we know) the utter and absolute harmfulness of all beverages containing alcohol. This being the case, we follow Him in the spirit rather than the letter.”<sup>7</sup>

One wonders, how can a person worship Christ as the divine Son of God while viewing Him as ignorant of the danger of alcoholic beverages? Moreover, could Christ’s limitation of knowledge had been such that He ignored even those explicit Old Testament warnings against alcoholic beverages (Prov 20:1, 31:4, 5; Lev 10:8-11; Hab 2:15; 2:5; Is 5:11, 12; 28:7)?

**Moderation Rather Than Abstinence.** The impact of Biblical criticism can be seen in the movement away from total abstinence to moderate drinking. This movement has affected even those churches which had once been the strongest advocates of total abstinence. The Methodist Church, for example, was by far the leader in the temperance reform. Today, however, it allows moderate drinking even among its clergy.

Billy Graham caused a great uproar across the United States when he condoned President Carter’s position to serve only wine at the White House, by saying: “I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism . . . Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That wasn’t grape juice as some of them try to claim.”<sup>8</sup> To calm the outcry from conservatives, Graham clarified his position, saying: “It is my judgment that because of the devastating problem that alcohol has become to America, it is better for Christians to be teetotalers except for medical purposes. . . . The creeping paralysis of alcoholism is sapping our morals, wrecking our homes, and luring people away from the church.”<sup>9</sup> It is evident from these statements that Graham recommends abstinence from social rather than Biblical reasons.

**Biological or Biblical Ethics?** Like Graham, many church leaders and scholars today advocate teetotalism, not because they believe that it is Biblically and morally wrong to drink alcoholic beverages, but because of their harmful effects upon both personal and public health. These people are guided by what may be called *biological ethics* rather than *Biblical ethics*, that is, by their concern over the threat of alcohol to human life (*biology*=study of life), rather than by their conviction of Biblical disapproval of alcoholic beverages.

This trend is influencing the approach of some Seventh-day Adventists to the problem of alcohol consumption. An example is the series of five articles on chemical dependency published in the *Adventist Review* on October 29 and November 5, 12, 19, and 26, 1987. Its authors discuss the problem of alcohol dependency primarily as a *sickness* rather than as a *sin* problem. The underlying assumption seems to be that the Adventist church

---

should move away from viewing the drinking of alcoholic beverages as essentially “a deliberate sin.” Instead it should view alcoholism more as a medical than as a moral problem.

**Moral or Medical Issue?** The reduction of alcoholism to the status of a disease to which some people are vulnerable began in the late 1930s and has become widely accepted. A reason for this is, as stated by San Francisco psychologist Paul Good, that “if you call it a moral problem, you don’t have a treatment industry.”<sup>10</sup> He adds, “A billion-dollar industry services alcoholism as a disease.”<sup>11</sup> This flow of money into treatment programs—from employers, insurance companies and governments—could dry up quickly if the Supreme Court were to undermine alcoholism’s status as disease.

The adoption of the sickness model has largely eliminated the moral aspect of alcohol abuse, reducing it to a genetic and/or physiological disorder. This popular view is now being challenged by scholars such as Herbert Fingarette, an expert on addiction at the University of Southern California who is often consulted by government in legal cases involving alcoholics. In his newly released book, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease*, Fingarette argues convincingly, on the basis of several recent medical studies which have been largely ingored, that heavy drinking is in most cases a behavioral rather than a medical problem.<sup>12</sup>

**A “No Fault” Society.** It is not surprising that alcoholism has been reduced to the status of sickness for which the individual is not responsible. This is simply another example of the fact that we are fast becoming a “no fault” society—a society where no one is willing to assume responsibility or blame for anything he does. We have no fault insurance and no fault divorces, so why not also no fault alcoholism.

Ralph Woerner perceptively observes: “Alcoholics are no longer to blame for what they have become. They have caught a disease, like chicken pox, measles or mumps. The poor fellow was thirsty. He went into a bar one day where they served him a disease-causing drink, which destroyed his brain, wrecked his marriage, and brought untold anguish upon his family. But it was all so innocently done. No one is responsible for what happened.

“We would never allow a company to sell a beverage which causes measles, smallpox or polio, but with alcohol is different. It is different because we really do not believe it contains a disease-causing agent. When it is sold it is merely a beverage to quench one’s thirst and to make his heart merry. When the consumer becomes addicted, he has contracted a disease. This ‘schizophrenic’ reasoning allows the manufacturer to sell his product

without responsibility or blame. It allows the user to destroy himself without guilt or shame. He is a 'victim' like someone who has been hit by a tornado, an earthquake, or a flood. How can he be held responsible for what he has become? By labeling alcoholism a disease we absolve the alcoholic of all responsibility and guilt. This is essential if we are going to have a 'no fault' society.

"When it is brewed the product is 'as pure as a mountain stream.' When the user becomes addicted he is a victim of a terrible disease. Thus, the producer and the consumer are both exonerated from all guilt and responsibility for the suffering they have caused."<sup>13</sup>

**Need for Moral Conviction.** Informing Christians about the harmful effect of alcoholic beverages to their health, self-image, family, and society is urgently needed. But will this provide a compelling motivation to remain or become abstinent? Will the simple knowledge of the harmful effects of alcohol adequately convince and convict Christians to be teetotalers? In my view education alone is not enough. It takes more. It takes not merely *biological ethics* but primarily *Biblical ethics*. *It is only when a Christian recognizes that drinking is not only a bad habit that can harm one's health, but also a transgression of a God-given principle to ensure our health and holiness, that he or she will feel compelled to abstain from intoxicating substances.*

The massive national education on the danger of cigarette smoking has not so radically reduced the number of smokers. There are still about 40 million Americans who would rather smoke their health away than quit the habit. This shows that biological ethics alone is not enough. Similarly, educating people regarding the physio-social effects of alcohol will not substantially reduce the drinking problem either in the church or in the society as a whole.

The reason for this is the fallen human nature described by Paul with these words: "For I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:15, 24). The long and sad experience of the human race teaches us that for the sake of immediate pleasure, human beings will persist in doing what they know will eventually destroy not only their well-being but also that of society.

**The Christian Way of Freedom.** The Christian way of freedom is found in seeking to *serve God* rather than *to serve self*, in seeking to know and to do the will of God rather than to gratify and preserve our life style. Our present life is a meaningless and unfulfilling existence until it finds its meaning and fulfillment in God. The good news of Scripture is that God has



provided us with a way to find meaning and fulfillment in Him, by accepting His forgiveness for our past sins and His power to live in the present according to the principles of His Word. This was, as Paul explains, the purpose of Christ's coming into this world "in the likeness of sinful flesh . . . in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:3, 4).

All of this means that our Christian position on drinking must be formulated not merely on the basis of *biological ethics*, but primarily on the basis of *Biblical ethics*. Our conviction must be rooted not only in the negative effects of drinking on the physio-social aspects of life, but also in the positive principles and admonitions regarding drinking given to us by God in His Word. The definition of our Christian position on drinking must begin by listening first to what God has to say about it in His Word, and then to what scientific research tells us regarding the effects of alcohol.

### THREE MAJOR POSITIONS

What does the Bible teach us regarding the question of drinking? Does God *approve* the moderate use of alcoholic beverages? Does God disapprove of alcoholic beverages but *permit* their use in the past because of human failings (Matt 19:8) as He allowed divorce, polygamy, and slavery? Does God *totally disapprove* of any alcoholic beverage, even if moderately consumed? These three questions represent three basic positions that have been articulated on the question of drinking. We shall designate them respectively as *moderationist*, *abstentionist*, and *prohibitionist*.

#### 1. The Moderationist View

**Definition and Supporters.** The moderationist view maintains that while Scripture condemns the *immoderate use* (abuse) of alcoholic beverages, it does approve their *moderate use*. This view is defended by such authors as G. I. Williamson in his book, *Wine in the Bible and the Church*,<sup>14</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry in *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages*<sup>15</sup> and Norman L. Geisler, in his article "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking."<sup>16</sup>

The moderationist view rests on the fundamental assumption that the Bible knows *only of fermented wine*, which it considers a divine blessing to be freely enjoyed with moderation. Recent research, as we shall see, has challenged the "one wine" theory, by showing that the Hebrew and Greek words (*yayin* and *oinos*) which are uniformly rendered "wine" throughout the Scripture, can refer to either *unfermented grape juice* or to *fermented wine*.

By holding to the “one wine” view, moderationists argue that it was fermented wine that was exchanged as a gift between godly men (Gen 14:18-20); it was fermented wine that was brought as an offering to God (Ex 29:38, 40; Lev 23:13); it was fermented wine that the Israelites drank before the Lord when they brought their tithe to the temple (Deut 14:26); it was fermented wine that Jesus drank since He was accused of being a “drunkard” (Luke 7:33-35); it was also high-quality fermented wine that Jesus miraculously manufactured at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11); it was fermented wine that Jesus used to institute the Lord’s Supper (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18) and that primitive Christians used at their communion services (1 Cor 11:21, 22).

**Weaknesses of the View.** We will show the weaknesses of each of these claims. At this juncture it suffices to make two general observations. First, moderationists fail to explain adequately those passages which unreservedly condemn not merely the abuse but even the use of wine (Lev 10:8-11; Judges 13:3, 4; Prov 31:4, 5; 23:31; 20:1; 1 Tim 3:2,3). How can Scripture approve the moderate use of fermented wine while denouncing it at the same time as “a mocker” (Prov 20:1) that “bites like a serpent and stings like an adder” (Prov 23:32)? How can the same wine be both commended and condemned in the Bible as good and evil? If the answer is the *amount* rather than the *kind* of wine consumed, then the Scripture should have given some hints regarding safe limits of drinking.

A second observation has to do with the nature of fermented wine or of any other alcoholic beverage. Could God legitimately recommend the moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages while knowing of their harmful effects? Moderation reduces but does not eliminate the ill-effects of alcohol. The same is true with tobacco. Smoking only half a pack instead of two packs of cigarettes a day reduces but does not eliminate the harm of tobacco. It is absurd and dangerous to imagine that God would have approved and encouraged the moderate use of a substance which intoxicates our organism, irrespective of the amount consumed.

## 2. The Abstentionist View

**Definition and Supporters.** Many conservative Christians recognize the problems inherent in the moderationist view, and consequently they espouse what we shall call the “abstentionist view.” This view maintains that although God approved the moderate use of alcoholic beverages in Bible times, today it is preferable for Christians to abstain from them because of the many serious social and health problems related to alcohol consumption.

The abstentionist view is held, as noted earlier, by Billy Graham. Among the recent studies supporting this view are the reports on the use of

alcoholic beverages released by the (former) Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod,<sup>17</sup> Harold Lindsell's book, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*,<sup>18</sup> and Arnold B. Come's, *Drinking: A Christian Position*.<sup>19</sup> According to this view, abstinence is not a matter of explicit Biblical teaching, but rather of prudence in view of the devastating impact of alcohol consumption in our society.

**The Adventist Abstentionist View.** The Seventh-day Adventist Church upholds the abstentionist view, but on a somewhat different ground. It believes that God did not approve but merely permitted the use of alcoholic beverages. As stated in the newly released book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* "Scriptural stories involving the use of alcoholic beverages may give the impression that God approved their use. However, Scripture also indicates that God's people participated in social practices . . . that God certainly did not condone. In interpreting such Scriptural passages, it is helpful to keep in mind that God does not necessarily endorse all that He permits."<sup>20</sup>

In its comment on Deuteronomy 14:26, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* explicitly affirms: "... Thus it was with 'wine' and 'strong drink.' Neither was strictly prohibited, except to those engaged in religious duties, and perhaps also in the administration of justice (Lev 10:9; Prov 31:4, 5) . . . In times past God often 'winked' at the gross 'ignorance' responsible for practices He could never approve."<sup>21</sup>

By viewing alcoholic beverages as permitted (though not approved) by God in past times of ignorance and perversion, Adventists find it necessary to appeal primarily to health reasons for their position on abstinence. An example is the *Fundamental Beliefs* 21, which deals with Christian behavior. It states: "Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well."<sup>22</sup>

**Weaknesses of the View.** The Adventist position that God permitted alcoholic beverages without approving their use rests primarily on the assumption that the "wine or strong drink" mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:26 refer to alcoholic beverages.<sup>23</sup> Since the text commands to consume these beverages before the Lord in Jerusalem, the command is seen as representing a divine concession to the use of alcoholic beverages because of human perversion. The weaknesses of this interpretation are discussed in Chapter 7 where the text is examined. Our study of the context and of the derivation of the Hebrew word *shekar*, usually translated "strong drink," show that in this context the word refers to an unfermented beverage.

The position that the use of alcoholic wine was allowed as a divine concession is also weakened by those passages which describe "wine"

(*yayin*), not as a divine concession but as a divine blessing for the people to enjoy. For example, Psalm 104:14, 15 says: “Thou [God] dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine [*yayin*] to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man’s heart.” Here “wine” is joined together with food and oil as a basic divine blessing which enjoys God’s approval.

Similarly, in Isaiah 55;1 God’s free offer of His mercy is likened to the free reception of water, wine and milk: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine [*yayin*] and milk without money and without price.” The fact that “wine and milk” are here paired together as symbols of good and satisfying spiritual benefits suggests again that “wine” (*yayin*) was not merely permitted but also approved. Other examples indicating divine approval for wine can be found in those passages which describe wine as the symbol of prosperity and gladness of the messianic age. These will be discussed in Chapter 3.

**An Apparent Biblical Paradox.** The above examples recommending wine as a divine blessing for believers to enjoy stand in sharp contrast to those passages condemning wine as “treacherous” (Hab 2:5), and “a mocker” which “at the last . . . bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder” (Prov 20:1; 23:32). These two contrasting sets of verses present a puzzling Biblical paradox. How can the same inspired Bible both commend and condemn the use of wine? It is evident that the same wine cannot be both good and evil at the same time.

The solution to this apparent paradox cannot be found in the amount of wine ingested, as argued by moderationists, because, as will be later demonstrated, the Scripture commends and condemns wine itself, irrespective of the quantity used. Nor is the solution to be found by viewing the positive references to wine as divine concession rather than a divine approval, since, as we have seen, often wine is presented together with food as a divine blessing for people to enjoy.

The solution is rather to be found in recognizing that the Hebrew and Greek words (*yayin* and *oinos*) which are uniformly translated “wine” can refer to both *unfermented grape juice* and *fermented wine*. The failure to note this double meaning of the Biblical terms for wine has led some to conclude that Bible teachings on drinking are contradictory. Lael Othniel Caesar, for example, concludes his thesis on “The Meaning of *Yayin* in the Old Testament,” saying that while “the use of *yayin* was sometimes proscribed . . . there is Scriptural evidence that God gave Israel permission to consume intoxi-

cants.”<sup>24</sup> The same view is expressed by *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* on its comment on Deuteronomy 14:26, as cited above.

### 3. The Prohibitionist View

**Definition of the View.** The prohibitionist view maintains that the apparent contradiction between the Biblical approval and disapproval of the use of wine can best be resolved by recognizing that the same Hebrew and Greek words for wine (*yayin* and *oinos*) can refer both to unfermented grape juice and to fermented wine. Consequently the “wine” God approves of is uniformly unfermented grape juice and the “wine” He disapproves is fermented and intoxicating. According to this view alcoholic beverages are prohibited in Scripture as unfit for human consumption. To partake of them is not only unhealthy but also immoral, because it represents the violation of a Biblical principle designed to ensure our health and holiness. This is the view that I have come to accept, after a careful examination of all the Biblical references to drinking “wine.” I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Ellen White, who greatly influenced the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the adoption of the Biblical principle of abstinence, clearly espouses the prohibitionist view. The theological basis of her views is presented in Chapter 8.

**Supporters of the Prohibitionist View.** The most comprehensive and compelling defense of the prohibitionist view to date is the doctoral dissertation of Robert P. Teachout entitled “The Use of ‘Wine’ in the Old Testament,” presented in 1979 at the Dallas Theological Seminary. To this study I am greatly indebted for both sources and analysis, as the reader will soon discover by my frequent references to it. Teachout later published in 1983 (revised in 1986) a 96-page popularized summary of the conclusions found in his 462-page dissertation, entitled *Wine. The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence*.<sup>25</sup>

Another significant study supporting the prohibitionist view is Stephen M. Reynold’s *Alcohol and the Bible*, published in 1983 by The Challenge Press. Reynold, who was one of the translators of the New International Version, offers valuable linguistic analysis of crucial words and phrases. Ernest Gordon’s booklet, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine* (1944) provides a helpful exegetical study of the New Testament references to wine.<sup>26</sup>

Among the many older studies defending the prohibitionist view, the one that stands out for its erudition and comprehensive analysis is *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* by Frederic Richard Lees and Dawson Burns, published in numerous editions first in England and then in the United States from 1867 on. Its authors examine extensively every single Biblical

---

passage referring to “wine” and “strong drink,” offering for each the various available versions, criticism and exposition. I am grateful to Ernest H. J. Steed for lending me his personal copy of this hard-to-find book.

A smaller but most valuable study is Leon C. Field, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible-Wine Question*, first published in New York in 1883. To this book I am deeply indebted for its scholarly analysis of numerous New Testament references to wine and drinking.

Another older study is William Patton’s *Bible Wines, Laws of Fermentation*. Patton provides some helpful information on the laws of fermentation and the use of the word “wine” as found in the Bible and history. His analysis, however, is rather superficial, often limited to a compilation of statements from different authors. The book is still being reprinted by the Sane Press, the latest edition of which was released in 1988.

In presenting the results of my own investigation of the Biblical teachings regarding the use of alcoholic beverages, I feel deeply indebted to the scholars cited above and to many others who have broadened my understanding of this complex and vital subject. Though I often refer and give credit to the research done by other scholars, the views and conclusions presented are my own and I assume full responsibility for them.

### Conclusion

Our survey of the alarming drinking problem of our time suggests that Christian churches bear a partial responsibility for it. That is because to a large extent they have failed to instill clear convictions into the minds of people about the moral and physical evil of intoxicants. In addition we have found that a major contributory factor has been the impact of Biblical criticism in weakening the authority of Scripture in general and of its teaching on drinking in particular.

Since the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 more and more churches have abandoned their stand for total abstinence, encouraging instead moderation in drinking. Moderation, however, has led millions to become immoderate drinkers, because alcohol is a habit-forming narcotic diminishing one’s capacity for self-control.

To support their moderationist position many churches have accepted the view that the Bible knows only of fermented wine (“the one wine theory”) which it considers as a divine blessing to be freely enjoyed with moderation. Consequently any condemnation of wine in the Bible refers not to the *kind* of wine (alcoholic), but to the *amount* consumed.

In view of the enormous influence this position still has on the drinking habits of millions of Christians, we must carefully examine what Scripture teaches regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. We shall begin our investigation by looking first into the meaning of the word “wine” in Scripture and history. Then we shall proceed to examine the Biblical teachings regarding alcoholic beverages as found in the Old Testament, the example and teachings of Jesus, and the apostolic admonitions to temperance and sobriety.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. This statistical information is provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and is cited in “Coming to Grips with Alcoholism,” *U.S. News and World Report* (November 30, 1987): 56.

2. Ibid.

3. Jerry Dunn, *God is for the Alcoholic* (Chicago, 1896), p. 87.

4. John L. Merrill, “The Bible and the American Temperance Movement: Text, Context and Pretext,” *Harvard Theological Review* 81,2 (April 1988): 165.

5. The source of information for the per capita consumption of alcohol is Rutgers University Center for Alcoholic Studies, published in Steve Olson, *Alcohol in America* (Washington, D.C., National Academy Press, 1985), p. 2.

6. John L. Merrill (n. 4), p. 166.

7. John Cole McKim, “Prohibition Versus Christianity,” *North American Review* 208 (Spring 1918): 127. The same argument was suggested in the 1830s by Gerrit Smith who maintained that Jesus drank wine simply because He lacked the “better knowledge of our times” (see Ian R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1900* [Westport, CT, 1979], p. 145).

8. “Carter Will Restore Confidence, Graham Says,” *Miami Herald* (December 26, 1976), section A, p. 18.

9. Editorial, “Graham on Drink: ‘Don’t,’” *Christianity Today* (February 4, 1977): 63.

10. As quoted in “Coming to Grips with Alcoholism” (n. 1), p.59.

11. Ibid.

12. Herbert Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

13. Ralph Woerner, "A No Fault Society," *Church of God Churchlight* (December 1988):1-2.
14. G. I. Williamson, *Wine in the Bible and the Church* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1976). See also J. G. Vos, *The Separated Life* (Philadelphia, n.d.).
15. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986).
16. Norman L. Geisler, "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1982): 46-55. See also Robert. H. Stein, "Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times," *Christianity Today* (June 20, 1975): 9-11.
17. Paul R. Gilchrist, ed., "Study Committee on Beverage Use of Alcohol Report," in *Documents of Synod* (Lookout Mountain, Tennessee: Reformed Evangelical Church, Evangelical Synod, 1982), pp.19-33.
18. Harold Lindsell, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (Washington, D.C., 1973), chapter 8.
19. Arnold B. Come, *Drinking: A Christian Position* (Philadelphia, 1964). See also Adrian Jeffers, "Wine in the Bible: Weal or Woe?" *The Western Commentator* 5 (July-August 1975):7.
20. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of the 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 1988), p. 282.
21. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C., 1953), vol. 1, p. 1002.
22. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (n.18.), p. 278.
23. See the comment of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (n.21) on Deuteronomy 14:26.
24. Lael Othniel Caesar, "The Meaning of *Yayin* in the Old Testament" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University), p. 152.
25. Robert T. Teachout, *Wine: The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence* (Published by the author, 1986).
26. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine* (Philadelphia:1944).



## Chapter 2

# THE MEANING OF “WINE”

“Why devote a chapter of this book to the definition of “wine”? Everybody knows that wine is the fermented juice of grapes! Such a surprise is understandable because most of today’s English dictionaries define “wine” as “fermented grape juice” or “the fermented juice of grapes,” making no allowance for unfermented grape juice to be called “wine.”

The universally accepted definition of “wine” as “fermented grape juice” may well explain why many Bible believing Christians have come to believe that the “wine” mentioned in the Bible must in all instances be alcoholic. This assumption, known as the “one wine theory,” has greatly prejudiced the study of the Biblical teachings on the use of alcoholic beverages by leading many sincere Christians to believe that God approves the moderate use of fermented, intoxicating wine. The reasoning can best be illustrated syllogistically, as follows:

1. The Bible, like today’s English language, knows only of alcoholic wine.
2. Wine is praised in the Bible as a gracious divine blessing.
3. Therefore, the Bible approves the moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages.

The problem with this syllogism is that its first premise is very wrong. As this chapter will show, the Bible knows of two distinctly different grape beverages: the first, *unfermented*, refreshing and lawful; the second, *fermented*, intoxicating and unlawful. This view of two kinds of wines in the Bible is flatly denied by numerous scholars. Dunlop Moore states emphatically: “The theory of two kinds of wine—the one fermented and intoxicating and unlawful, and the other unfermented, unintoxicating, and lawful—is a modern hypothesis, devised during the present century, and has no foundation in the Bible, or in Hebrew or classical antiquity.”<sup>1</sup> An even stronger denial

---

of the two wines theory is found in E. W. Bullinger's *The Companion Bible*, which says: "The modern expression, 'unfermented wine,' is a contradiction of terms. If it is wine, it must be fermented. If it is not fermented, it is not wine, but a syrup."<sup>2</sup>

**Objective of Chapter.** We intend in this chapter to examine if indeed the theory of two kinds of wine has no Biblical and historical foundation, as many contend. To some readers this investigation may seem rather technical and not directly related to the study of the Biblical teaching on alcoholic beverages. Yet, this investigation is essential to understand what the Bible has to say on this timely subject. In fact, our conclusion regarding the secular and Biblical usage of the term "wine" will enable us to clarify the apparent contradiction between those Biblical passages commending and those condemning the use of wine.

**Procedure.** The procedure we shall follow is to trace the secular usage of the word "wine" backward, from English, to Latin, Greek and finally Hebrew. This historical survey across four languages is justified by the fact that the English word "wine" is directly related linguistically to the Latin *vinum*, the Greek *oinos*, and the Hebrew *yayin*. The relationship of sound and look between these words becomes clearer when we place these respective words side by side without the case ending *um* for the Latin *vin(um)*, *os* for the Greek *oin(os)* and without the prefix *ya* for the Hebrew *(ya)yin* (originally *yayin*). Without the case endings or suffix these four words look like this: *wine*, *vin*, *oin*, *yin*. The linguistic relationship among them is self-evident. They all have a similar stem in common. This indicates that it is the *sound* of the same word which has been transliterated rather than the equivalent *meaning* which has been translated with a different word.

In view of their similarity in sound and look we must ascertain what these related words actually mean in the various languages. We shall conduct our investigation beginning with the usage of the word "wine" in the English language and then move backward to the Latin *vinum* to the Greek *oinos* and finally to the Hebrew *yayin*. We trust that this procedure will help the Bible reader to see the historical continuity existing in the secular and Biblical usage of this one-related-word as a designation for both fermented and unfermented grape juice.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first examines the secular usage of wine, *vinum*, *oinos*, and *yayin*. The second considers the Biblical usage of the Greek *oinos* and the Hebrew *yayin*.

## PART 1

## SECULAR USAGE OF THE WORD "WINE"

## 1. The Meaning of "Wine" in English

**Current Usage of "Wine."** Most people assume today that the word "wine" can refer only to fermented, intoxicating grape juice, or to the fermented juice of any fruit used as beverage. The basis for this assumption is the current definition given to the word by most modern dictionaries. For example, the seventh edition of the *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines "wine" as follows: "1: fermented grape juice containing varying percentages of alcohol together with ethers and esters that give it bouquet and flavor. 2: the usu. fermented juice of a plant product (as a fruit) used as a beverage. 3: something that invigorates or intoxicates." Note that no mention at all is made in this current definition of unfermented grape juice as one of the possible meanings of "wine." It is not surprising that people who read a definition such as this, common to most dictionaries, would naturally assume that "wine" can only mean a fermented juice.

**Past Usage of "Wine."** This restrictive meaning of "wine" represents, however, a departure from the more classical dual meaning of the word as a designation for both fermented or unfermented grape juice. To verify this fact one needs only to consult some older dictionaries. For example, the 1955 *Funk & Wagnalls New "Standard" Dictionary of the English Language* defines "wine" as follows: "1. The fermented juice of the grape: in loose language the juice of the grape whether fermented or not." This definition shows that forty years ago the loose usage of "wine" referred to "the juice of the grape whether fermented or *not*." It is noteworthy that even the more recent *New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (1971) defines "must" as "Wine or juice pressed from the grapes but not fermented." This definition clearly equates "wine" with grape juice.

The 1896 *Webster's International Dictionary of the English Language* which defines "wine" as "the expressed juice of grapes, especially when fermented . . . a beverage . . . prepared from grapes by squeezing out their juice, and (usually) allowing it to ferment." This definition is historically accurate, since it recognizes that the basic meaning of "wine" is "the expressed juice of grapes," which is usually, but not always, allowed to ferment.

"The problem," as Robert Teachout points out, "is that people have taken the very *usual* meaning of the word (whether in Hebrew, Greek, Latin or English)—as an intoxicating beverage—and have made it the *only* defini-

tion of the word. That is incorrect scholarship! It is inaccurate both biblically and secularly, and it is inaccurate in the English language historically.”<sup>3</sup>

**Older English Dictionaries.** The inaccuracy in the English language becomes even more evident when we look at older English dictionaries. For example, the 1828 *Webster’s Dictionary* defines the word “must” as “*new wine*—wine pressed *from* the grape, but not fermented.”<sup>4</sup> Note that the unfermented grape juice is here explicitly called “new wine.”

The 1759 Nathan Bailey’s *New Universal English Dictionary of Words and of Arts and Sciences* offers the following definition for “wine”: “Natural wine is such as it comes from the grape, without any mixture or sophistication. Adulterated wine is that wherein some drug is added to give it strength, fineness, flavor, briskness, or some other qualification.”<sup>5</sup> Note that in this definition Bailey does not use the word “fermented,” though it is implied in some of the wines he describes.

Other eighteenth-century lexicographers define the word “wine” very similarly. John Kersey’s *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum, or A General English Dictionary*, published in London in 1708, says: “Wine, a liquor made of the juice of grapes or other fruits. Liquor or Liqueur, anything that is liquid; Drink, Juice, etc. Must, sweet wine, newly pressed from the grape.”<sup>6</sup> In this definition “wine” explicitly includes “must, sweet wine, newly pressed from the grape.”

Benjamin Marin’s *Lingua Britannica Reformata or A New English Dictionary*, published in 1748, defines “wine” as follows: “1. the juice of the grape. 2. a liquor extracted from other fruits besides the grape. 3. the vapours of wine, as wine disturbs his reason.”<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that here the first meaning of “wine” is “the juice of the grape,” without any reference to fermentation.

A clear example of the use of the term “wine” to refer to unfermented grape juice is provided by William Whiston’s translation of Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*, first published in 1737. Referring to Joseph’s interpretation of the cupbearer’s dream, Josephus writes: “He therefore said that in his sleep he saw three clusters of grapes hanging upon three branches of a vine, large already, and ripe for gathering; and that he squeezed them into a cup which the king held in his hand and when *he had strained the wine*, he gave it to the king to drink . . . Thou sayest that *thou didst squeeze this wine from three clusters of grapes* with thine hands and that the king received it: know, therefore, that the vision is for thy good.”<sup>8</sup>

In this translation Whiston uses "wine" as a proper rendering for fresh, unfermented grape juice (*gleukos*), obviously because in this time "wine" meant either fermented *or* unfermented grape juice. Josephus' statement offers another significant insight, namely, that it was customary long before Israel became a nation to squeeze the juice from grapes and drink it immediately in its fresh, unfermented state. This is what Josephus called *gleukos*, the term which our English translators render "wine" or "new wine" in Acts 2:13. Does not this translation support the conclusion that unfermented grape juice was called "wine" in older English usage?

**Bible Translations.** The above sampling of definitions of "wine" from older English dictionaries suggests that when the King James Version of the Bible was produced (1604-1611) its translators must have understood "wine" to refer to both fermented and unfermented wine. In view of this fact, the King James Version's uniform translation of the Hebrew *yayin* and Greek *onios* as "wine" was an acceptable translation at that time, since in those days the term could mean either fermented or unfermented wine, just as the words it translates (*yayin* or *oinos*) can mean either. Today, however, when "wine" has assumed the sole meaning of fermented grape juice, modern translations of the Bible should indicate whether the text is dealing with fermented or unfermented grape juice. By failing to provide this clarification, uninformed Bible readers are misled into believing that all references to "wine" in the Bible refer to fermented grape juice.

## 2. The Meaning of the Latin *Vinum*

**Latin Usage of *Vinum*.** It is significant that the Latin word *vinum*, from which the English "wine" derives, was also used to refer to fermented or unfermented grape juice. A large four-volume Latin lexicon, *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, published in 1740, gives several definitions for *vinum*, all supported by ancient Roman authors. Two of these are especially relevant: "*Aigleuces vinum*—"("sweet wine"), "*Defrutum vinum*—"("boiled wine"), both of which are unfermented grape juice.<sup>9</sup> The lexicon further explains that "*vinum vocantur ipsae etiam uvae*"—"("even the very grapes are called wine"). The latter statement is supported by Marcus Cato's designation of grape juice as "*vinum pendens*," that is, "wine still hanging on the grapes."<sup>10</sup>

Parkinson in his *Theatrum Botanicum* published in 1640, explains that "The juyce or liquor pressed out of the ripe grapes, is called *vinum*, *wine*. Of it is made both *sapa* and *defrutum*, in English *cute*, that is to say, boiled wine, and both made of *mustum*, *new wine*; the latter boyled to the halfe, the former to the third part."<sup>11</sup> This explanation is significant because it attests that the juice pressed out of ripe grapes was called "*vinum*, *wine*," and when boiled it became "*sapa*" or "*defrutum*," depending on how much it was boiled down.

Pliny (A. D. 24-79), the renowned Roman scholar and author of the celebrated *Natural History*, lists the boiled wines *sapa* and *defrutum* among the *vinum dulce*—"sweet wine." To these he adds other kinds of unfermented sweet wines known as *semper mustum*—"permanent must," *passum*—"raisin wine," and *militites*—"honey-wine." The last was made from must "in the proportion of thirty pints of must of a dry quality to six pints of honey and a cup of salt, this mixture being brought to the boil."<sup>12</sup>

W. Robertson in his *Phraseologia Generalis*, published in 1693, defines the Latin *mustum* as "new wine" and the phrase *vinum pendens* as "wine yet on the tree."<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor" of the Roman Catholic Church, explains that "grape juice—*mustum*" can be used for the Eucharist, because it already "has the specific quality of wine [*speciem vini*]."<sup>14</sup>

The foregoing examples suffice to show that the Latin word *vinum*, like its derived English *wine*, has been historically used to refer either to fermented or unfermented grape juice. Further documentation from ancient Roman writers supporting this conclusion will be given in Chapter 4, where we shall examine the ancient methods for preserving wine unfermented.

### 3. The Secular Usage of the Greek *Oinos*

***Oinos: Only Fermented Grape Juice?*** It is widely believed that both in secular and Biblical Greek the word *oinos*, from which derive both the Latin *vinum* and the English *wine*, meant exclusively fermented grape juice. For example, in his book *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages*, Kenneth L. Gentry states: "Classical Greek—the historical forerunner of the New Testament (*koine*) Greek—employs the term as a fermented beverage. The Liddell and Scott *Greek-English Lexicon* of classical Greek defines *oinos* as 'the fermented juice of the grape.' Interestingly, classical Greek apparently used *oinos* as a functional equivalent for 'fermented juice,' as Liddell and Scott note . . ."<sup>15</sup> Gentry goes on quoting New Testament lexicographers to show that "no major New Testament lexicon disputes the fermented character of *oinos*."<sup>16</sup> After examining some New Testament passages, Gentry concludes: "The case is clear: *oinos* is an alcoholic beverage. Yet nowhere is wine *per se* forbidden."<sup>17</sup>

In the light of such a categorical claim, it is important to ascertain if indeed it is true that in classical Greek *oinos* meant only fermented grape juice. If this claim can be shown to be untrue—by submitting literary examples where *oinos* refers also to unfermented grape juice—then it is certainly possible that the same dual meaning of *oinos* is present also in the New Testament and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint.

**Unfermented Grape Juice.** There are ample Greek literary texts which negate the narrow definition of *oinos* as denoting only fermented wine. A clear example is provided by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). In his book *Metereologica*, he clearly refers to "grape juice" or "must" (*gleukos*), as one of the kinds of wine: "For some kinds of wine [*oinos*], for example must [*gleukos*], solidify when boiled."<sup>17</sup> In another passage of the same book, Aristotle refers to a sweet grape beverage (*glukus*) which "though called wine [*oinos*], it has not the effect of wine, for it does taste like wine and does not intoxicate like ordinary wine."<sup>18</sup> In this text Aristotle explicitly informs us that unfermented grape juice was called "*oinos*—wine," though it did not have the taste or the intoxicating effect of ordinary wine.

Athenaeus, the Grammarian (about A.D. 200), explains in his *Banquet* that "the Mityleneans have a sweet wine [*glukon oinon*], what they called *prodromos*, and others call it *protropos*."<sup>19</sup> Later on in the same book, he recommends this sweet, unfermented wine (*protropos*) for the dyspeptic: "Let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, especially that kind called *protropos*, the sweet Lesbian *glukus*, as being good for the stomach; for sweet wine [*oinos*] does not make the head heavy."<sup>20</sup> Here the unfermented sweet grape juice is called "lesbian—*effoeminatum*" because the potency or fermentable power of the wine had been removed.

The methods by which this was done will be discussed in Chapter 4, when we discuss the preservation of grape juice in the ancient world. At this juncture it is significant to note that unfermented wine was recommended for stomach problems. To this fact we shall refer again in Chapter 7, when considering the meaning of Paul's recommendation to Timothy to "use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" (1 Tim 5:23).

In another passage Athenaeus explains: "At the time of festivals, he [Drimacus the General] went about, and took wine from the field [*ek ton agron oinon*] and such animals for victims as were in good condition."<sup>21</sup> As Lees and Burns observes, "No one, we suppose, can carry prejudice so far as to impose upon himself the belief that fermented and bottled wine was thus "taken from the fields."<sup>22</sup>

***Oinos* as Pressed Grape Juice.** In several texts the freshly squeezed juice of the grape is denominated *oinos* "wine." For example, Papias, a Christian bishop of Hierapolis who lived at the close of the apostolic age, describes the current extravagant view of the millennium as a time when "vines will grow each with . . . ten thousand clusters on each twig, and ten thousand grapes in each cluster, and each grape, when crushed, will yield twenty-five jars of wine [*oinos*]."<sup>23</sup>

Proclus, the Platonic philosopher, who lived in the fifth century, in his annotation to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, has a note on line 611 where he explains how the grapes were first exposed to the sun for ten days, then to the shade for ten days and finally "they treaded them and squeezed out the wine [*oinon*]." <sup>24</sup> Here also the freshly squeezed juice of the grape is explicitly called "*oinos*—wine."

Several Greek papyri, discussed by Robert Teachout in his dissertation, indicate that *oinos* could refer to unfermented grape juice. <sup>25</sup> A rather clear example is a papyrus from A.D. 137 which contains this statement: "They paid to the one who had earned his wages pure, fresh wine [*oinon*] from the vat." <sup>26</sup>

Nicander of Colophon speculates that *oinos* derives from the name of a man, *Oineus*, who first squeezed grapes into a cup: "And *Oineus* first squeezed it out into hollow cups and called it *oinos*." <sup>27</sup> This view is supported by Melanippides of Melos who says: "Wine, my master, named after *Oineus*." <sup>28</sup> These two statements suggest that some traced the origin of *oinos* to the very act of squeezing the juice out of grapes, first done by a man whose name, *Oineus*, presumably became the name of the grape juice itself.

**The Septuagint Renderings.** The Septuagint, an intertestamental Greek translation of the Old Testament, offers significant examples of the dual meanings of *oinos*. Ernest Gordon points out that "In the Septuagint, the Hebrew word for grape-juice, *tirosh*, is translated at least 33 times by the Greek word *oinos*, wine, and the adjective 'new' is not present. *Oinos* without qualification, then, can easily mean unfermented wine in the New Testament." <sup>29</sup> It is interesting that the translators of the Septuagint used *oinos* to translate the Hebrew word for grape juice (*tirosh*), instead of a less ambiguous word like *gleukos*, which means "must."

It is also noteworthy that although the Septuagint usually translates the Hebrew *yayin* as *oinos*, in Job 32:19 *yayin* is rendered as *gleukos*, which is the common Greek word for newly pressed grape juice: "Behold, my heart is like wine [*gleukos*—grape juice] that has no vent; like new wineskins, it is ready to burst." In this instance the translators of the Septuagint show that for them the Hebrew *yayin* could refer to must in the process of fermentation.

The above sampling of texts, from both secular and religious authors, makes it abundantly clear that the Greek word *oinos*, like the Latin *vinum* and the English *wine*, was used as a generic term to refer either to fermented or unfermented grape juice. It remains for us now to verify if the same dual meanings are also present in the secular usage of the Hebrew *yayin*.



#### 4. The Secular Usage of the Hebrew *Yayin*

***Yayin* as Freshly Pressed Grape Juice.** Before examining the Biblical meaning of the Hebrew *yayin* and of the Greek *oinos*, we shall consider the usage of *yayin* in Jewish literature, since the latter provides extra-Biblical documentation on how this word was used over the centuries in Jewish culture. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* provides a concise description of the various usages of *yayin*: “Fresh wine before fermenting was called ‘*yayin mi-gat*’ (wine of the vat; Sanh 70a). The ordinary wine was of current vintage. The vintage of the previous year was called ‘*yayin yashan*’ (old wine). The third year’s vintage was ‘*yayin meyushshan*’ (very old wine).”<sup>30</sup>

An almost identical description of the use of *yayin* is found in the more recent *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971): “The newly pressed wine prior to fermentation was known as *yayin mi-gat* (‘wine from the vat;’ Sanh 70a), *yayin yashan* (‘old wine’) was wine from the previous year, and that from earlier vintages, *yashan noshan* (‘old, very old’).”<sup>31</sup> The full statement from Sanhedrin 70a, a Talmudic treatise to which both encyclopedias refer, reads as follows: “Newly pressed wine, prior to fermentation, was known as *yayin mi-gat* (wine from the press).”

Both of these standard Jewish Encyclopedias explicitly attest that the term *yayin* was used to refer to a variety of wines, including “the newly pressed wine, prior to fermentation.” The newly pressed grape juice was apparently known also as “new wine,” since Rabbi Hanina B. Kahana answers the question: “How long is it called new wine?” by saying, “As long as it is in the first stage of fermentation . . . and how long is this first stage? Three days.”<sup>32</sup>

**Unfermented Wine for Religious Ceremonies.** Louis Ginzberg, who for many years was an eminent Professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, wrote a scholarly article in 1923 entitled: “A Response to the Question whether Unfermented Wine May be Used in Jewish Ceremonies.” In this article Ginzberg examines several passages from the Talmud, relating to the use of unfermented wine in Jewish ceremonies. His conclusions are significant and will be presented in chapter 5.

In this context we shall mention only a couple of statements from the Talmud which Ginzberg examines at considerable length. The first is from the treatise *Baba Bathra* 97a, where Rabbi Hiyya discusses whether freshly pressed wine could be used for the *kiddush*, the ceremony to welcome a religious festival such as the Sabbath. Rabbi Hiyya says: “Since the wine [*yayin*] from the press is acceptable for libations *bedi’abad*, it is acceptable

for *Kiddush lekatehillah*.”<sup>33</sup> This statement is significant for two reasons. First, because it shows that freshly pressed grape juice was known as “wine” (*yayin*). Second, because it indicates that unfermented wine was acceptable for religious ceremonies.

The second passage is largely a restatement with changes of the one just quoted and is found in the *Halakot Gedalot*, the earliest Jewish compendium of the Talmud. The statement reads: “One may press out a cluster of grapes and pronounce the *Kiddush* over the juice, *since the juice of the grape is considered wine [yayin] in connection with the laws of the Nazirite*.”<sup>34</sup>

This statement is perplexing because the Nazirite law in Numbers 6:1-4 makes no reference that unfermented grape juice was considered wine. Presumably, some Rabbis reached this conclusion on the basis of their common acceptance of grape juice as wine. Louis Ginzberg expresses this view saying: “Since there is no express mention of grape-juice among the drinks prohibited to the Nazirite, its prohibition by the Rabbis can only be justified on the ground that it is considered wine.”<sup>35</sup>

If this assumption is correct, it would provide an additional indirect indication that unfermented grape juice was commonly considered wine (*yayin*) in the Jewish society. Such an indirect indication, however, is hardly necessary to establish this conclusion, since the two passages cited earlier provide direct evidence that the juice of the grape was indeed designated wine (*yayin*).

**Conclusion.** The investigation into the secular usage of the related words—*wine*, *vinum*, *oinos* and *yayin*—has clearly shown that these words have been historically used in their respective languages to designate the pressed juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. This means that those who boldly claim that “the two wines view” is devoid of Biblical and historical support, base their claim on their ignorance of the parallel secular usage of the related words for wine in English, Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

## PART 2

### THE BIBLICAL USAGE OF YAYIN AND OINOS

The foregoing investigation has shown that in secular Greek and Hebrew, the respective words for wine, *oinos* and *yayin*, have been used to refer either to fermented or unfermented wine. At this juncture it is important to ascertain if the same dual meanings are found in the Biblical usage of these two related words. This information is essential because it will explain why

---

Scripture sometimes clearly approves of wine and sometimes strongly disapproves of it, while using the same word to designate both.

The apparent ambiguity of Scripture toward wine is resolved if we can establish that the two related words for wine—*oinos* and *yayin*—are used in Scripture in the same way as in secular Greek and Hebrew, namely to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. If these dual meaning is present in Scripture, then it will be easier to show that God approves of the unfermented grape juice and that He disapproves of the fermented intoxicating wine, even while using the same word to designate both. The procedure we shall follow is to examine first the usage of *yayin* in the Old Testament and then of *oinos* in the New Testament.

### 1. *Yayin* as Fermented Wine

**Frequent Use.** The noun *yayin* is the most frequently used word for wine in the Old Testament, fully 141 times. As already noticed, there is an apparent inconsistency in the use of this word, since sometimes it receives God's approval and sometimes His disapproval. The reason for this will become apparent by looking at some examples where *yayin* obviously means fermented, intoxicating wine and at others where it means unfermented grape juice.

According to Robert Teachout's tabulation of the 141 references to *yayin* in the Old Testament, 71 times the word refers to unfermented grape juice and 70 times to fermented wine.<sup>36</sup> This tabulation may not necessarily be accurate, since in certain instances the context is unclear. The actual ratio in the two usages of *yayin* is of relative significance, because for the purpose of our study it is important simply to establish that *yayin* is sometimes used in the Old Testament to refer to the unfermented juice of the grape.

**Examples of Intoxication.** No one doubts that *yayin* frequently refers in the Old Testament to intoxicating wine. This fact is clearly established both by the many examples of the evil consequences of drinking *yayin* and by the divine condemnation of its use.

The very first example of the use of *yayin* in Scripture describes the intoxicating effects of fermented wine: "Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine [*yayin*] and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent" (Gen 9:20, 21).

Another sordid example in which intoxicating wine played a leading role is that of Lot's daughters. Fearing to be left without progeny after the destruction of Sodom and the surrounding cities, the older daughter said to the

younger: "Come, let us make our father drink wine [*yayin*], and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father.' So they made their father drink wine [*yayin*] that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose" (Gen 19:32-33). The story continues relating how the following night the younger daughter repeated the same strategy.

The story of Nabal provides another example of the evil effects of intoxicating wine. Nabal was a wealthy man who had benefited from David's protection. Yet he refused to give any food in return to David's men. When David organized his men to kill the ungrateful Nabal, his wife, Abigail, acted hastily on a tip received and brought provisions to David, apologizing for her husband's foolish behavior. After David accepted her apologies and provisions, she returned home, only to find her husband drunk: "And Abigail came to Nabal; and, lo, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she told him nothing at all until the morning light. And in the morning, when the wine [*yayin*] had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him and he became as a stone" (1 Sam 25:36-37).

Among the many other stories of intoxicating wine, we could refer to Ammon, who was murdered by the servants of his brother Absalom while he was "merry with wine [*yayin*]" (2 Sam 13:28). Also King Ahasuerus who, when his heart "was merry with wine [*yayin*]" (Esther 1:10), tried to subject Vashiti, his queen, to the gaze of the inebriated nobility of the royal court.

The examples cited suffice to show that *yayin* in the Old Testament often refers to fermented, intoxicating wine. Further indications are provided by the explicit divine disapproval of the use of wine.

**Disapproval of *Yayin*.** The classic condemnation of the use of intoxicating wine and a description of its consequences is found in Proverbs 23:29-35. After warning against some woes caused by wine, such as sorrow, strife, complaining, wounds without cause and redness of eyes, Solomon admonishes to refrain even from looking upon wine: "Do not look at wine [*yayin*] when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder" (Prov 23:31-32).

A similar warning against intoxicating wine is found in Proverbs 20:1: "Wine [*yayin*] is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." Such warnings, however, were largely ignored. By the time of Isaiah, drinking fermented wine had become such a universal problem that even "the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink; they are confused with

wine [*yayin*], they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment" (Is 28:7).

Other passages which clearly indicate that *yayin* refers to fermented, intoxicating wine, will be mentioned in the following chapter, where we shall examine more closely some of the reasons that Scripture admonishes not to use fermented wine.

## 2. *Yayin* as Unfermented Grape Juice

**No Self-explanatory Passage.** The use of *yayin* in the Old Testament to denote unfermented grape juice is not always as evident as its use to describe alcoholic wine, because the former does not come under condemnation like the latter. There is no single passage which clearly defines *yayin* as unfermented grape juice. If such a passage existed, there would be no controversy over this subject and no need to write this book.

The Bible, however, is not a lexicon which defines its words. The meaning of its words must often be derived from their context and from their comparative usage in other passages and/or related (cognate) languages. In the case of the word *yayin*, we believe that there are passages where the context clearly indicates that the word designates unfermented grape juice.

**Isaiah 16:10.** One of the clearest passages is Isaiah 16:10. The context of the passage is God's judgment upon Moab for its pride. The judgment is manifested, as often is the case throughout the Old Testament, through the removal of the divine blessing from the vineyard and the grape juice: "And joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field; and in the vineyard no songs are sung, no shouts are raised; no treader treads out wine [*yayin*] in the presses; the vintage shout is hushed" (Is 16:10).

The important point which this passage clarifies is that what the treaders tread out in the pressing vat is called *yayin*. This is obviously unfermented grape juice, since fermentation is a time-controlled process. Some people wrongly assume that if one just lets grape juice alone, it will automatically ferment into a "good" grade of wine. Such an assumption is wrong. Pressed grape juice (must) allowed to ferment without a controlled environment becomes spoiled grape juice (vinegar) which no one wishes to drink.

Kenneth L. Gentry objects to this interpretation by arguing that "the poetic imagery so common in Hebrew poetry will allow *yayin* here to be alcoholic."<sup>37</sup> His argument is that in poetry sometimes the end results are attributed to the substance which causes the result. Gentry's objection has

two major weaknesses. First, it fails to recognize that the poetic imagery of Isaiah 16:10 deals with the joy of the harvest and the treading of the grapes. The *yayin* flowing out of the press is seen not in terms of what it could become, fermented wine, but in terms of what it is at harvest time, "wine in the presses."

Second, Gentry ignores the fact that the pressed grape juice, prior to fermentation, was called by the Jews, as shown earlier, "*yayin mi-gat*—wine from the press." Being unwilling to accept the fact that pressed grape juice could be called *yayin*, Gentry and a host of moderationists are forced to interpret as alcoholic wine the very *yayin* flowing from the press. Normal interpretation of Isaiah 16:10 does not require interpreting *yayin* as a poetic reference to the finished product, fermented wine, since the plain reference to fresh grape juice makes good, understandable sense in the context. A parallel passage is found in Jeremiah 48:33.

**Jeremiah 40:10, 12.** Another clear example of the use of *yayin* to designate the unfermented juice of the grape is found in Jeremiah 40:10, 12. In verse 10, Gedaliah, the Babylonian governor, tells the Jews who had not been taken captive: "Gather wine [*yayin*] and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken." This order encouraged those Jews who had fled to neighboring countries to return to the land of Judah "and they gathered wine [*yayin*] and summer fruits in great abundance" (Jer 40:12). In both of these verses we find the term *yayin* used in a matter-of-fact construction to refer to the fruit of the vine. Alcoholic wine is not gathered from the fields. Such usages negate the assumption that *yayin* can refer only to fermented wine.

**Nehemiah 13:15.** In Nehemiah 13:15 we find another example where *yayin* is used to designate freshly pressed grape juice. "In those days I saw in Judah men treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on asses; and also wine [*yayin*], grapes, figs and all kind of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I warned them on the day when they sold food." Here *yayin* is most probably the pressed grape juice, since it is mentioned together with the treading of wine presses on the Sabbath. The fresh juice was sold on the Sabbath along with fresh grapes and other fruits.

**Lamentations 2:12.** In Lamentations there is a vivid description of the physical anguish suffered by Judah during the great famine caused by Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem. In famished distress the little children cried out to their mothers: "'Where is bread and wine[*yayin*]?' as they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mothers' bosom" (Lam 2:12).

---

In this passage the nursing infants are crying out to their mothers for their normal fare of food and drink, namely, bread and *yayin*. It is hardly imaginable that in time of siege and famine, little children would be asking their mothers for intoxicating wine as their normal drink. "What they wanted as they were dying on their mothers' breast," notes Robert Teachout, "was grape juice (*yayin*) which has a tremendous nourishment and which had been part of their normal diet."<sup>38</sup>

**Genesis 49:11.** In Genesis 49:11 the blessings of God upon Judah are prophesied through the imagery of an abundant harvest of *yayin*: "He washes his garments in wine [*yayin*] and his vesture in the blood of grapes." The idea expressed by this imagery is that the harvest is so copious that the garments of the grape treaders appear washed in the abundance of juice.

In this passage we also have a striking example of Hebrew parallelism where two clauses express the same thought with different words. In this instance, the "garments" of the first clause correspond to the "vesture" of the second clause, and the "wine" (*yayin*) to the "blood of the grapes." "Blood" is a poetical name for "grape juice," and its usage in parallelism with "wine" suggests that in Bible times grape juice was called *yayin*, prior to its fermentation.

**Song of Solomon.** Other examples of the use of *yayin* referring to unfermented grape juice are found in the love poem written by Solomon, King of Israel. In several verses the enjoyment of pure love is compared with *yayin*: "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine [*yayin*], . . . We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine [*yayin*]; . . . How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine [*yayin*]" (Song of Solomon 1:2, 4; 4:10).

In these verses *yayin* can hardly refer to fermented, intoxicating wine, since the author of this book condemns fermented wine as a "mocker" and a stinging "adder" (Prov 20:1, 23:32). It is evident that Solomon is comparing the sweetness of pure, undefiled love with sweet grape juice. Such a comparison is most appropriate, because, as Teachout observes, "just as grape juice was given explicitly by God for the purpose of rejoicing the heart of man (Psalm 104:15), so too is the love between a man and a woman."<sup>39</sup>

The foregoing examples clearly indicate that, contrary to prevailing opinion, *yayin* was used in the Old Testament, as in rabbinical literature, to designate either fermented *or* unfermented grape juice.

---

### 3. *Oinos* as Fermented Wine

The meaning of *oinos*, the Greek term for wine in the New Testament, is equivalent to the Hebrew meaning of *yayin* in the Old Testament. Earlier we established that *oinos* was used in secular Greek literature as a generic term to refer either to fermented or unfermented grape juice. The same dual meanings of *oinos* can be found in its Biblical usage. The word, however, occurs only 32 times in the New Testament, while the corresponding Hebrew *yayin* occurs 141 times.

**Intoxicating *Oinos*.** One of the clearest examples of the use of *oinos* as intoxicating wine, is found in Ephesians 5:18: "And do not get drunk with wine [*oinos*], for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." It is evident that here *oinos* refers to fermented, intoxicating wine. First, because it can make a person "drunk," and second, because its usage is condemned as "debauchery," that is, utter depravity and dissoluteness.

The intoxicating power of *oinos* is implied in its symbolic use to describe divine judgment upon the wicked: "He also shall drink the wine [*oinos*] of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger" (Rev 14:10). Here the "wine of God's wrath" is said to be "unmixed" (*akraton*), that is, not mixed with water which would reduce its potency. A similar figurative use is found in Revelation 16:19 (NIV) where it says: "God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine [*oinos*] of the fury of his wrath." Here the fury of God's wrath is described by the imagery of a cup of wine, intoxicating and maddening those who are compelled to drink it.

The intoxicating wine of God's wrath represents the retribution in kind upon "the great harlot . . . with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk" (Rev 17:1, 2). Here spiritual whoredom is represented as intoxicating wine possessing an incredible power to confuse the understanding and to corrupt the heart.

These few examples of the literal and figurative use of *oinos* make it abundantly clear that the term is used in the New Testament to refer to intoxicating, fermented wine.

### 4. *Oinos* as Unfermented Grape Juice

Indications of the Biblical usage of *oinos* as unfermented grape juice come to us in two different ways: (1) through the Greek translation of the Old Testament (known as the Septuagint) used by the apostles, and (2) through the context of such New Testament texts as Matthew 9:17 and Revelation 6:6.



---

***Oinos* in the Septuagint.** We noted earlier that the Septuagint, an intertestamental Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the apostles, translates at least 33 times the Hebrew word for grape juice, *tirosh*, by the Greek word *oinos* (Ps 4:7-8, Is 65:8; Joel 1:10-12; 2:23-24). For example, in Proverbs 3:10 the freshly pressed juice of the grape (*tirosh* in Hebrew) is translated *oinos* in the Septuagint. The King James Version reads: "Thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Prov 3:10). "New wine" translates the Hebrew *tirosh*, but the Septuagint simply uses the word *oinos* without the adjective "new." This in itself shows, as Ernest Gordon observes, that "*oinos* without qualification, then, can easily mean unfermented wine in the New Testament."<sup>40</sup> The fact that the translators of the Septuagint employed the word *oinos* to translate *tirosh*, which is the common Hebrew word for fresh grape juice, is proof that *oinos* was used to refer to both fermented and unfermented grape juice.

This conclusion is further supported by the use of the Greek word *oinos* in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *yayin* when the latter clearly means the freshly pressed juice of the grapes. For example, the Septuagint uses *oinos* to translate *yayin* in Isaiah 16:10: "No treader treads out wine [*oinos* in the Septuagint] in the presses." In view of the fact that the language of the Septuagint greatly influenced New Testament writers, it seems plausible to assume that *oinos* is used also in the New Testament with the same dual meanings of fermented or unfermented grape juice.

**New Wine in Fresh Wineskins.** A possible use of *oinos* in the New Testament as a reference to unfermented wine, is found in Matthew 9:17 where Jesus says: "Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; if it is, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." From this verse we learn that it was customary in Christ's time to put new wine into new wineskins in order to preserve both the wine and its wineskins.

The usual explanation for this custom is that new wineskins were used because they could better resist the expansive force of the carbonic acid generated by fermentation. For example, Jimmy L. Albright writes: "Freshly made wine was put into new wineskins; old skins would burst under the pressure (Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38)."<sup>41</sup> This view can hardly be correct, because new wineskins, no matter how strong, could resist the pressure caused by fermentation. I have learned this fact from personal experience, as I have seen in my parents' cellar glass bottles shattered to pieces by grape juice which had inadvertently fermented.

---

The *Encyclopedia Biblica* rightly observes that “it is impossible that the *must* could ever have been put into skins to undergo the whole process of fermentation, as is usually stated, the action of the gas given off in the earlier stages of the process being much too violent for any skins to withstand.”<sup>42</sup>

The process of wine making in the ancient Near East is only relatively known. James B. Pritchard, excavator of ancient Gibeon, where 63 storage vats were found, candidly admits that “only a little is known from literary and pictorial sources of preclassical times about the process of making wine in the ancient Near East.”<sup>43</sup> According to his reconstruction, at Gibeon the juice of pressed grapes was transferred into four different tanks during the course of several days. In the last three tanks the violent fermentation processes occurred. Then the decanted wine was poured into large jars sealed with olive oil at 65 degrees F (18 degrees C).

**Unfermented Grape Juice.** In the light of this information, Christ’s saying about “new wine” being placed in “fresh wineskins” can best be understood as referring to wine fresh from the press which was strained and possibly boiled, and then placed immediately into new wineskins made airtight, possibly by a film of oil on the opening of the wineskin. The various methods used by the ancients to preserve grape juice unfermented will be discussed in Chapter 4. At this juncture it suffices to note that Christ’s words suggest that “new wine” was placed into fresh wineskins to insure the absence of any fermentation-causing substance.

“If old bags were used,” Lees and Burns explain, “some of the decayed albuminous matter adhering to their sides must, by the action of air, have become changed into a leaven or ferment (Hebrew, *seor*); or by long wear and heat, cracks or apertures admitting the air might exist undetected; and the wine, thus set a-fermenting, would in due course burst the skin, and be spilled and ‘lost’”<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, if unfermented new wine was poured into new wineskins, no cause of fermentation would be present. Thus, the wine would be preserved from fermentation and the wineskins from rupture. If this interpretation is correct, then Christ’s reference to “new wine” (*oinos neos*) would constitute another example of the use of *oinos* in the New Testament to describe unfermented grape juice.

**Oil and Wine Spared.** An example of the generic use of the word *oinos* is found in Revelation 6:6, where a voice is heard from the center of the throne room, saying: “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not harm oil and wine [*oinos*]!” The warning against hurting the oil and the wine sets the limits to the destruction which the

black horse and its rider are about to carry out. "Since the roots of the olive and vine go deeper," explains Robert H. Mounce, "they would not be affected by a limited drought which would all but destroy the grain."<sup>45</sup>

In the context of this warning against the destruction of the harvest, the reference to "oil and wine" is significant, because it shows that these two terms could be used to refer to the solid fruits, the olive and the grape yielding oil and wine (*oinos*). This usage of the term *oinos* to refer to the actual fruit—the grapes—is not surprising, because there are numerous examples in secular Greek in which wine is spoken of as produced within the grape and cluster.<sup>46</sup> Anacreon, for example, speaks of the *oinos* "imprisoned in the fruit upon the branches," and he sings of the treaders "letting loose the wine."<sup>47</sup>

The above examples of the usage of *oinos* in the New Testament and in the Septuagint show that the term was used in Biblical Greek in a generic way, to refer to either fermented or unfermented grape juice. This usage is consistent with what we have found to be the use of *yayin* in the Old Testament. Thus the meaning of the two related Biblical terms for wine (*yayin* and *oinos*) must be determined by the context in which they are used. This will become more apparent in the next chapter where we shall examine the Biblical teaching on wine.

### Conclusion

The survey conducted in this chapter on the usage of four related words—*wine* in English, *vinum* in Latin, *oinos* in Greek and *yayin* in Hebrews—has shown an amazing consistency in the historical usage of these related words. *In all four languages, these linguistically related words have been used historically to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented.* This significant finding discredits the charge that the theory of the two wines is devoid of Biblical and historical support. The sampling of Biblical and historical sources examined in this chapter shows instead that it is the theory of one wine which is devoid of Biblical and historical support.

Long before this century, scholars recognized that the Hebrew, Greek and Latin words for wine could refer equally to fermented or unfermented grape juice. In recent times, however, this historical understanding has been obscured by the restrictive use of "wine" which has come to mean only fermented, intoxicating grape juice. This has misled many Christians into believing that *yayin* and *oinos* also refer *only* to fermented wine which Scripture allegedly approves.

In this chapter we have endeavored to clarify this prevalent misunderstanding, by showing how Scripture uses the same words (*yayin* and *oinos*)

to designate either fermented or unfermented grape juice. This conclusion will become clearer in the next chapter, where we shall examine some of the reasons that the Bible disapproves of fermented wine but approves of unfermented grape juice.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Dunlop Moore, "Wine," in Philip Schaff, *A Religious Encyclopedia of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal and Practical Theology* (Chicago, 1887), vol. 3, p. 2537. The same view is emphatically articulated by Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986), pp.29-56. See also Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, 1970), p. 1168.

2. E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (London, 1923), appendix 27.

3. Robert P. Teachout, *Wine. The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence* (Published by the author, 1986), p. 22.

4. Cited by Frederic Richard Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (London, 1894), p. xxxvii. Several similar definitions are given on pp. xxxvi to xxxviii.

5. Cited by Charles Wesley Ewing, *The Bible and Its Wines* (Denver, 1985), p. 1.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

7. *Ibid.*

8. William Whiston, trans., *Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 48. The text is from Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2, 5, 2, emphasis supplied.

9. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (London, 1740), vol. 4, p. 557.

10. Marcus Cato, *On Agriculture* 147, 1.

11. Cited by Lees and Burns (n. 4), p. xxxvi.

12. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 11, 80-85, trans. H. Rackham, *Pliny Natural History, The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 241-243.

13. Cited by Lees and Burns (n. 4), p. xxxvi.

---

14. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, 1947), part 3, question 74, article 5, p. 2443.

15. Kenneth L. Gentry (n.1), pp. 45-46.

16. Ibid., p. 46.

17. Aristotle, *Metereologica* 384. a. 4-5.

18. Aristotle, *Metereologica* 388. b. 9-13. See also *Metereologica* 388. a. 34 which says: "There is more than one kind of liquid called wine [*oinos*] and different kinds behave differently. For new wine contains more earth than old, and so thickens most under the influence of heat, but solidifies less under the influence of cold." The reference to the thickening of new wine under the influence of heat implies that new wine was preserved unfermented by boiling it down. This practice, as we shall see in Chapter 4, was common among the Romans.

19. Athenaeus, *Banquet* 1, 54.

20. Ibid., 2, 24.

21. Ibid., 6, 89.

22. Lees and Burns (n. 4), p. 198.

23. Cited by Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5, 33, 3-4, trans. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York, 1950), p. 263.

24. Cited by Lees and Burns (n. 4), p. 433.

25. Robert P. Teachout, "The Use of 'Wine' in the Old Testament" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 369.

26. P. Oxy. IV. 729<sup>19</sup>; *ibid.*, p. 10.

27. Nicander, *Georgica* frag. 86, cited by Robert P. Teachout (n. 25), p. 370.

28. Cited by Athanaeus, *Banquet* 2. 35.

29. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine. An Exegetical Study* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 14.

30. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906 ed., s. v. "Wine," vol. 12, p. 533.

31. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1971 ed., s. v. "Wine," vol. 16, p. 538.

- 
32. *Sanhedrin* 70a, trans. H. Freedman, *Sanhedrin* (London, 1935), vol. 2, p. 476.
  33. Cited by Louis Ginzberg, "A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies," *American Jewish Year Book* 1923, p. 408.
  34. *Ibid.*, p. 409.
  35. *Ibid.*, p. 410.
  36. Robert P. Teachout (n. 25), pp. 349-358.
  37. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 30.
  38. Robert P. Teachout (n. 3), p. 37.
  39. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
  40. Ernest Gordon (n. 29), p. 14.
  41. Jimmy L. Albright, "Wine in the Biblical World: Its Economic, Social and Religious Implications for New Testament Interpretation" (Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980), p. 137.
  42. *Encyclopedia Biblica*, s. v. "Wine and Strong Drink."
  43. James B. Pritchard, *Gibeon: Where the Sun Stood Still* (Princeton, 1962), p. 97.
  44. Lees and Burns (n. 4), p. 266.
  45. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, 1977), p. 155.
  46. For some examples see Lees and Burns (n. 4), p. 433.
  47. Anacreon, *Ode* 49 and *Ode* 51.

# Chapter 3

## “WINE” IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Bible seems to speak about wine in a contradictory way. On the one hand, it unreservedly disapproves of the use of wine (Lev 10:8-11; Judg 13:3, 4; Prov 31:4, 5; 23:31; 20:1; Hab 2:5; 1 Tim 3:2, 3), while on the other hand it wholeheartedly approves of wine as a divine blessing for people to enjoy (Gen 27:28; 49:10-12; Ps 104:14, 15; Is 55:1; Amos 9:13; John 2:10, 11).

The solution to this apparent contradiction, as already stated in Chapter 1, is to be found not in the amount of wine ingested, because, as this chapter will show, Scripture both condemns and commends wine itself, irrespective of the quantity used. Nor is the solution to be found in viewing the positive references to wine as a divine concession rather than a divine approval, because, as we shall see in this chapter, wine is often presented as a divine blessing for people to enjoy.

Our thesis is that the solution is to be found in the dual meanings of the Hebrew *yayin* and Greek *oinos*, terms which are uniformly translated “wine,” but which can refer either to *unfermented grape juice* or to *fermented wine*. The recognition of this dual usage provides the clue to the idea that the Bible approves unfermented grape juice and disapproves fermented, intoxicating wine.

To verify the validity of our thesis, we have surveyed in the previous chapter the historical usage of the four related words: English *wine*, Latin *vinum*, Greek *oinos*, and Hebrew *yayin*. The survey has shown an amazing consistency in the historical usage of these related words, all of which have been used to refer to the juice of grapes, whether fermented or unfermented.

**Objective of Chapter.** This chapter builds upon the conclusion reached in the previous chapter, by examining the reasons for the Biblical approval and disapproval of wine. This examination will serve to clarify further the distinction which the Bible makes between fermented and unfermented wine.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first examines the Biblical approval of wine and the second its disapproval. The method we shall follow to determine which “wine” is approved and which is disapproved, will be to examine the context of each reference. Only when the context clearly indicates that the beverage mentioned refers to unfermented grape juice, shall we accept “grape juice” as the legitimate meaning of the Hebrew or Greek words used for “wine.”

## PART 1

### BIBLICAL APPROVAL OF UNFERMENTED WINE

**Central Importance of the Vineyard.** The vineyard, with its products of grape and wine, was vital in Biblical economy and theology. A look at a concordance suffices to recognize this fact. The word “vineyard” occurs 94 times in the Old Testament and 23 times in the New Testament. The word “vine,” 54 times in the Old Testament and 9 times in the New Testament. The word “grapes,” 18 times in the Old Testament and 3 times in the New Testament. The word “wine—*yayin*,” 141 times in the Old Testament and *oinos* 30 times in the New Testament.

These numerous references in themselves indicate the enormous importance of the grapevine and especially of its product, wine, a word which occurs far more frequently than the words “vineyard,” “vine” or “grapes.” The vineyard with its wine epitomizes both the material and spiritual blessings which God chose to bestow upon His obedient people.

#### 1. “Wine” as Symbol of Divine Blessing

**Isaac’s Blessing of Jacob.** An early example of the use of “wine” as a symbol of divine blessing of prosperity is found in Genesis 27:28, where Isaac blesses Jacob saying: “May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine [*tirosh*].” In this patriarchal blessing material prosperity (“the fatness of the earth”) is defined especially by the phrase “plenty of grain and wine.” The words “grain” and “wine” in Hebrew are “*dagan*” and “*tirosh*,” both of which are used to describe not the finished product, that is, bread and wine, but the actual growth in the field of the grain and of the grapes.

The frequent association of *tirosh* (“wine”) with *dagan* (“grain”) and *yitzhar* (“fresh oil”)<sup>1</sup> indicates, as Robert Teachout convincingly shows in his dissertation, that these three words “refer to the storable product which has been threshed or pressed.”<sup>2</sup> The word *tirosh*, in particular, clearly refers to the pressed grape juice in numerous passages.<sup>3</sup>



In Micah 6:15, God pronounces His judgment upon His errant people, saying: “You shall sow, but not reap; you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you shall tread grapes [*tirosh*], but not drink wine [*yayin*]”. Here *tirosh* (“grapes”) is clearly placed in apposition to *yayin* (“wine”), just as “olives” (*zayith*) are placed in apposition to “oil” (*shemen*). Poetical consistency and common sense requires that *tirosh* be taken as the solid substance, grapes, whose pressure yielded “wine” (*yayin*).

These observations should clarify why “wine” (*tirosh*) is a key aspect of the material blessing promised to Jacob, namely, because it is the approved unfermented grapes/or grape juice and not the fermented intoxicating wine. This explains why from the very first mention of *tirosh* (“wine”) in Genesis 27:28 to its very last in Zechariah 9:17, this word is consistently used to express God’s blessings upon His people.

**Moses’ Blessing of Israel.** A similar example of *tirosh* (“grape juice”) is found in the blessing Moses pronounced over the whole nation just before his death: “So Israel will live in safety alone; Jacob’s spring is secure in a land of grain and new wine [*tirosh*], where the heavens drop dew” (Deut 33:28, NIV). Here material prosperity is represented by an abundant harvest of grain and grape juice (*tirosh*). The New International Version attempts to clarify that *tirosh* is unfermented by qualifying it as “new wine.” The qualification “new” is missing in most other English versions, thus misleading uninformed Bible readers into believing that fermented wine is God’s promised blessing to His people.

**Jacob’s Blessing of Judah.** The patriarchal blessing of Jacob upon Judah offers another example of unfermented wine (*yayin*) used as the symbol of material prosperity. Jacob said: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his ass’s colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine [*yayin*], and his vesture in the blood of grapes [*dam anabim*].” (Gen 49:10-11).

The parallelism between washing the “garments in wine” and the “vesture in the blood of grapes” indicates that “wine” (*yayin*) here refers to the juice of grapes, which is poetically called also “the blood of grapes.” By means of this figurative language the idea is conveyed that God’s blessing will be so abundant upon Judah that His people will be able to use grape juice not only for drinking but also for washing their clothes. It is obvious that in Israel’s history grape juice was never so abundant. This does not detract from the fact that God wanted His blessing upon His obedient people to be manifested through an abundance of grape juice.

One of the clearest descriptions of “wine” as the symbol of divine blessing is found in Isaiah 65:8: “Thus says the Lord: ‘As the wine [*tirosh*] is found in the cluster, and they say, “Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,’ so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all.” Two things are noteworthy in this text. First, the “wine” (*tirosh*) found in the cluster is obviously the unfermented juice of the grapes. Second, because of its nature, such “wine” had “a blessing in it.” Presumably the blessing that grape juice contains is both literal and figurative. Literally, it provides the blessing of wholesome nourishment; figuratively, it represents the divine blessing of prosperity. The Biblical approval of “wine” in these cases clearly refers to unfermented grape juice, and not to fermented wine.

**“Wine” as a Conditional Blessing.** The divine blessing of grape juice was conditional in nature. Each generation of Israelites was called upon to obey God to receive the blessing of the grain, grape juice and oil. For example, Moses admonishes the Israelites, saying: “And if you will obey my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine [*tirosh*] and your oil” (Deut 11:13, 14; cf. 7:9-13).

In this passage it is evident that “wine” (*tirosh*) is either the grapes or the fresh grape juice, since it is harvested together with grain and oil. We noted earlier that *tirosh* (“grape juice”) is frequently associated with grain and oil to refer to the products which are threshed or pressed at harvest time. The blessing of these products was not automatic. Each generation was called to obey to receive from God an abundant harvest of grain, grape juice and oil.

An example of the conditionality of God’s blessing is found in Hosea. The prophet speaks of God’s rebuking the Israelites for ignoring that it was He and not Baal who had given them “the grain, the wine, and the oil.” “And she [Israel] did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine [*tirosh*], and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Baal” (Hos 2:8; in Hebrew v. 10).

**Removal of “Wine” as a Divine Curse.** What God is saying in Hosea to the Israelites is that He kept His promise made to their fathers by bestowing upon them an abundant harvest of grain, grape juice and oil, as well as silver and gold. But, since they ascribed such blessings to the pagan gods of the land, He would remove these blessings from them: “Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine [*tirosh*] in its season; and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness” (Hos 2:9; in Hebrew v. 11).

Both the “grain” and the “wine” (*tirosh*) are here presented as being created directly by God who has established their season of maturity. One could hardly find a stronger evidence for “wine” (*tirosh*) being understood as the harvested grape juice, since God threatened to remove it in “its season.”

Another telling example of divine judgment upon His erring people, manifested through the removal of the blessings of “wine,” is found in Joel. The prophet graphically describes the effect of God’s judgment with these words: “The fields are laid waste, the ground mourns; because the grain is destroyed, the wine [*tirosh*] fails, the oil languishes” (Joel 1:10). Here we have a most direct and decisive proof that “wine” (*tirosh*) is used in the Old Testament to refer to the actual fruit of the vine. Because of their natural and nourishing properties, grapes and grape juice could effectively symbolize both the bestowal and the removal of God’s blessing from the people.

## 2. “Wine” as Symbol of Messianic Blessings

**Renewed Blessings.** It is encouraging that in the Bible God’s warning about the removal of the blessings of the harvest, is often followed by His promise to restore such blessings upon His people. This restoration is usually associated with the prophesied messianic age of peace and prosperity.

For example, the same prophet Joel who graphically describes God’s judgment in terms of the destruction of grain, wine and oil, announces the restoration of these blessings: “Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people. The Lord answered and said to his people, ‘Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine [*tirosh*], and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations” (Joel 2:18, 19).

Jeremiah announces in a similar vein the future messianic restoration: “‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’ For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine [*tirosh*] and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more” (Jer 31:10-12).

Here the famous triad of natural products (grain, wine, and oil) occurs again and is significantly called “the goodness of the Lord” which God’s people will enjoy in perfect peace, obviously because all three are nourishing and natural products.

**Messianic Prosperity.** Amos provides another descriptive example of the use of “wine” as a fitting symbol of the fertility of the messianic age: “Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine [*asis*], and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine [*yayin*], and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit” (Amos 9:13, 14).

In this passage the fertility and abundance of the messianic age are presented through the imagery of agricultural operations following in rapid succession, without exhausting the soil. In this context “wine” is mentioned twice. The first reference speaks of the mountains dripping “sweet wine” (*asis*). As vines were often cultivated on the hillsides, the prophet here represents the fertility of the vines through the expressive imagery of the hills sending forth streams of the luscious juice contained within the bursting grapes. It is evident that here the “sweet wine” (*asis*) is the sweet grape juice dripping from very ripe grapes.

The second reference speaks of planting “vineyards” and drinking “their wine” (*yayin*). Since the phrase is paired with “they shall make gardens and eat their fruit,” “wine” here presumably means the normal product of the vineyard, grape juice, just as “fruit” is the normal product of “gardens.” Thus, in both references God’s approval and blessing of “wine” refer to unfermented grape juice.

**Offer of Divine Mercy.** Since unfermented wine is used to symbolize God’s blessings upon His people, both in the present and in the future messianic age, it could also effectively represent God’s free offer of His saving mercy to His people. This usage is found in Isaiah 55:1, where God says: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine [*yayin*] and milk without money and without price.”

Here God’s free offer of His mercy is likened to the free reception of three natural products: water, wine and milk. It is hard to believe that in this context “wine” (*yayin*) refers to fermented, intoxicating wine. The fact that “wine” (*yayin*) is paired with milk, a natural, nourishing food, suggests that “wine” refers to nourishing and wholesome grape juice.

It is interesting that the pairing of “milk and wine” is found also in the Song of Solomon 5:1: “I come to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine [*yayin*] with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink: drink deeply, O lovers.” In

this love poem “wine” (*yayin*) must refer to grape juice for at least two reasons. First, the pure juice of the grape would form a suitable companion beverage to fresh milk, and both could be drunk “deeply,” without injuring the body or the mind.

Second, it is hard to believe that Solomon would be encouraging one to “drink deeply” of intoxicating wine when in Proverbs he strongly condemns wine as “a mocker” (Prov 20:1) that “bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder” (Prov 23:32). Unless one believes that Scripture contradicts itself, the only legitimate conclusion we can draw is that “wine” (*yayin*) in Song of Solomon 5:1 refers to unfermented grape juice.<sup>4</sup> This usage of “wine” as unfermented grape juice would explain why the latter is paired with milk, since both of them are natural, nourishing products which can fittingly represent both genuine love between two lovers and God’s loving mercy toward His people.

### 3. “Wine” as a Wholesome Beverage

**Primary Purpose of Vineyards.** “Wine” as unfermented grape juice is approved in the Scripture also because it provides a wholesome beverage. “Scripture clearly indicates,” as Robert Teachout points out, “that the reason God introduced the vine into the world for man to use was so that man would have a delightful drink; it was not primarily so that he would have one more variety of fruit to eat.”<sup>5</sup>

Teachout submits two lines of Biblical evidence for this conclusion. “First,” he says, “it is the juice of the grape, rather than the grape itself, which is always mentioned in the passages dealing with God’s blessing upon His people.”<sup>6</sup> Various representative passages support this argument. For example, Amos 9:14 says: “I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine [*yayin*], and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.”<sup>7</sup> Here the stated purpose of planting vineyards is to “*drink their wine.*” We noted earlier that “wine” (*yayin*) here presumably means grape juice as the normal product of the vineyard, since it is placed in parallelism with “fruit” as the normal product of gardens.

The second line of evidence submitted by Teachout indicating that the primary purpose of the vineyard was to produce a wholesome beverage, grape juice, is statistical in nature. “In the entire Old Testament,” notes Teachout, “there are no more than 13 references to grapes intended for eating or to edible grape products such as dried grapes, raisins, raisin cakes, etc. By contrast, the Old Testament refers to grape beverages about 238 times.”<sup>8</sup> This suggests that

God designed the vine to provide not merely beneficial grapes and raisins, but primarily, grape juice, a wholesome and satisfying beverage in addition to water.

**“Wine” to Gladden the Heart.** God’s purpose in giving “wine” was to provide us with a wholesome and delightful beverage to gladden our hearts and not to make us “merry.” This thought is expressed in Psalm 104:14-15: “Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and *wine* (*yayin*) to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”<sup>9</sup>

In this song of thanksgiving the Psalmist enumerates God’s bountiful provisions for the needs of His creatures. He refers to the grass growing up for the cattle and to the plants providing us with food. From the same source is “wine,” the juice of the grape which cheers the heart by its pleasantness. “Wine” (*yayin*) here refers to grape juice to which is ascribed the capacity of cheering the heart in Psalm 4:7: “Thou hast put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine [*tirosh*] abound” (cf. Jud 9:13).

The word translated “wine” here is *tirosh*, a term which, as we have seen, is explicitly used in numerous passages to refer to grape juice. What the Psalmist is saying in this passage is that while the ungodly derive their chief joy from the abundance of grain and grape juice, the believer experiences an even greater joy when he is the recipient of the light of God’s countenance. The truth expressed in this text is different from that in Psalm 104:14-15, yet it does show that grain and grape juice were commonly viewed as sources of joy. This gives us reason to believe that the “wine” (*yayin*) mentioned in Psalm 104:15 is the same as the unfermented “wine” (*tirosh*=grape juice) of Psalm 4:7, since in both passages reference is made to a product of the earth which gladdens human hearts.

**Sustenance and Sweetness.** In Psalm 104:14-15 there appears to be a contrast between the plants in general which provide us with solid *food* and the vine in particular which supplies us with *wine* as a drink to cheer our hearts. This does not mean that the Psalmist is referring to the pleasure given by the artificial stimulation of intoxicating wine. The effect of the latter is sometimes expressed in the Scripture by the verbless formula “the heart of \_\_\_\_\_ was merry with wine” (2 Sam 13:28; Esther 1:10). By contrast, the wholesome joy over God’s provision of grape juice is expressed by the verbal formula “wine to gladden [*samah*] the heart of man.”

It is important to remember, as we shall see in Chapter 4, that many ancient people loved sweet drinks. While today many think of milk and grape juice as beverages for babies and of coffee and wine as drinks for adults, in

Bible times milk and grape juice were desirable wholesome beverages for young and old. In my homeland, Italy, most adults use coffee rather than milk as their breakfast drink. To offer a glass of milk to an Italian who is an habitual drinker of coffee and wine is to treat him/her as a baby. This was by no means true in the ancient world where, as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 7, people loved sweet beverages. Pliny tells us that sometimes people added a considerable amount of honey to grape juice to make it sweeter.<sup>10</sup>

The ideas contrasted in Psalm 104:14,15 appear to be *sustenance* and *sweetness*. God provides us with sustaining nourishing food, and with a sweet delightful drink, grape juice. The problem is that God’s gift of wholesome grape juice has been perverted by allowing it to spoil through controlled fermentation. The result is that millions of people today, including many Christians, seek, not the natural enjoyment of wholesome and satisfying fruit juices like grape juice, but rather the artificial stimulation of alcoholic wine and liquors. The effect of the latter is to release temporarily the tension, dulling the senses and thus diminishing their capacity to enjoy consciously God’s provision of natural products.

#### 4. “Wine” as Tithe or Offering

**An Acknowledgment of God.** The juice of the grape, being God’s beneficent gift to mankind, could effectively be used to express appreciation toward the source of this enjoyment, God Himself. Thus, it is not surprising that God in the Old Testament invites His people to acknowledge His gifts by returning to Him as tithe or offering part of the produce of the land such as grain, wine and oil. These were to be used for the support of the priests and Levites.

Numbers 18:12 explicitly states: “All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine [*tirosh*] and of the grain, the first fruits of what they give to the Lord, I give to you.” Here again “wine” (*tirosh*) is grouped together with oil and grain, since these three are seen as the most valuable natural products.

Several reasons suggest that “wine” (*tirosh*) in this context refers to unfermented grape juice. First, the trio of oil, wine and grain, as we have seen, refers to the harvest of these products. Second, verse 13 clearly states: “The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the Lord, shall be yours [of the priests].” This statement clarifies that oil, wine and grain are part of the first ripe fruits of the land. Third, verse 27 explicitly explains: “And your offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor, and as *the fulness of the wine press*” (Num 18:27).<sup>11</sup> This text makes it abundantly clear that “the best of the wine” brought as tithe to the sanctuary was the fresh produce of the wine press.

This conclusion is supported by a Talmudic statement of Rabbi Jose who taught: “One may bring any kind of fruit to the holy Temple, as a token of thanksgiving, but one is not permitted to bring intoxicating liquor.”<sup>12</sup>

**Eating the Tithe Before the Lord.** The tithe and offerings were to be brought to the sanctuary and part of them were to be eaten by the people before the Lord: “And before the Lord your God, in the place which he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine [*tirosh*] and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herd and flocks; that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always” (Deut 14:23; cf. 12:17, 18).

Here the triad recurs and “wine” (*tirosh*) again occupies the second place. On the basis of the meaning of *tirosh* (“grape juice”) established above, it is evident that what was consumed before the Lord was not intoxicating wine, but unfermented grape juice. This conclusion may appear to be contradicted by Deuteronomy 14:26 which speaks of “wine or strong drink” drunk before the Lord. This problem passage will be examined in Chapter 7, a chapter devoted specifically to an examination of some misunderstood passages.

The references considered above clearly demonstrate that God wanted His people to acknowledge His gift to them of satisfying grape juice by returning part of it to the sanctuary to benefit the priests and Levites who by virtue of their office were precluded from active participation in the harvest of grain, grape juice and oil.

## 5. “Wine” as a Libation

**Drink Offering.** Several Old Testament passages speak of a libation of “wine” (*yayin*) which was part of a burnt offering or grain offering (Ex 29:40; Lev 23:13; Num 15:5, 7, 10; 28:14; 1 Chron 9:29; Hos 9:4; 14:7; Deut 32:38). The proportion of wine in these offerings was determined by the kind of animal consumed as the accompanying burnt offering. The libation was poured out upon the burning sacrifice which was to be consumed by fire as a sweet aroma for the Lord (Ex 24:40; Num 15:10).

**Fermented or Unfermented Grape Juice?** The question is, which beverage is meant by the “wine” (*yayin*) mentioned in the drink offerings? Was it fermented or unfermented grape juice? To some this may appear to be an academic issue, since the libation was not drunk by the God of Israel as in the case of pagan deities. The issue, however, is not merely academic because the God of Biblical revelation is concerned about details. Since He gave explicit instructions regarding the kind of animals to be used for sacrifice, it is proper to assume that He also had a specific beverage in mind for the libation.



The question then is, How can we determine if the prescribed “wine” for libation was fermented or unfermented wine? Unfortunately the context of those passages mentioning the use of “wine” for libation offers us no help. Thus, the answer must be found by considering several implications of the overall Biblical teaching on this subject.

First, if God expected His people, as we have shown above, to drink grape juice and to bring grape juice as tithe and offering to the sanctuary, it seems logical to assume that He would not allow them to offer fermented wine as a libation to Him.

**No Fermented Thing.** Second, Leviticus 2:11 prohibits bringing cereal offerings to the altar with *hametz*, that is, anything leavened or fermented, and burning upon the altar any *seor*, that is, any ferment. This prohibition suggests that God could hardly have permitted fermented wine to be poured out as a libation upon the altar. Some medieval Rabbis tried to explain away this prohibition and to justify the use of fermented wine for the Passover by arguing that only grain beverages ferment. Fruit beverages, including grape juice, allegedly do not ferment.<sup>13</sup> Such an attempt reflects, as Louis Ginzberg, a renowned Talmudic scholar, points out, “a general tendency of rabbinic Judaism to give religious sanction to purely secular actions.”<sup>14</sup>

The inconsistency of the rabbinic view which excluded the possibility of fermentation for grape juice is revealed by the long-standing tradition mentioned by Maimonides, according to which the wine of the heave offering had to be “wine fresh from the press.”<sup>15</sup>

**Only Natural Products.** A third reason supporting the use of unfermented wine for libations is the fact that the items used for offerings, such as flour, oil, sheep, goats, and bulls, were all natural products which enjoyed God’s blessing. Thus, “it would certainly follow,” as Teachout rightly points out, “that the natural product of the grape harvest—juice rather than wine—would be offered as well, rather than a product which had been changed *in nature* by the fermentation process.”<sup>16</sup>

In the light of the foregoing consideration, we would conclude that the “wine” (*yayin*) used for libations was unfermented grape juice. The silence of the Scripture on this matter could simply indicate that the use of unfermented grape juice was so obvious that no specific instruction was necessary.

**Conclusion.** The study of the Biblical approval of “wine” has shown a consistent pattern: all the positive references to “wine” have to do with unfermented and unintoxicating grape juice. We have found that because of its natural and nourishing properties, grape juice was fittingly used to

represent the divine blessing of material prosperity, the blessing of the messianic age, the free offer of God’s saving grace, the wholesome joy God offers to His people, and the acknowledgment of God through the use of grape juice as tithe, offerings and libations.

## PART II

### BIBLICAL DISAPPROVAL OF FERMENTED WINE

In the first part of this chapter we have established that God wholeheartedly approves the use of unfermented and nourishing grape juice. In the second part we shall now see that God strongly disapproves of fermented and intoxicating wine. We have found that since the same words for “wine” (*yayin* and *oinos*) are used in Scripture and secular literature to designate both fermented and unfermented grape juice, it is necessary to examine the context to determine whether the “wine” spoken of is fermented or unfermented. In the study we shall now conduct of the passages expressing divine disapproval over the use of “wine,” the context leaves no doubt as to the intoxicating nature of the “wine” mentioned.

The Biblical condemnation of the use of intoxicating wine is expressed in a variety of ways. Some texts condemn outright the use of wine. Others explain the physical and moral consequences of the use of intoxicating wine. Still others illustrate the sad results of the use of alcoholic wine in the life of important people. There is also a group of texts which strongly prohibit the use of wine by certain people called to fulfill a special function.

An attempt will now be made to categorize some of the significant ways in which Scripture condemns the use of alcoholic beverages. We trust that this survey will serve to clarify, among other things, that Scripture condemns not only the *abuse* of alcoholic wine and strong drink, but also the actual *use*.

#### 1. The Prohibition of Intoxicating Wine

**Proverbs 23:29-35.** The most explicit Biblical prohibition of the use of intoxicating wine, as well as the most dramatic description of its harmful effects, is found in Proverbs 23:29-35. The wise man says: “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine [*yayin*], those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine [*yayin*], when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things,

and your mind utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. ‘They struck me,’ you will say, ‘but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.’”

This passage is divisible into three parts: (1) A description of the internal and external effects of intoxicating wine; (2) A categorical admonition to abstain altogether from the use of wine; (3) A warning of what will happen if the admonition is ignored.

In the first part, lovers of intoxicating wine and strong drink experience all sorts of misery: lamentation, sorrow, contention, needless wounds, and a disfigured face with red eyes (Prov 23:29-30).

**Admonition to Abstain.** To avoid such shame and suffering, Solomon in the second part admonishes in a categorical way to refrain from even looking at wine: “Do not look at wine” (Prov 23:31). The reason for this absolute prohibition is no doubt the fact that gazing at something attractive is the first step towards partaking of it. The Chinese have a proverb: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” And drunkenness begins with the first drink. Stephen Reynolds, one of the translators of the New International Version, argues convincingly that since the verb *yith’addam* (“it is red”) is reflexive in Hebrew (hithpael conjugation), it should be translated as “it makes itself red.”<sup>17</sup> The meaning of this phrase is illuminated by verse 29 of the same chapter which refers to “redness of eyes” resulting from drinking alcoholic wine. Presumably then this characteristic effect of alcoholic wine is used idiomatically to designate the alcoholic wine itself. Thus, the phrase means: “Do not look at wine when it is alcoholic.”

The Talmud quotes Rabbi Isaac, who said: “Look not upon the wine, which reddens the face of the wicked in this world and makes him pale (with shame) in the next.”<sup>18</sup> While the meaning “reddens the face” cannot be legitimately derived from the Biblical text, Rabbi Isaac is right in his perception that the redness does not refer to the color of the wine itself, but to its intoxicating nature.

The next two phrases further clarify the alcoholic nature of the wine in question: “when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.” This is a description of the effervescence generated by fermentation, which makes wine bubble or sparkle in the glass and go down pleasantly.

**Warning of Consequences.** Lest a person be seduced by the attractiveness of fermented wine, Solomon describes in the third part its deadly nature by comparing it to the poisonous bite of a serpent and the sting

of an adder (Prov 23:32). Neglecting such wise counsel will cause a person to be deceived, to resemble someone who lies in the midst of the sea or on the top of a mast, rolling hither and thither and yet insensible to bumps and bruises. When finally he wakes up from such lethargy, he again seeks the cause of all his misery (Prov 23:33-35).

This Biblical view of wine as a deadly poison is supported by its metaphorical use in Deuteronomy 32:33, where the evil deeds of apostate Israel are compared to the venom of a snake: “Their wine is the poison of serpents, and the cruel venom of asps.”

**Abuse or Use of Wine.** Some argue that in this passage Solomon warns against drunkenness and not against moderate drinking. In other words, it is the *abuse* of alcoholic beverages rather than their *use* which is condemned. It must be admitted that the passage dramatically describes the effects of drunkenness. However, *Solomon’s solution to the problem of immoderate drinking is to counsel abstinence, not moderation.* Why? Because he finds the source of all the misery and suffering caused by intoxicating wine and strong drinks lies not in their *abuse* but in their *nature*—they have the capacity to hurt like the bite of a serpent and the sting of an adder (Prov 23:32).

*When we accept the Biblical teaching that alcoholic beverages abuse us, we will stop arguing about the virtue of not abusing them.* Solomon understood the fundamental truth that the problem with alcoholic beverages is not merely their abuse but primarily the beverages themselves. It is the nature of intoxicating wine and strong drink to deceive and injure a person; consequently we ought neither to desire nor to drink them. A person may abuse what is good, but what is bad will abuse him or her. Therefore, the only *safe* course is to abstain from any intoxicating substance.

**Proverbs 20:1.** The book of Proverbs contains several other passages which denounce the use of intoxicating wine and strong drink (Prov 31:4-5; 20:1; 23:20; 4:17). One of the most explicit passages is Proverbs 20:1: “Wine [*yayin*] is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” This text is divided into two parts. The first describes the nature of wine and strong drink and the second counsels against their use.

The inherent properties of intoxicating drinks are here clearly stated. Intoxicating wine is “a mocker” (*letz*), presumably in the sense that it makes a drinker mock at serious things (Prov 9:7-8; 13:1; 14:6; 15:12) or possibly in the sense that it makes a mockery of the good resolutions one makes before partaking of it. “Strong drink [*shekar*] a brawler [*homeh*],” in the sense that it causes internal disturbance to those who drink it and external conflict to

their families and society. Consequently, it is “unwise” to be led astray by alcoholic beverages.

In the context of the book of Proverbs willfully rejecting wise counsel means to sin by doing so: “The devising of folly is sin” (Prov 24:9; cf. 1:7, 10). This means that the admonition not to be led astray by the use of alcoholic beverages is not only wise counsel but also a moral principle to be obeyed.

Note should be taken of the fact that God’s indictment in this passage, as in Proverbs 23:31, is not merely on excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages, but on the beverages themselves. *The text clearly states that wine itself is a “mocker,” irrespective of the quantity used.*

**Habakkuk 2:5.** A similar indictment of intoxicating wine is found in Habakkuk 2:5 where the prophet says: “Moreover, wine [*yayin*] is treacherous; the arrogant man shall not abide.” Intoxicating wine is here described as “treacherous.” The Hebrew *boged* suggests the idea of one who is a secret defrauder, a deceiver. This characteristic of wine provides the basis of the comparison with “the arrogant man” who in his treacherous greed “gathers for himself all nations, and collects as his own all peoples” (Hab 2:5).

Habakkuk’s statement that “wine is treacherous” confirms Solomon’s verdict that “wine is a mocker.” These Biblical indictments of intoxicating wine place upon it a stigma which no social flattery or sophistry can expunge.

**Ephesians 5:18.** In the New Testament we find a similar indictment of intoxicating wine in Ephesians 5:18, where Paul says: “Do not get drunk with wine [*oinos*], for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.” This translation of the Revised Standard Version makes drunkenness rather than wine itself the cause of debauchery. The Greek text, however, allows for a different reading, namely, “And do not get drunk with wine, in which (*en ho*) is debauchery.” The subject of “in which” can be the previous word “wine” or the drunkenness spoken of in the preceding clause. This means that the second clause can signify “in which wine is debauchery” or “in which state of drunkenness is debauchery.”

This option is not allowed by most English translations, including the Revised Standard Version, which reads: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.” Ernest Gordon rightly points out in his book *Christ, the Apostles and Wine*, that “this is not translation but interpretation, in fact a misinterpretation, which saves the face of wine while condemning drunkenness. It discards the translation accepted from Jerome’s time (A.D. 382) down. Thus the Latin version (*Vulgate*) has it *vino in quo est luxuria* (wine in which is voluptuousness) and in Jerome’s writing the meaning is interpreted accordingly.”<sup>19</sup>

Gordon submits numerous examples not only from Jerome’s writings but also from those of Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, all of whom quote Paul’s text as saying that in wine’s very nature is debauchery. Gordon then cites four classical translations, French, German, English (Douay Version) and Spanish, *all of which speak of wine and not of drunkenness as the cause of debauchery*. These and other translations as well as patristic testimonies will be cited in Chapter 7, where this text will be examined at greater length. Such references will show that many translators and expositors have understood Ephesians 5:18 as a Biblical indictment of wine itself and not merely of drunkenness.

**Translators’ Bias.** In the light of the foregoing considerations, one wonders why most English translations and commentaries have chosen to translate or interpret Ephesians 5:18 by making “drunkenness” rather than “wine” the cause of dissoluteness, debauchery.

A possible reason could be the predilection of the translators themselves for wine which could have influenced them to “save the face of wine while condemning drunkenness,” as Ernest Gordon puts it.<sup>20</sup> This hypothesis will gain support in Chapter 7 where we shall examine the meaning of the Greek words *nepho* and *nephalios*, usually translated “be sober, temperate.” We shall see that the basic and primary meaning of these words is “to abstain from wine.” Such meaning, however, is absent in most Bible translations and commentaries, presumably because of the reason just given, namely, that the translators’ and commentators’ fondness for wine has led them to interpret these terms figuratively as mental vigilance rather than as physical abstinence in order to justify their drinking habits.

**Moderation or Abstinence?** Some argue that since Paul says, “Do not get drunk with wine,” he virtually sanctions a moderate use of wine, short of drunkenness. This is a superficial assumption. If a preacher tells people today, “Don’t get high with cocaine!” does he mean that a moderate use of cocaine is acceptable? Moreover, if the words “in which is debauchery” are joined to the word “wine” as the Greek text allows and as numerous past and present translations have done, then Ephesians 5:18 becomes a powerful indictment of wine itself, rather than only of drunkenness.

Whether or not “debauchery”—a translation of the Greek word *asotia* which literally means unsavableness, absence of salvation—is connected to “wine” as its germinal and active cause, or to “drunkenness” as the state of body and mind which brings debauchery into play, the fact of the *connection* remains. Moreover, no matter how the clauses may be construed, as Lees and Burns point out, “the passage in its entirety neither recommends intoxicating drink nor implies that its use, in the smallest measure, is either salutary or safe.”<sup>21</sup>

Some commentators see a possible connection between Ephesians 5:18 and Luke 1:15 where it is said of John the Baptist: “He shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.” In both Luke 1:15 and Ephesians 5:18 the admonition not to drink or to get drunk with wine is followed by the exhortation to “be filled with the Spirit.” The parallelism of the two passages suggests that abstinence from wine and strong drink preserves the mind free from intoxicating influences, consequently making a person more receptive to the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

**Conclusion.** The preceding study of those Biblical passages prohibiting the use of wine has shown two things: first, the “wine” prohibited is unquestionably alcoholic; second, the Biblical indictment is not against the *abuse* of alcoholic beverages but rather against their *use*, irrespective of the quantity consumed.

## 2. The Consequences of Drinking Intoxicating Wine

The Bible not only disapproves the drinking of alcoholic beverages, but it also enlightens us in a variety of ways as to the consequences of their use. Six different scriptural consequences will be surveyed to lay before the reader the Biblical position on the results of drinking intoxicating beverages.

**Drinking Distorts Perception of Reality.** Numerous Biblical passages indicate that drinking alcoholic beverages distorts one’s perception of reality. For example, Isaiah gives a vivid picture of the mental and moral effects of intoxicating beverages: “These also reel with wine [*yayin*] and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine [*yayin*], they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment” (Is 28:7).

Prominence is given in this passage to “the priest” and “the prophet,” because as God’s representatives they were called to be models of purity and godliness. Instead, by indulging in intoxicating wine and strong drink, they became confused, erring in vision and stumbling in judgment. Their perception of reality became distorted. They erred in vision presumably by mistaking for divine revelations the fancies of their distorted perceptions. They stumbled in judgment by failing to discharge those duties which required clear and perceptive minds. The priests, in particular, by using wine and strong drink, violated their pledge of abstinence (Lev 10:9) and profaned the sacredness of their office.

Another graphic description of how intoxicating wine distorts the reality of things is found in Proverbs 23:33 where Solomon, speaking of those who indulge in wine and strong drink, says: “Your eyes will see strange

things, and your mind utter perverse things.” Here the effect of alcohol is described in terms of its damage to the brain and nervous system, causing among other things an impairment of vision, of speech and of the thinking process. The “eyes will see strange things, . . . [the] mind utter[s] perverse things,” and the perception of the world around is greatly distorted.

**Drinking Dulls Thinking Abilities.** An important reason that drinking alcoholic beverages, such as wine, is prohibited in the Bible is because it impairs the capacity to think, to distinguish between right and wrong and consequently to make responsible moral decisions. Rabbi Meir states this truth with these terse words: “Whenever wine enters a person, his mind becomes confused.”<sup>22</sup> We have found this truth expressed in Isaiah 28:7 where priests and prophets are rebuked for having become “confused with wine,” erring in vision and stumbling in judgment. The Talmud brings out this truth most graphically when it says: “When the wine enters the system of a person, out goes sense, wherever there is wine there is no understanding.”<sup>23</sup>

It was because of this concern that God gave this specific instruction to Aaron concerning the priests: “Drink no wine [*yayin*] nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses” (Lev 10:9-11).

The specific reason given for the prohibition to drink alcoholic beverages is that these would impair the priests’ ability to distinguish between the holy and the profane and to teach the people God’s commandments. The same reason is repeated in Ezekiel’s vision of the new Temple, where priests are enjoined to abstain from intoxicating wine in order that they may be able to “teach my people the difference between the holy and the common, and [to] show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean” (Ezek 44:23).

Both passages make it clear that a constant discernment of God’s holiness requires abstention from alcoholic beverages. The fact that the priests had to avoid alcohol in order to preserve sanctuary sacredness and holiness implies that alcohol is seen in the Scripture as profane and unholy. The reason for this is to be found both in the intrinsic *nature* of alcohol, that is, in its power to intoxicate (Prov 23:29-30; 20:1; Hab 2:5) and in its *effects*, that is, in its capacity to impair the discernment between the holy and the profane, and between right and wrong. In view of the fact that as Christians we are “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9) called to “keep sane and sober” (1 Pet 4:7) in a world often insane and intemperate, God’s injunction to abstain from alcoholic beverages to preserve our moral discernment is especially relevant today.



Some argue that since the priests were required to abstain from alcoholic beverages when they ministered at the sanctuary (Lev 10:9; Ezek 44:21), this implies that they could drink them when not on duty. This assumption is unwarranted because a priest was a teacher in Israel called to live constantly an exemplary life.

In his comment on Leviticus 10:8, Rabbi Simon says: “May not one be permitted to draw the deduction that it is forbidden to drink wine and strong drink only when in the act of entering the tabernacle of the congregation, but it is permissible to drink before entering the tabernacle? The succeeding verse, ‘And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean’ (Lev 10:10), does not warrant such a deduction.”<sup>24</sup> The obvious reason is that priests (and believers alike) must be able to discern God’s will at all times.

**Drinking Corrupts Morals.** Closely related to the impairment of moral discernment and dependent upon it is the weakening of moral sensitivity resulting from the intake of alcoholic wine or liquors. The classic example of this phenomenon is, of course, the case of Noah: “And he drank of the wine [*yayin*], and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent” (Gen 9:21).

Another illustration is the case of Lot’s daughters who used wine successfully to weaken the moral restraints of their father: “Come, let us make our father drink wine [*yayin*] and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father” (Gen 19:32).

The example of Lot’s daughters in their use of wine to weaken sexual inhibitions has been followed by countless people throughout the centuries. This trend is so well accepted today that in most TV soap operas drinking precedes and predisposes people to illicit sexual relationships. In ancient Israel this happened without any inducement from TV soap operas. Habakkuk, for example, condemns such social evil, saying: “Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink of the cup of his wrath, and makes them drunk, to gaze on their shame!” (Hab 2:15; cf. Lam 4:21).

In a similar vein Isaiah pronounces woes upon those who become inflamed with wine and indifferent to spiritual realities: “Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening till wine [*yayin*] inflames them! They have lyre and harp, timbrel and flute and wine [*yayin*] at their feasts; but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands” (Is 5:11-12).

The potential for immorality present in alcoholic beverages was recognized by the rabbis. For example, Rabbi Isaac said: “The evil spirit entices

a person only while he is eating and drinking, and when one becomes merry by wine, then the evil spirit has the mastery over him. . . . The drinking of wine causes the evil inclinations to be awakened within a person.”<sup>25</sup>

**Drinking Causes Sickness.** Medical research tells us today that the drinking of alcoholic beverages takes a heavy toll on the human body, particularly on the liver, brain, stomach, heart and reproductive system. The Scripture alludes in simple but forceful terms to the harmful physical effects of drinking. We have seen that the intoxicating effect of wine is compared to the bite of a serpent and the sting of a viper (Prov 23:32).

Hosea mentions how wine made the princes sick on the occasion of what may have been the king’s coronation or birthday: “On the day of our king the princes became sick with the heat of wine [*yayin*]” (Hos 7:5). The term “heat” translates the Hebrew *hemah* which is often used to describe the inflaming, poisonous influence of wine (Deut 32:33; Jer 51:39). In Deuteronomy 32:33; for example, the term *hemah* is translated “poison”: “Their wine is the *poison* (*hemah*) of serpents.” Thus, in Hosea the cause of the sickness of the princes is attributed to “the poison of wine.”

This description of wine as a sickening poison shows that Scripture does not hesitate to expose in frightening terms the danger of intoxicating wine. The prophet Isaiah compares God’s punishment of Egypt to the staggering caused by wine: “as a drunken man staggers in his vomit” (Is 19:14). Similarly the Psalmist compares God’s punishment of His people to the staggering caused by wine: “Thou hast made thy people suffer hard things; thou hast given us wine to drink that made us reel” (Ps 60:3).

The Jews understood, though they often ignored, the physical harm inherent in drinking alcoholic beverages. This is indicated by the teaching of the highly respected Rabbi Yehudah, who said: “Wine in Hebrew is called ‘*yayin*’ and in Aramaic ‘*hemer*’. The word *hemer*, numerically, amounts to two hundred and forty-eight, corresponding to the number of joints in the human body. The drinking of wine affects injuriously every joint, weakens the body, and confounds one’s judgment. When wine enters the body, out goes the judgment.”<sup>26</sup> While we would reject his numerology, his point is true.

The Biblical warnings against the mental and physical dangers inherent in intoxicating wine have special significance for us as Christians who believe that our bodies are the handiwork of God (Gen 2:7; Ps 139:13-15) and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19-20). To destroy our health by means of intoxicating substances means to destroy God’s temple within us, “for God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are” (1 Cor 3:17).

**Drinking Disqualifies for Civil Service.** One of the clearest Biblical teachings is that drinking disqualifies a person from serving as a civil or religious leader. The wise Solomon clearly states that kings and rulers must not indulge in wine: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine [*yayin*], or for rulers to desire strong drink” (Prov 31:4). The reason for this explicit injunction is immediately given, “lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted” (Prov 31:5).

As in the case of the priests examined earlier, kings and rulers are enjoined to abstain from alcoholic wine, because this would impair their remembrance of the laws and consequently their capacity to be just in the judicial duties which, in ancient times, kings frequently discharged in person.

This text offers another example where Scripture makes a value judgment on alcoholic wine itself, rather than on the quantity drunk. The text does not say, “it is not for kings to drink *much* wine.” Rather it says, “It is not for kings to drink *wine*.” What is here prohibited, as elsewhere in Scripture, is not, as many claim, the *abuse* but the actual *use* of alcoholic beverages.

If the use of intoxicants is wrong for rulers because of their innate harmful effects, they are also obviously wrong for all, since they produce the same effect on all human organisms, though the consequences for society are more extensive when a leader is involved.

**Drinking Disqualifies for Church Service.** Abstinence from intoxicating wine is required in Scripture, not only of civil officials such as kings and rulers, but also of religious leaders, such as priests in the Old Testament and bishops/elders/deacons in the New Testament. We noted earlier that in the Old Testament priests were explicitly required to abstain from alcoholic beverages because these would impair their capacity to discern and to teach God’s holy precepts (Lev 10:9-11; Ezek 44:23).

It is noteworthy that abstinence from alcoholic beverages is required also of church leaders in the New Testament. In stating the qualifications for the office of bishop in 1 Timothy 3:2-3, Paul says: “Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate [*nephalion*], sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard [*me paroinon*]. . . .” In his epistle to Titus the Apostle repeats the qualifications for the office of elder or bishop (the two terms are used interchangeably in Titus 1:5, 7) in very similar words. He mentions specifically that an elder/bishop must be “no drunkard—*me paroinon*” and “self-controlled—*enkrate*” (Titus 1:7-8).

The Greek terms *nephalion* and *me paroinon* are rendered in most English translations respectively as “temperate” or “vigilant,” and as “no drunkard”

or “not given to much wine.” Such translations suggest that church leaders are required to be moderate drinkers of alcoholic wine, rather than to be abstinent. This notion is not supported by the primary meaning and usage of the Greek terms *nephalios* and *paroinos*. We shall show in Chapter 6, that *nephalios* literally means “physical abstinence, especially from wine,” and *me paroinos* “not near or beside wine.” For example, Josephus, a contemporary of the apostles, says: “The priests are in all respects pure and abstinent [*nephalioi*], not being allowed to drink wine as they wear the priestly garments.”<sup>27</sup>

The ancient *paroinos* was a man accustomed to attend drinking places or parties, and consequently closely associated with wine. What Paul is saying by the use of *nephalios* (“abstinent”) and *me paroinos* (“not near wine”), is that a church leader must not only abstain from drinking alcoholic wine, but also stay away from places where drinking takes place. This instruction harmonizes with Paul’s general admonition in 1 Corinthians 5:11 where he says: “I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one.”

The New Testament teaching on abstinence from alcoholic beverages will be examined at considerably greater length in Chapter 6 in conjunction with the apostolic admonitions to sobriety and temperance. Our study of the primary meaning of the Greek words used in such admonitions will show that Peter and Paul call not only for mental vigilance but also for physical abstinence. In the light of these considerations we conclude that the New Testament follows the Old Testament in requiring church leaders to abstain from alcoholic beverages.

## CONCLUSION

Our survey has shown that the Biblical approval or disapproval of “wine” is determined by the nature of the “wine” itself. All the positive references to “wine” have to do with unfermented, unintoxicating grape juice. In contrast, all the indictments of “wine” have to do with alcoholic, intoxicating wine. The latter is condemned, irrespective of the quantity used.

We have seen that the use of alcoholic beverages distorts the perception of reality, impairs the capacity to make responsible decisions, weakens moral sensitivity and inhibitions, causes physical sickness, and disqualifies one for both civil and religious service. In the light of such solemn Biblical warnings, we ought to respect God-given guidance by abstaining from alcoholic beverages and any intoxicating substance.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. See for example, Hos 2:8, 22 (in Hebrew 2:10, 24); Neh 5:11; 10:39 (in Hebrew 10:40); 13:5,12; Deut 7:13; 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 28:51; 2 Chron 31:5; 32:28.

2. Robert P. Teachout, “The Use of ‘Wine’ in the Old Testament” (Doctor of Theology dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 195.

3. See for example, Is 65:8; Prov 3:9-10; Joel 2:23-24; Neh 10:37; Deut 33:28; Is 36:17; 62:8.

4. Robert P. Teachout argues convincingly that “wine [*yayin*]” means unfermented grape juice throughout the Song of Solomon. He notes, for example, that intoxicating wine could hardly be compared with the genuine love of two lovers: “Far from exalting love by comparison, the very mention of love and fermented wine together in a favorable light would discredit both” (n. 2), p. 276.

5. Robert P. Teachout, *Wine. The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence* (published by author, 1983), p. 27.

6. Ibid.

7. See also Deut 28:39; 11:14; 2 Chron 32:28-29; Ps 4:7; Is 62:8, 9.

8. Robert P. Teachout (n. 5), p. 28.

9. Emphasis supplied.

10. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 11, 85.

11. Emphasis supplied.

12. *Talmud Babli Chulin* 120; *Erchin* 11, cited in the compilation of talmudic statements produced by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz, *Midrash Yayin Veshechor. Talmudic and Midrashic Exegetics on Wine and Strong Drink* (Detroit, 1923), p. 42.

13. For a discussion of the distinction made by some rabbis between grain beverages viewed as fermented and grape beverages seen as unfermented, see Frederic Richard Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (London, 1894), pp. 28, 281-286.

14. Louis Ginzberg, “A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies,” *American Jewish Year Book* (New York, 1923), p. 402.

- 
15. Maimonides, *Code of Maimonides*, Treatise III: Heave Offering 5, 25.
  16. Robert P. Teachout (n. 2), p. 299.
  17. Stephen M. Reynolds, *Alcohol and the Bible* (Little Rock, Arkansas, 1983), pp. 12-13.
  18. *Sanhidrin* 70a.
  19. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 31.
  20. Ibid.
  21. Lees and Burns (n. 13), p. 354.
  22. *Shir Hashirim Rabba* 2 cited by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz (n. 12), p. 39.
  23. *Midrash Rabbah Nosso* 10, cited by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz (n. 12), p. 33.
  24. *Talmud Babli Baba Metsea* 90b, cited by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz (n. 12), pp. 44-45.
  25. *Midrash Neelam*, cited by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz (n. 12), p. 53.
  26. *Yalkut Shimoni Shemini* 9, cited by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz (n. 12), p. 61.
  27. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 12, 2.

# Chapter 4

## THE PRESERVATION OF GRAPE JUICE

A major objection to the view that Scripture approves the use of unfermented grape juice is the alleged impossibility in Bible times of preserving grape juice unfermented. Burton Scott states this objection most clearly in his article on “*Wine*” in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: “Unfermented grape juice is a very difficult thing to keep without the aid of modern antiseptic precautions, and its preservation in the warm and not overly-cleanly conditions of ancient Palestine was impossible.”<sup>1</sup>

**Objective of This Chapter.** This chapter aims at ascertaining whether the preservation of grape juice in its unfermented state was possible or impossible in Bible times. Our investigation will show that the ancients were far more knowledgeable in the art of preserving fruits and wines than generally presumed.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first considers the methods used by the ancients to preserve fruits and wines in general and the second, the methods used to prevent the fermentation of grape juice in particular.

### PART 1

#### THE ANCIENT ART OF PRESERVATION

##### 1. The Preservation of Fruits

**Amazing Ability.** There is considerable information regarding the amazing ability of the ancients to preserve fruits and juices. An example is Josephus’ account of the Roman capture of the fortress of Masada. He tells us that the fruits and grains the Romans found in the fortress were still fresh, although they had been stored for many years: “Here was laid up corn in large quantities, and such as would subsist men for a long time; here was also wine

and oil in abundance, with all kinds of pulse and dates heaped up together; all which Eleazar found there, when he and his *Sicarii* got possession of the fortress by treachery. These fruits were also fresh and full ripe, and not inferior to such fruits newly laid in, although they were little short of a hundred years from the laying in (of) these provisions (by Herod), till the place was taken by the Romans; nay, indeed, when the Romans got possession of those fruits that were left, they found them not corrupted all that while: nor should we be mistaken, if we supposed that the air was here the cause of their enduring so long.”<sup>2</sup>

Josephus’ claim that the Jews in Masada were able to preserve grain and fruits fresh for almost one hundred years is obviously an exaggeration. The statement, however, does suggest that the art of preserving produce was well known to the Jews. Unfortunately Jewish sources do not tell us what such technology was.

**Classical Writers.** Some classical writers, however, do offer us considerable insight into the methods used by ancient people to preserve grains, fruits, vegetables and wines. One of them is Columella, a renowned agriculturalist who lived in the first century A.D. In his treatise *On Agriculture and Trees*, Columella discusses at great length the various methods used by different people to preserve such produce as lettuce, onions, apples, pears, berries, plums, figs, olives, unfermented grape juice and fermented wine. We shall summarize briefly what he says first about the preservation of fresh produce in general and then about the preservation of fermented and unfermented wines in particular. This information should dispel the mistaken notion of the impossibility of preserving grape juice unfermented in Bible times.

Columella describes first of all a method used to preserve berries and plums: “Cornel-berries, which we use instead of olives, also wild plums and onyx-colored plums should be picked while they are still hard and not very ripe; they must not, however, be too unripe. They should then be dried for a day in the shade; then vinegar and must boiled-down to half or one third of its original volume should be mixed and poured in [the vessel containing the berries or plums], but it will be necessary to add some salt, so that no worms or other form of animal life can be engendered in them.”<sup>3</sup>

**Methods of Preserving Fruits.** A similar method was used for the preservation of other kinds of fruits. Columella explains: “Before they [pears] are ripe but when they are no longer quite raw, examine them carefully to see that they are sound and free from blemish or worms, and then arrange them in an earthenware vessel that has been treated with pitch and fill it with raisin-wine or must boiled-down to one-third of its original volume, so that all the fruit is submerged; then put a cover on the top and plaster it up.”<sup>4</sup>



Columella goes on to explain that instead of boiled-down must, some people used honey-water or bee's wax-water for preserving fruits.<sup>5</sup> The submersion of fruit in liquid honey was viewed as one of the safest methods of preservation, because as Columella remarks, "such is the nature of honey that it checks any corruption and does not allow it to spread."<sup>6</sup> Today we use a similar method when we can fruit in a heavy sugar syrup.

Another method used was to place the fruit in a barrel between layers of sawdust and when the barrel was full, its lid was carefully sealed with thick clay.<sup>7</sup> Still another method consisted of "dabbing the fruit, when it is fresh, thickly with well-kneaded potter's clay, and when the clay has dried, hanging it up in a cool place; then, when it is required for use, the fruit should be plunged in water and the clay dissolved. This process keeps the fruit as fresh as if it had only just been picked."<sup>8</sup>

**The Preservation of Grapes.** Several methods were used for preserving grapes fresh. One of them consisted in cutting the grapes with lengthy branches and sealing the cut with pitch. The grapes were then placed in vessels filled with dry chaff. "In order that the grapes may remain green for as much as a year," Columella explains, "you will keep them in the following manner. When you have cut from the vine grapes . . . , immediately treat their pedicles with hard pitch; then fill a new earthenware pan with the driest possible chaff, which has been sifted that it may be free from dust, and put the grapes upon it. Then cover it with another pan and daub it around with clay mixed with chaff, and then, after arranging the pans in a very dry loft, cover them with dry chaff."<sup>9</sup>

Other people, according to Columella, preserved grapes by dipping their pedicles into boiling pitch immediately after they were cut, and then placing them in dishes arranged in different layers within a barrel containing boiled-down must.<sup>10</sup> Instead of must, some people used barley-bran to "fill the barrel with alternate strata of bran and grapes. Next they put on the lids and seal them up and store the grapes in a very dry and cool loft."<sup>11</sup>

Columella goes on relating similar methods used by other people. "Some people," he says, "after the same method, preserve green grapes in dry sawdust of poplar-wood or fir; others cover up the grapes, which they have picked from the vines when they were not too ripe, in dry flower of gypsum. Others, when they have picked a bunch, cut off with shears any defective grapes in it, and then hang it up in the granary where there is wheat stored below them. But this method causes the grapes to become shrivelled and almost as sweet as raisins."<sup>12</sup>

After describing several other methods used by different people to preserve grapes fresh, Columella concludes, saying: “different methods suit different districts according to the local conditions and the quality of the grapes.”<sup>13</sup>

Pliny, a Roman scholar and naturalist, contemporary of Columella, briefly describes in his *Natural History* other methods used to preserve grapes: “Some grapes will last all through the winter if the clusters are hung by a string from the ceiling, and others will keep merely in their own natural vigor by being stood in earthenware jars with casks put over them, and packed round with fermenting grape-skins.”<sup>14</sup>

**Squeezed Grapes.** The fact that the ancients knew several methods for preserving grapes fresh until the following vintage suggests that unfermented grape juice could be produced at any time of the year simply by squeezing grapes into a cup. This practice is confirmed both in rabbinical and Christian literature. For example, the *Halakat Gedalat*, the earliest compendium of the Talmud, says: “One may press out a cluster of grapes and pronounce the *kiddush* [blessing pronounced at the consecration of the Sabbath or a festival] over the juice, since the juice of the grape is considered wine in connection with the law of the Nazarite.”<sup>15</sup>

The apocryphal *Acts and Martyrdom of Matthew*, a document which circulated in the second and third centuries of the Christian era, attests to the use of freshly pressed juice of grapes in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper: “Bring as an offering the holy bread; and, having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when he rose from the dead on the third day.”<sup>16</sup> This is a clear and positive testimony not only of the custom of making grape juice by pressing grapes, but also of using unfermented grape juice in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

There are indications that the practice of pressing preserved grapes directly into the Lord’s Supper cup continued for centuries. For example, the third Council of Braga (A.D. 675) reports Cyprian’s charge against those “who presented no other wine [*vinum*] at the sacrament of the Lord’s cup but what they pressed out of the clusters of grapes.”<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that fresh grape juice is called “wine” (*vinum*). The charge was not against the use of unfermented grape juice as such, but rather against the failure to mix the grape juice with water.

The practice of mingling wine with water apparently originated, as Leon C. Field points out, “not necessarily in the weakening of alcoholic wine, but in the thinning of boiled wines and the thick juices of the crushed

clusters.”<sup>18</sup> Instruction about this had already been given three centuries before by Pope Julius I (A.D. 337) in a decree which read: “But if necessary let the cluster be pressed into the cup and water mingled with it.”<sup>19</sup> Additional historical testimonies will be given in the following chapter, in conjunction with our study of the communion wine. Such testimonies show that freshly preserved grapes were used throughout the year to make pressed grape juice.

## 2. The Preservation of Fermented Wine

**A Prevailing Misconception.** It is widely believed that in the ancient world it was much easier to preserve fermented wine than to preserve unfermented grape juice. Such a belief rests on the mistaken assumption that the preservation of fermented wine was a simple process requiring only that the pressed grape juice ferment naturally. The truth is quite different. Fermented wines are subject to a number of infections which cause them to become acid, malodorous and moldy. The ancients were well aware of these problems. Pliny, for example, frankly acknowledges that “it is a peculiarity of wine among liquids to go moldy or else to turn into vinegar; and whole volumes of instructions how to remedy this have been published.”<sup>20</sup>

Columella similarly notes that both fermented wine and unfermented, boiled-down must were subject to spoil: “Boiled-down must, though carefully made, is, like wine, apt to go sour.”<sup>21</sup> He goes on saying: “This being so, let us be mindful to preserve our wine with boiled-down must of a year old, the soundness of which has been already tested.”<sup>22</sup>

Here Columella indicates that unfermented, boiled-down grape juice, which generally kept better than fermented wine, was used to preserve the latter. Before discussing some of the techniques used in the ancient world to preserve wine, it is important to note how delicate and difficult it was in those days to preserve wine. A major reason was the lack of a precise technology for controlling the fermentation process.

**The Discovery of Pasteurization.** It was in the late nineteenth century that Louis Pasteur, the great French chemist, discovered the cause of fermentation and a remedy for it, known as pasteurization. Pasteur’s famous research, *Études sur la bière* (1876), was in fact conducted at the request of beer and wine producers who asked him to find a way to prevent the infections which spoiled their products, causing them enormous financial loss.

This research led Pasteur to discover that fermentation was caused by the multiplication of microorganisms rather than by chemical change. To prevent or control fermentation, Pasteur discovered in 1876 a method known today as “pasteurization,” which consists in the destruction of certain bacteria by exposing a liquid (wine, milk, beer) for a period of time to a certain temperature.

Today through pressure boilers, filters, separators, complex refrigeration and pasteurization, the wine industry (known as enology) is able to control the fermentation process. Such a control becomes especially necessary when the must contains too much water and too little sugar because the season has been cold or rainy, or because the grape has grown on moist lands. In such case, wine makers today correct the imperfect composition of the must by adding to it saccharin substances and by diminishing its water content through artificial evaporation. These modern technical procedures have freed wine growers from the constant fear that their vintage may become spoiled. Without such a technical knowledge and means, ancient wine makers faced the constant risk of losing their vintage.

**Problems in Preserving Wine.** Marcus Porcius Cato (234-150 B.C.), who is considered the father of both Latin prose and literature on agriculture, refers to some of the problems related to the preservation of fermented wine. In chapter 148 of his treatise *On Agriculture*, Cato alludes to such problems when he speaks of the terms “for the sale of wine in jars.” One of the conditions was that “only wine which is neither sour nor musty will be sold. Within three days it shall be tasted subject to the decision of an honest man, and if the purchaser fails to have this done, it will be considered tasted; but any delay in the tasting caused by the owner will add as many days to the time allowed the purchaser.”<sup>23</sup> The fact that the purchaser was to taste the wine within three days of purchase or take it as it was, shows how quickly wine was subject to turn sour or musty.

Cato prescribes some precautions to prevent wine from becoming sour or musty: “Divide the grapes gathered each day, after cleaning and drying, equally between the jars. If necessary, add to the new wine a fortieth part of must boiled-down from untrod grapes, or a pound and a half of salt to the culleus [a liquid measure]. If you use marble dust, add one pound to the culleus; mix this with must in a vessel and then pour into the jar. If you use resin, pulverize it thoroughly, three pounds to the culleus of must, place it in a basket, and suspend it in the jar of must; shake the basket often so that the resin may dissolve. When you use boiled must or marble dust or resin, stir frequently for twenty days and press down daily.”<sup>24</sup>

In this statement Cato provides quite an insight into the variety of products used to preserve fermented wine: boiled-down must, salt, marble dust, and resin. Later we shall see that Columella mentions other preservatives as well. In spite of the use of such preservatives, problems still developed with fermented wine.

In chapters 107 to 110 Cato refers to some of these problems. One of them was the bad odor emitted by wine and absorbed by the brims of the wine jars. Another problem was the wine that became itself acid or bad smelling. To remedy the problem of bad-smelling brims, Cato prescribes the preparation of a cream, made up of boiled must, crushed iris and Campanian melilot. These ingredients were to be mixed and allowed to boil over a slow fire. The resulting cream was smeared over the brims of wine jars.<sup>25</sup>

Apparently this treatment did not always prevent wine from turning sour (*asperum*). To sweeten the wine turned bitter, Cato offers this prescription: “Make four pounds of flour from vetch, and mix four cyathi of wine with boiled-down must; make into small bricks and let them soak for a night and a day; then dissolve with wine in the jar, and seal sixty days later.”<sup>26</sup> This procedure was to make the wine “sweet” and “of good odor.”

Presumably this did not always happen, because in the following chapter Cato gives another prescription to remove bad odor from wine: “Heat a thick clear piece of roofing-tile thoroughly in the fire. When it is hot coat it with pitch, attach a string, lower it gently to the bottom of the jar, and leave the jar sealed for two days. If the bad odor is removed the first time, that will be best; if not repeat until the bad odor is removed.”<sup>27</sup>

The above examples of ancient remedies to cure problems caused by fermenting wine show how mistaken the assumption is that the preservation of fermented wine was a simple process in the ancient world. The sources indicate that the process was far from simple. The different means used to prevent spoiling the wine reveal the perplexity and uncertainty of vine growers regarding how to remedy the deterioration of fermented wine. To better appreciate the complexity and intensity of the problem, we shall consider briefly some of the methods used to preserve fermented wine.

**Preservation of Wine with Boiled-Down Must.** Boiled-down unfermented must was used in the ancient world not only as a drink, diluted with water, but also as a preservative for fermented wine. Columella, the renowned Roman agriculturist, discusses at great length how boiled-down must was used to preserve wine. “Let us be mindful,” he urges, “to preserve our wine with boiled-down must of a year old, the soundness of which has been already tested.”<sup>28</sup>

Not all wine needed to be preserved with boiled-down must or other preservatives, but especially that produced from new vineyards, or vineyards located in less than ideal locations. “We regard as the best wine,” Columella says, “any kind which can keep without any preservative.”<sup>29</sup> Such wines,

however, were apparently rather rare, because Columella discusses extensively how to preserve wines from different kinds of vineyards and seasonal conditions.

The preparation of boiled-down must to be used as a preservative for fermented wine was quite a laborious process. It involved not only the boiling down in a leisurely manner of the must to half or one-third of its original volume, but also the addition of such preservatives as pitch and turpentine resin. Spices were also added such as “the leaf of spikenard, the *costus* [an Indian aromatic plant], the date, the angular rush and the sweet-rush . . . myrrh, cinnamon, balsam and saffron.”<sup>30</sup>

This complex preparation was eventually mixed with the wine to be preserved. The actual ratio of the mixture depended on the quality of the wine. As Columella explains: “It is uncertain how much of this preparation ought to be added to forty-eight *sextarii*, because the calculation of the right amount must be based on the quality of the wine, and care must be taken that the flavor of the preservative is not noticeable, for that drives away the purchaser. I personally, if the vintage is wet, usually mix a *triens* of the preservative in two *amphorae*; if it is dry, a *quadrans*.”<sup>31</sup>

**Preservation of Wine with Salt.** Another significant method for preserving wine was by adding salt or sea-water to the must during the first few days of fermentation. Apparently this method was widely used, since Columella says: “Some people—and indeed almost all the Greeks—preserve must with salt or sea-water.”<sup>32</sup>

If powdered salt was used it was diluted with water before being poured into the fermenting wine. If sea-water was used, it was “boiled-down to a third of its original volume,”<sup>33</sup> and then poured into the must, after the latter had been transferred into fumigated jars. The use of salt was widely recommended to prevent a moldy taste in the wine. “If possible,” Columella advises, “every sort of vintage in every district ought to be salted with this same quantity; for this prevents there being any moldy taste in the wine.”<sup>34</sup>

**Preservation of Wine with Pitch.** Another substance used to preserve wine was pitch, in both its liquid and solid form. Columella devotes three chapters of his treatise *On Agriculture* (22, 23, 24) to the discussion of the various kinds of pitches used to preserve wine. Usually the pitch was dissolved in sea-water which was allowed to evaporate, and then such a solution was poured into the wine to be treated. The actual quantity of the solution used depended on the condition of the wine.

To those wishing to preserve the whole vintage with pitch, Columella offers this advice: “But if you wish to preserve the whole vintage with the same pitch in such a way that it is impossible to tell from the taste that it has been preserved with pitch, it will be enough to mix six *scripula* of the same pitch with forty-five *sextarii* of wine when at length it has ceased to ferment and the dregs have been cleared away.”<sup>35</sup>

The foregoing discussion of the various methods used by ancient people to preserve fermented wine is by no means exhaustive. Other substances were used as preservatives such as marble dust, lime sulphur fumes or crushed iris. The examples cited suffice to show that the preservation of fermented wine in the ancient world was a far more complex process than is generally assumed. In fact, in some places the risk of preserving fermented wine was so great that, as we shall now see, all the vintage was boiled-down and preserved as sweet, unfermented grape juice.

## PART 2

### THE PRESERVATION OF GRAPE JUICE

**Fermentation Process:** The ancients were acquainted with the fact of fermentation, even though they did not understand its causes. Just what happens during the conversion of grape juice into wine was not clearly understood until the 1860’s, when Louis Pasteur undertook his study of fermentation. The ancients, however, were familiar with some of the methods by which fermentation can be prevented.

Grape juice contains two leading ingredients, glucose or grape sugar and albumen, both of which contribute to the fermentation process. The albumen, which is found in the lining of the skin and in the envelope of the seed of the grape, contains microscopic organisms which are the fermenting agents, known as ferments or yeast.

The decaying of the albumen in the grape juice affords conditions favorable for the multiplication of yeast germs which mix with those already present in the air and release a chemical enzyme capable of breaking down the grape sugar into two forms. One is ethyl alcohol, a colorless liquid that readily mixes with water and remains in solution in the wine. The other is carbon dioxide gas, which appears in tiny bubbles which give the appearance of ebullition.<sup>36</sup>

The process of fermentation occurs only in the presence of certain conditions such as a moderate temperature, moisture and air in the grape juice.

Now there are four major methods by which these conditions can be altered or eliminated and thus grape juice be preserved fresh and unfermented. We shall now consider each of these four methods, all of which were known to the ancients.

### 1. The Preservation of Grape Juice by Boiling

**Moisture and Heat.** The fermentation of grape juice can be prevented by reducing sufficiently its moisture content or by heating the juice at high temperature. The reason for this is that the growth of the yeast germs, which are the fermenting agents, slows or stops entirely when the moisture content of the grape juice is heated at 150° to 180° F. At such a temperature most of the ferments are destroyed. Both of these results are achieved by boiling the grape juice.

By boiling, the water of the grape juice evaporates, yeasts and molds are destroyed, and the sugar content increases, thus inhibiting yeast growth. This method of preserving grape juice unfermented by carefully boiling it down to a syrup was commonly and successfully used in the ancient world. When desired, the syrup would be drunk diluted with water. Several sources confirm this practice.

**Ancient Testimonies.** The most celebrated Roman poet, Virgil (70-19 B.C.), in his *Georgics*, pictures a housewife thus “She boils down by the fire the moisture of sweet must, and skims off with leaves the wavy froth of the simmering caldron.”<sup>37</sup> This method was widely used, as indicated by Columella’s lengthy description of how to preserve must successfully by boiling it down. “Care should also be taken,” he writes, “so that the must, when it has been pressed out, may last well or at any rate keep until it is sold.”<sup>38</sup>

To ensure its preservation, Columella explains that “some people put the must in leaden vessels and by boiling reduce it by a quarter, others by a third. There is no doubt that anyone who boiled it down to one-half would be likely to make a better thick form of must.”<sup>39</sup> Must boiled-down to a third was called *defrutum*: “Must of the sweetest possible flower will be boiled-down to a third of its original volume and when boiled-down . . . is called *defrutum*.”<sup>40</sup>

Pliny differs from Columella by calling *defrutum* the must boiled-down to one-half and *sapa*, the must boiled-down to a third. In discussing the various kinds of “sweet wine” (*vinum dulce*), he writes: “*Siraeum*, by some called *hepsema* and in our country *sapa*, is a product of art, not of nature, made by boiling down must to a third of its quantity; must boiled-down to only one-



half is called *defrutum*.”<sup>41</sup> The difference in the names given to the different kinds of boiled-down must, only serves to confirm the common usage of this beverage.

The preservation of must by boiling required considerable care. Columella gives us this insightful description: “We shall heat the furnace at first with gentle fire and with only very small pieces of wood, which the country people call *cremia* (brushwood), so that the must may boil in a leisurely manner. The man in charge of this boiling should have ready prepared strainers made of rushes or broom, but the latter should be in a raw state, that is to say, not beaten with a hammer. He should . . . stir up any dregs which have settled at the bottom and bring them up to the top; he should then clear away with the strainer any scum which remains on the surface, and he should go on doing this until the must seems cleared of all lees.”<sup>42</sup>

**Safe Preservation.** When the necessary care was exercised, the boiled grape juice could be safely preserved for a long time. This required lengthy boiling and careful removal of all scum, as Columella explains: “If there is plenty of wood, it is better to boil the must and clear off all the scum with the dregs; if this is done a tenth part will be lost, but the rest keeps good forever.”<sup>43</sup>

This method of preservation was especially recommended by Columella for “any estate where the wine often turns acid.” In this case, all the must was to be poured into the cauldron and boiled until a tenth part of it evaporated. “Afterwards, when it has cooled, you should pour it into vessels, cover it and seal it up; in this way it will keep longer and no harm will befall it.”<sup>44</sup>

**Wide Use of Boiled Grape Juice.** The custom of preserving grape juice by boiling it down into a syrup has survived through the centuries in the Near East and mediterranean countries. This beverage is known as *vino cotto* (boiled wine) in Italian, *vin cuit* in French, *nardenk* in Syriac and *dibs* in Arabic. In its article on “Wine,” the John Kitto’s old but renowned *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* quotes several nineteenth century historians on the use of boiled grape juice in the Near East. One of them, Dr. A. Russell, in his *Natural History of Aleppo*, writes: “The inspissated juice of the grape, *sapa vini*, called here *dibbs*, is brought to the city in skins, and sold in the public markets; it has much the appearance of coarse honey, is of sweet taste, and in great use among the people of all sorts.”<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, Cyrus Redding, in his *History of Modern Wines*, states: “On Mount Libanus, at Kesroan, good wines are made, but they are for the most part *vins cuits* (boiled wines). The wine is preserved in jars.”<sup>46</sup> J. D.

Paxton, who witnessed a vintage in Lebanon, also says: "The juice that was extracted when I visited the press was not made into (what is now called) wine, but into what is called *dibs*."<sup>47</sup> The common use of unfermented, "boiled wine" in the Near East during the nineteenth century is also attested by several travel accounts.<sup>48</sup>

Rev. Henry Homes, an American missionary to Constantinople, in his article on wine published in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* (May 1848) gives this account of his observations: "Simple grape-juice, without the addition of any earth to neutralize the acidity, is boiled from four to five hours, so as to reduce it one-fourth the quantity put in. After the boiling, for preserving it cool, and that it be *less liable to ferment*, it is put into earthen instead of wooden vessels, closely tied over with skin to exclude the air. It ordinarily has not a particle of intoxicating quality, being used freely by both Mohammedans and Christians. Some which I have had on hand for two years has undergone no change."<sup>49</sup>

**Dilution of Boiled Grape Juice.** It was a common practice in ancient times to dilute both fermented and unfermented wines. In Rome a public establishment existed for this purpose, known as the *Thermopolium*. It furnished its patrons both cold and hot water to dilute their wines. "The hot water," as Sir Edward Barry observes in his treatise *Observation on the Wines of the Ancients*, "was often *necessary* to dissolve their more inspissated and old wines."<sup>50</sup>

The dilution was especially necessary for those wines which had been reduced to a kind of thick cream through boiling. Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher who lived in the fourth century B.C., says that the wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was contained and to dissolve the scraping in water.<sup>51</sup> Similar, very likely, was the Teniotic wine of Egypt, which Athenaeus, a Greek grammarian who lived in the second century A.D., tells us had "such a degree of richness [*liparon*, literally, 'fatness'], that when mixed with water it seems gradually to be diluted, much in the same way as Attic honey well mixed."<sup>52</sup>

Several ancient authors refer to the custom of diluting fermented wines. "Hesiod prescribed, during the summer months, three parts of water to one of wine. Nicochares considers two parts of wine to five of water as the proper proportion. However, according to Homer, Pranmian and Meronian wines required twenty parts of water to one of wine. Hippocrates considered twenty parts of water to one of the Thracian wine to be the proper beverage."<sup>53</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume that those wines which were diluted with twenty parts of water were the boiled, condensed grape juices mentioned

above. A lover of fermented wines would hardly have enjoyed drinking a wine which had been diluted with 95% of water. Thus, the wines which were heavily diluted must have been primarily unfermented grape juices, thickly condensed through boiling.

**Boiled Grape Juice among the Jews.** Several reasons lead us to believe that the boiling process was most probably used also in ancient Israel to preserve grape juice. The art of making and preserving wine was common to Mediterranean countries where viticulture prevailed, and has survived to the present.<sup>54</sup> There are indications that the ancient Jews preserved wine by boiling it. John Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* says: "The Mishna states that the Jews were in the habit of using *boiled wine*. 'They do not boil the wine of the heave-offering, *because it diminishes it*,' and consequently thickens it, thus rendering the mingling of water with it when drunk necessary; but it is immediately added, 'Rabbi Yehudah permits this *because it improves it*' (*Teromoth Perek 100, 11*)."<sup>55</sup>

In the talmudic treatise entitled '*Abodah Zarah*' there is a lengthy discussion on what some rabbis thought of the use of boiled wine. One of the issues discussed is whether a Jew could use boiled wine which he had handed over for storage to a Gentile. The fear was that the Gentile might have offered it to an idol. Rabbi Ashi dismissed such a fear, saying: "Our boiled wine which is in the keeping of a heathen does not require double sealing. For as to the fear lest he would offer it to the idol, it is not offered in that state."<sup>56</sup> The reason is, as the footnote explains, that Gentiles used only raw wine for their sacrificial offering. Boiled wine was unacceptable for their sacrifices, and consequently there was no fear of its being offered to an idol.<sup>57</sup>

Another issue discussed is whether boiled wine left uncovered became unfit for use. On this issue the renowned Rabbi Hiyya deliberated: "Boiled wine is not rendered unfit by being left uncovered."<sup>58</sup> The reason given in the footnote is that "a snake does not drink it."<sup>59</sup> The popular notion appears to have been that snakes were fond of fermented wine but did not touch boiled wine. Consequently fermented wine needed to be covered lest it be poisoned by a snake, but boiled grape juice could remain uncovered because snakes would not touch it. These incidental remarks provide an indirect and yet compelling evidence that boiled wine was produced and used by Jews.

**Boiled Grape Juice in Ancient Israel?** It is hard to tell how extensive the use of boiled wine was in ancient Israel is hard to tell. But there is no reason to doubt that it was used. Some of the Biblical references to "honey—*debash*" could be referring to a sweet grape syrup. The Hebrew *debash* corresponds to the Arabic *dibs*, which is the usual term for a sweet

syrup made by boiling down the juice of grapes, raisins or dates. In his article on “honey” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, J. I. Ross writes: “The honey of the Bible was of three different kinds: (a) a thick grape syrup (Arabic *dibs*); (b) wild honey . . . (c) honey from domesticated bees.”<sup>60</sup>

Some scholars maintain that certain Old Testament texts refer not to bee’s honey but to a grape syrup. For example, in the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, J. A. de Bost states: “Some authors believe that several Old Testament texts, namely Gen 43:11; Ezek 27:17, Jer 41:8 do not refer to bee’s honey but to a sweet beverage, a syrup that drips from ripe dates (these are the Hebrew scholars Maimonides, Josephus, Hiller, Celsius, Geddes, etc.). They appeal, among other things, to the fact that the Hebrew word *debash*, which means honey, in Arabic has the meaning of dates. Other scholars maintain that the word must be understood as grapes’ honey, that is, grape juice boiled with or without sugar until it becomes thick as a syrup (Rosenmüller). This beverage is made even today in Syria and Palestine (Shaw, Russell, Burckhardt). 150 kilos of grapes produce 50 kilos of this beverage, called *dibs* (*debash*). It is used instead of sugar, diluting it with water. For the poor it replaces butter and for the sick wine. The Greeks and the Romans knew the honey of grapes.”<sup>61</sup>

The account of the spies in Numbers 13 may support the meaning of *debash* as the honey of grapes. The spies “came to the valley of Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them; they brought also some pomegranates and figs” (v. 23). In front of the fruits which the spies brought back as proof of the fertility of the land, namely, an enormous cluster of grapes with pomegranates and figs, they said: “We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey [*debash*], and this is its fruit” (v. 27). Since the fruits shown to prove that the land flowed with “milk and honey” were especially the incredibly large grapes, “honey” may refer to boiled grape juice, known as “grapes’ honey—*dibs*,” produced with the kind of grapes displayed, and “milk” may signify the green pastures which nourished the milk-producing cows. The emphasis appears to be on the value of the natural products of the land.

The *Encyclopedia Biblica* notes in this regard that “in later Hebrew certainly, and in OT possibly, *debash* is also used to denote certain artificial preparations made from the juice of various fruits by inspissation, like the modern *dibs*. Reference has already been made to the theory that the ‘honey’ with which the land of Canaan was said to ‘flow’ was this inspissated syrup; it has also been held that at least the honey intended for transport (Gen 43:11; 1 King 14:3) and export (Ezek 27:17) must be so understood.”<sup>62</sup>

Speaking of grape juice, the article continues, saying: “The early inhabitants of Canaan, however, as Bliss appears to have shown, were certainly acquainted with this manufacture. His excavations at Tell el-Hesy (Lachish) revealed two wine-presses with apparatus (as he judged) for boiling down the filtered juice (inspissation) into grape syrup.”<sup>63</sup> The preceding observations give us reason to believe that the boiling process was most probably used by the ancient Jews to preserve grape juice unfermented.

## 2. The Preservation of Grape Juice through Filtration

**Separation of Albumen.** Another method by which the fermentation of grape juice can be prevented is by separating the albumen, which is located in the lining of the skin and in the envelope of the seeds of the grape, from the other elements. The albumen, as noted earlier, contains the fermenting agents, known as ferments or yeast. By careful procedures the juice of the grapes can be separated from the fermenting pulp. The ancients understood this principle and applied it in two ways: (1) gentle pressing, (2) filtration.

**Gentle Pressing.** The grapes were brought in from the vineyard and placed in wine vats. The first juice that flowed before the treading began, according to Pliny, was called *protropum*. “The name,” he explains, “was given by some people to must that flows down of its own accord before the grapes are trodden.”<sup>64</sup> This juice, that flowed spontaneously from the grapes, was composed almost entirely of the sugar portion of the grapes. The high sugar content of the juice, combined with its relative freedom from yeast, would make its preservation in an air tight container relatively easy.

In this particular passage Pliny mentions that *protropum* was allowed to ferment. But this was not always the case. Other passages now to be considered indicate that the first juice as well as the subsequent juice which flowed from gently pressed grapes was preserved unfermented.

After discussing two “sweet wines,” namely *sapa* and *defrutum*, which were made by boiling down the must respectively to a third and to one-half of its volume, Pliny mentions the raisin-wine, known as *passum*, which was well known under different names in most Mediterranean countries. This unfermented grape juice was made by drying the grapes in the sun and then gently pressing out the juice. “Some people,” Pliny explains, “make this wine from any sweet white grapes that ripen early, drying them in the sun till little more than half their weight remains and then they gently press out the juice [*leniter exprimunt*].”<sup>65</sup>

By pressing out gently the sun-dried grapes only the rich juice would be released. Because of its high sugar content and the absence of the

fermenting pulp, this juice could be more readily preserved. Sometimes the level of sugar was raised by adding honey. Speaking of “honey-wine,” Pliny says: “it differs from mead because it is made from must, in the proportion of thirty pints of must of a dry quality to six pints of honey and a cup of salt, this mixture being brought just to the boil.”<sup>66</sup>

Polybius, an historian of the second century B.C., tells us that “among the Romans women are forbidden to drink [fermented] wine; and they drink what is called *passum*, which is made from raisins, and tastes very much like the sweet wine [*gleukos*] of Aegosthena or Crete. This is what they do to quench their thirst. But it is almost impossible for them to drink wine without being found out.”<sup>67</sup> It is noteworthy that unfermented grape juice made from sun-dried grapes was drunk especially by women in the Roman society.

The importance of pressing the grapes gently to prevent the escape of the albumen is emphasized also by Columella. Speaking of sun-dried grapes, he says, “Tread them on the fourth day and pour the must, which should have none of the last squeezing in it.”<sup>68</sup> The Latin verb used for “tread” is *calcato*, which means “trodden by foot.” Thus the juice was to be removed after treading the grapes by foot and before their squeezing with the heavy beam (*tortivo*). The latter would release the fermenting yeast located in the lining of the skin of the grapes.

To prevent the fermentation of gently pressed grape juice, it was necessary to pour it into properly sealed jars which would be stored in a cool place. Columella gives us an informative description of how they did it: “That must may remain always as sweet as though it were fresh, do as follows. Before the grape-skins are put under the press, take from the vat some of the freshest possible must and put it in a new wine-jar; then daub it over and cover it carefully with pitch, that thus no water may be able to get in. Then sink the whole flagon in a pool of cold, fresh water so that no part of it is above the surface. Then after forty days take it out of the water. The must will then keep sweet for as much as a year.”<sup>69</sup>

The importance of storing the juice in a cool place will be discussed later. At this point it is important to note the caution taken in utilizing “the freshest possible must” which flowed before the grape-skins were put to the press. This would ensure that the juice would be rather free of the fermentation-causing yeast found in the lining of the skin of the grapes.

**Filtration.** When the fermentable pulp was pressed out together with the saccharin juice, a separation of the former was still possible by means of filtration. It is evident that the ancient means of filtration were far less sophisticated and efficient than those used by the wine industry today. Their

basic method consisted of using a bag, called *sacco*, in which the grapes were placed. A vase was placed below the bag to receive the falling juice. Several Latin writers refer to the use of such strainers or filters in the preparation of wines.

The Roman poet Virgil (70-19 B.C.) mentions the sackcloth (*cola*) as one of the standard pieces of equipment of the wine press (*prelum*). Its purpose, as Pliny points out, was to remove the fermentable substances from the juice: “Wines are most beneficial when all their potency has been overcome by the strainer [*sacco*]. We must remember that wine is grape juice that has acquired strength by fermentation.”<sup>71</sup> In this statement Pliny clearly explains that the purpose of the strainer (*sacco*) was to remove the fermentable substances which give alcoholic potency to the wine.

It is certain that grape juice was filtered to deprive it of the intoxicating power caused by fermentation. Plutarch, the first-century Greek biographer and moralist, after speaking of the filtering process in very much the same words as Pliny, says: “Wine is rendered old, or feeble in strength, when it is frequently filtered. The strength being thus excluded, the wine neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind and passions, and is much more pleasant to drink.”<sup>72</sup>

It is noteworthy that Plutarch observes that the filtered, non-alcoholic wine was “more pleasant to drink” than the alcoholic variety. This observation can help us understand the nature of the “good wine” produced by Christ at the wedding of Cana (John 2:10). A reason for the production of filtered wines was, according to Pliny, to enable people to drink more without becoming intoxicated: “What is more, to enable us to take more, we reduce its strength by means of a linen strainer.”<sup>73</sup>

It is significant to note in this connection the comment of the Delphin edition on Horace’s words, “Strain clear the wine,” which says: “The ancients filtered and defecated their must repeatedly before it could have fermented; and thus the faeces which nourish the strength of the wine being taken away, they rendered the wine itself more liquid, weaker, lighter and sweeter, and more pleasant to drink.”<sup>74</sup>

**A Biblical Allusion.** Isaiah 25:6 may contain an allusion to the Biblical custom of filtering the must. The text reads: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow of wine on the lees well refined.” The word “wine” present in the two phrases, “wine on the lees” and “wine on the lees well refined” (RSV), is not found in the Hebrew text. Instead, the Hebrew

term used is *shemarim*, which means “preserves,” a term which can refer to vintage-produce. Thus, a more accurate translation would be “a feast of vintage-produce” and “a feast of vintage-produce well cleansed.” The Vulgate (Latin) translation respects this meaning: “a feast of vintage-produce (*convivium vindemiae*), a feast of vintage-produce well-cleansed (*vindemiae defaecatae*).”

In this verse God compares the blessings of the Gospel feast to His providing of two festal luxuries: fat things—rich, marrowy meats—and confections such as jellies and syrups. The former would be served in the most savory way and the latter in their purest state. The “vintage-produce well cleansed” could refer to the filtered grape juice, which on account of its purity and sweetness was regarded, as we have seen, as most pleasant to drink. This harmless nutritious drink fits the emblem of the blessings of salvation which here God promises to all the redeemed.

### 3. The Preservation of Grape Juice Through Cold Storage

**Below 40° Fahrenheit.** The fermentation of grape juice can be prevented also by keeping it below 40° F (4° Celsius). Nearly all processes of fermentation cease at about 40° F. Fermentation is possible only between about 40° and 80° F (4° and 27° Celsius). Below the former point fermentation is inoperative and above the latter point the acetous supplants the vinous process. By lowering the temperature to about 40° F., the albumen settles at the bottom and the juice does not ferment.

**Ancient Method.** The ancients were familiar with this method of preservation. When they desired to preserve grape juice in its sweet, unfermented state, they would take an *amphora* and coat it with pitch within and without. Then they would fill it with *mustum lixivium*—the must that flowed before the grapes would be pressed with a heavy beam—and they would seal it carefully with pitch. It was then immersed in a pool of cool water or a cistern and allowed to remain undisturbed for six weeks or two months. After this process the grape juice could remain unfermented and hence it was called *semper mustum*, that is, *permanent must*.

We cited earlier a description of this process as given by Columella. To ensure that must remains *semper dulce* “always sweet,” Columella prescribes this procedure: “Before the grape-skins are put under the press, take from the vat some of the freshest possible must and put it in a new wine-jar; then daub it over and cover it carefully with pitch, that thus no water may be able to get in. Then sink the whole flagon in a pool of cold, fresh water so that no part of it is above the surface. Then after forty days take it out of the



---

water. The must will then keep sweet for as much as a year.”<sup>75</sup> Columella goes on to say that “for as long as it is properly cold, so long will it remain in good condition.”<sup>76</sup>

In the method described by Columella fermentation was prevented in two ways: (1) by the exclusion of the air, (2) by the reduction of the temperature. The yeast germs are introduced by the action of ordinary air into the fermentable juice. Thus, by placing the grape juice in air-tight wine jars, fermentation was unlikely to occur, especially since the jars were kept in a cold pool.

A similar description of this process is provided by Pliny. Speaking of the sweet wine called *aigleukos* by the Greeks and *semper mustum* “permanent must” by the Romans, he says: “Care is needed for its production, as it must not be allowed to boil [*fervere*, to ferment]—that is the word the Romans used to denote the passage of must into wine. Consequently, as soon as the must is taken from the vat and put into casks they plunge the casks in water till midwinter passes and regular cold weather sets in.”<sup>77</sup>

This method of preserving grape juice must have been in use long before the time of Pliny and Columella, because Cato (234-149 B.C.) mentions it two centuries before them: “If you wish to keep grape juice through the whole year, put the grape juice in an amphora, seal the stopper with pitch, and sink in the pond. Take it out after thirty days; it will remain sweet the whole year.”<sup>78</sup>

**Gibeon’s Wine Cellars.** It seems reasonable to presume that the Jews knew and used the Roman method of preserving grape juice in air-tight jars, stored in a cold place. The various techniques for making and preserving wine, according to the Roman authors cited earlier, seemed to have been well known throughout the Mediterranean world. Explicit information about Palestine, however, is lacking.

Some indirect information is provided by James B. Pritchard, who excavated the ancient Gibeon where sixty-three storage wine-vats were found, with a holding capacity of 25,000 gallons. His reconstruction of the process of wine making at Gibeon includes the filtration of the pressed juice into two cylindrical tanks 2 ft. in diameter and 2 ft. deep. After filtering the wine was stored in cool cellars in large jars sealed with olive oil.<sup>79</sup>

Pritchard tested a suggestion of a local wine maker that wine would keep from turning into vinegar in the cellar, if it was sealed with olive oil. The excavators stored a jar of wine sealed with a film of olive oil for a month in the cellars of Gibeon. To their delight they found at the end of the month that

the wine was perfectly preserved.<sup>80</sup> The reason was that the oil provided a practical barrier preventing the oxidation of the wine.

The success of the experiment suggests the possibility that the same method could have been used for preserving unfermented grape juice. Freshly pressed grape juice, after being filtered to eliminate glutinous material, could have been stored in cool cellars in jars sealed with olive oil. To some extent this method was used by my father when I was a boy. I recall helping him to filter the grape juice through a thick linen sack and then pouring the juice into bottles which were sealed with a film of oil and a tight cork. The bottles would be stored in a cool cellar. Today, with the availability of bottle caps which seal bottles hermetically, my father follows a simpler procedure. He boils the must and pours it into bottles which he seals immediately with bottle caps pressed tight by a simple machine. He then stores the bottles in a cool cellar.

The frequent linkage in the Old Testament of olive oil and wine may suggest not only the common use of the two products, but also the dependency upon the former to preserve the latter.

#### 4. The Preservation of Grape Juice Through Sulphur Fumigation

**Sulphur Fumigation.** The fermentation of grape juice can also be prevented by the fumes of sulphur dioxide. The method consists in filling the jars nearly full with fresh unfermented grape juice, then burning sulphur dioxide in the empty portion, and while the sulphur fumes are present, the jars are tightly closed. Another possibility is to pour the must into jars or bottles which have been strongly treated with sulphur fumes. The sulphur absorbs the oxygen of the air and inhibits the formation of yeast germs. Sulphur dioxide is widely used today in the wine industry to deal with some of the infection to which wine is subject.

**Ancient Use of Sulphur.** The use of sulphur to preserve wine was known in the ancient world. In a chapter devoted to various methods used to preserve wine, Pliny speaks of Cato who “mentions sulphur.”<sup>81</sup> Horace alludes to this practice in a poem dedicated to the celebration of a glad anniversary: “This festal day, each time the year revolves, shall draw a well-pitched cork forth from a jar set to drink the smoke in Tullus’ consulship.”<sup>82</sup> The next stanza suggests that this fumigated wine was unfermented, because a hundred cups of it could be drunk without causing “clamor et ira,” that is, “brawls and anger.”<sup>83</sup>

In his book on *Roman Antiquities*, T. S. Carr says that “the application of the *fumarium* [sulphur fumes] to the mellowing of wines was borrowed from the Asiatics; and thus exhalation would go on until the wine was reduced to the state of syrup.”<sup>84</sup> In its comment on this statement, John Kitto’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* says: “When the Mishna forbids *smoked wines* from being used in offerings (*Manachoth*, viii. 6, et comment.), it has chiefly reference to the Roman practice of fumigating them with sulphur, the vapor of which absorbed the oxygen, and thus arrested the fermentation. The Jews carefully eschewed the wines and vinegar of the Gentiles.”<sup>85</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The study conducted in this chapter on the ancient methods of preserving both fermented wine and unfermented grape juice should help dispel two major misconceptions: (1) In the ancient world it was easy to preserve fermented wine because all that it takes is to let the pressed juice ferment naturally; (2) In the ancient world it was impossible to preserve the grape juice unfermented because people had neither the technical knowledge nor the means to prevent fermentation.

We have found that both of these popular notions are unfounded. The problems the ancients encountered in preserving fermented wine were as great as, if not actually greater, than, those faced in preserving unfermented grape juice. To prevent wine from becoming acid, moldy, or bad-smelling a host of preservatives were used such as salt, sea-water, liquid or solid pitch, boiled-down must, marble dust, lime, sulphur fumes or crushed iris.

In comparison to preserving fermented wine, the keeping of grape juice from fermenting was a relatively simple process. It was accomplished simply by boiling the juice down to a syrup, or by separating the fermentable pulp from the juice of the grape by means of filtration, or by placing the grape juice in sealed jars which were immersed in a pool of cold water, or by fumigating with sulphur the wine jars before sealing them. The use of such techniques clearly indicates that the means of preserving grape juice without fermentation were known and used in the ancient world.

The fact that the documentation comes mostly from the classical world rather than from the Old Testament world does not mean that the art of preserving grape juice was unknown in ancient Israel. The Jews were not less knowledgeable in the art of preserving fruits, cereals and juices than were the surrounding nations. We found that, according to Josephus, the Romans were astonished to find in the fortress of Masada, wine, oil, fruits and cereals

freshly preserved, though they had been stored for several years.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, rabbinical sources mention specifically the use of boiled wine.

The reason for the silence of Scripture on the *means* used for preserving grape juice is to be found in the nature of the Bible itself, a book which deals primarily with those aspects of life which are related to salvation history. In the Bible we find no treatise on agriculture, as among classical writers. The reason is not a lack of interest or of knowledge of farming, but a reluctance to deal with issues unrelated to the religious life of God's people.

No mention is made in the Bible of the means used to prevent the spoilage of fermented wine, yet the Jews must have known them. The same holds true for unfermented grape juice. The Bible attests that God's people did have and did use unfermented grape juice. We are not told how the Jews preserved the grape juice unfermented. We have reasons to believe that they knew some methods of preservation known and used in the ancient world. This conclusion will be confirmed in the next two chapters, which examine the teaching of Jesus and of the apostolic church regarding alcoholic beverages.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1939 ed., s. v. "Wine," by Burton Scott Easton, vol. 5, p. 3086.

2. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 7, 8, 4, trans. William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 599.

3. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 10, 3, trans. E. S. Forster and Edward H. Heffner, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955). All the quotations from Columella are taken from this edition. Henceforth only the title of Columella's work will be given.

4. *Ibid.*, 12, 10, 4.

5. *Ibid.*, 12, 11, 1-2; 12, 12, 3.

6. *Ibid.*, 12, 47, 4.

7. *Ibid.*, 12, 46, 6.

8. *Ibid.*, 12, 46, 5.

9. *Ibid.*, 12, 44, 1.

10. *Ibid.*, 12, 44, 2.

11. Ibid., 12, 44, 3.

12. Ibid., 12, 44, 4.

13. Ibid., 12, 44, 8.

14. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 3, 16, trans. H. Rackham, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960). All the quotations from Pliny will be taken from this edition. Henceforth only the title of Pliny's work will be given.

15. Cited by Louis Ginzberg, "A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies," *American Jewish Year Book* (1923), p. 409.

16. *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 8, pp. 532-533.

17. Joseph Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church* (London, 1852), vol. 2, p. 760.

18. Leon C. Field, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* (New York, 1883), p. 91.

19. Gratian, *De Consecratione*, Pars III, Dist. 2, c. 7, cited by Leon C. Field (n. 18), p. 91.

20. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 26.

21. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 20, 1.

22. Ibid.

23. Marcus Cato, *On Agriculture* 148, trans. William Davis Hooper, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960). All the quotations from Cato will be taken from this edition. Henceforth only the title of Cato's work will be given.

24. Ibid., 23.

25. Ibid., 107.

26. Ibid., 109.

27. Ibid., 110.

28. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 20, 1.

29. Ibid., 12, 19, 3.

30. Ibid., 12, 20, 5.

31. Ibid., 12, 20, 6.

32. Ibid., 12, 25, 1.

33. Ibid., 12, 25, 4.

34. Ibid., 12, 23, 3.

35. Ibid., 12, 23, 2.

36. For information on the process of fermentation of wine, see Robert Rasor, *Alcohol Distiller's Manual* (San Antonio, Texas, 1980), pp. 104-109. Also Albion Roy King, *Basic Information on Alcohol* (Washington, D. C. 1964), pp. 22-24; Charles R. Carroll, *Alcohol: Use, Nonuse and Abuse* (Dubuque, Iowa, 1975), pp. 31-34.

37. Virgil, *Georgics* 1, 295-296.

38. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 19, 1.

39. Ibid., 12, 19, 1.

40. Ibid., 12, 21, 1.

41. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 11, 80.

42. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 19, 3-4.

43. Ibid., 12, 20, 8.

44. Ibid., 12, 26, 1.

45. John Kitto, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 ed., s. v. "Wine," vol 2, p. 956.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Several travel accounts of the Near East are cited by William Patton, *Bible Wines. Laws of Fermentation* (Oklahoma City, n.d.), pp. 30-32.

49. Cited by William Patton (n. 48), p.32.

50. Sir Edward Barry, *Observations on the Wines of the Ancients* (London, 1775), p. 165.

51. Aristotle, *Metereologica* 4, 10.

52. Athenaeus, *Banquet* 1, 25.

53. William Patton (n. 48), p. 50. For a discussion of the practice of diluting wine among the Romans, see Robert H. Stein, "Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times," *Christianity Today* (June 20, 1975): 9-11. A more extensive treatment is found in Jimmy L. Albright, "Wine in the Biblical World: Its Economic, Social, and Religious Implications for New Testament Interpretation" (Ph. D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), pp. 176-178.

54. See also Henry J. Van-Lennep, *Bible Lands: Their Modern Customs and Manners Illustrative of Scripture* (New York, 1875), p. 120; also Edwin Wilbur Rice, *Orientalism in Bible Lands*, 3rd edition (Philadelphia, 1929), p. 154.

55. John Kitto, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 edition, s. v. "Passover," vol 2, p. 477.

56. 'Abodah Zarah 30a, trans. I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud* (London, 1936), p. 148.

57. Ibid., note 2.

58. Ibid., p. 149.

59. Ibid., p. 148, note 8.

60. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 edition, s. v. "Honey," vol. 2, p. 639.

61. *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. Ch. Meygruiess, 2nd edition, 1865, s. v. "Vin et Miel."

62. *Encyclopedia Biblica*, eds. T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, 1903 ed., s. v. "Honey," vol. 2, p. 2105.

63. Ibid.

64. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 11.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 14, 11, 85; a similar recipe is given by Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 51, 1.

67. Polibius, *Fragments* 6. 4 (6. 2).

---

68. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 37, 1.

69. *Ibid.*, 12, 29, 1.

70. Virgil, *Georgics* 2, 240-245.

71. Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24.

72. Plutarch, *Symposiacs* 8, 7.

73. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 28.

74. Horace, *Carminum Liber* 1, 11, 6, trans. C. E. Bennett, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1946). All the quotations from Horace are taken from this edition. Henceforth only the title of Horace's work will be given.

75. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 29, 1.

76. *Ibid.*, 12, 30, 1.

77. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 11.

78. Marcus Cato, *On Agriculture* 120, 1.

79. James B. Pritchard, *Gibeon: Where the Sun Stood Still* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 90-98.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

81. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 25, 129.

82. Horace, *Carminum Liber* 3, 8, 9-12.

83. *Ibid.*, 3, 8, 6.

84. Cited by John Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 edition, s. v. "Wine," vol. 2, p. 956.

85. *Ibid.*

86. See note 2.



# Chapter 5

## JESUS

### AND WINE

Many well-meaning Christians find the fundamental justification for their moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages in the teachings and example of Jesus. For example, in his book *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages*, Kenneth L. Gentry appeals first of all to Christ's example to defend a moderate partaking of alcoholic beverages: "First, we must again be reminded that the Lord and his apostles partook of [fermented] wine despite the fact that sinful men indulged in it to their own hurt and degradation."<sup>1</sup>

It is alleged that Christ not only partook of fermented wine but also produced it in abundant quantity at the wedding of Cana and gave it to His disciples at the Last Supper. Norman L. Geisler, for example, explicitly states in his article "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking" that "it is false to say that Jesus made unfermented wine. As a matter of fact, He made wine that tasted so good the people at the wedding feast in Cana said it was better than the wine they had just drunk. Surely they would not have said this if it had tasted flat to them. In fact in John 2:9-10 it is called 'wine' (*oinos*) and 'good wine' (*kalon oinon*). These are the same words used for fermented wine elsewhere in the New Testament."<sup>2</sup>

The popular belief that "Jesus was not a teetotaler," but a moderate drinker of fermented wine who even "miraculously 'manufactured' a high-quality (alcoholic) wine at Cana"<sup>3</sup> and instituted the Last Supper with alcoholic wine,<sup>4</sup> has no doubt influenced the drinking habits of millions of Christians around the world more than anything else that the Bible says about drinking. The reason is simple. The example and teachings of Christ are normative for Christian belief and practice. If Christ made, commended and used fermented wine, then there can hardly be anything intrinsically wrong with a moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages! Simply stated, "If wine was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me!"

**Objective and Procedure.** In view of the fundamental importance and far-reaching consequences of Christ's example and teachings on drinking, we will closely examine in this chapter what the Gospels tell us about Jesus and wine. Our primary objective is to ascertain whether indeed Christ by His teachings and example sanctioned the use of fermented wine.

The chapter is divided into the following five wine-related stories or sayings:

- (1) The Wedding at Cana: John 2:1-11.
- (2) New Wine in New Wineskins: Luke 5:37-38; Mark 2:22.
- (3) Is Old Wine is Better? Luke 5:39.
- (4) Was Jesus a Glutton and a Drunkard? Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34.
- (5) The Communion Wine: Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23.

## PART 1

### THE WEDDING AT CANA

**Importance of the Miracle.** Moderationists view Christ's miraculous transformation of water into wine at the wedding of Cana as primary evidence of Jesus' sanctioning the use of alcoholic beverages. They argue that if Jesus produced between 120 and 160 gallons of high-quality alcoholic wine for the wedding party and guests at Cana, it is evident that He approved of its use in moderation.

The belief that the wine Christ provided in Cana was alcoholic rests on five major assumptions. First, it is assumed that the word *oinos* "wine" indicates only "fermented-quality grape drink, i.e. wine."<sup>5</sup> Second, it is assumed that since the word *oinos* "wine" is used in reference both to the wine which ran out and the wine that Christ made, both wines must have been alcoholic. Third, it is assumed that the Jews did not know how to prevent the fermentation of grape juice; and since, as argued by William Hendriksen, the season of the wedding was just before Spring Passover (cf. John 2:13), that is, six months after the grape harvest, the wine used at Cana had ample time to ferment.<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, it is assumed that the description given by the master of the banquet to the wine provided by Christ as "the good wine" means a high-quality alcoholic wine.<sup>7</sup> Fifth, it is assumed that the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) used by the master of the banquet indicates that the guests were intoxicated because they had been drinking fermented wine. Consequently, the wine Jesus made must also have been fermented.<sup>8</sup> In view of the

---

importance these assumptions play in determining the nature of the wine provided by Christ, we shall examine each of them briefly in the order given.

**The Meaning of *Oinos*.** The popular assumption that both in secular and Biblical Greek the word *oinos* meant fermented grape juice exclusively was examined at great length in Chapter 2. We submitted numerous examples from both pagan and Christian authors who used the Greek word *oinos* referring both to fermented and unfermented grape juice. We also noticed that *oinos* is used at least 33 times in the Septuagint to translate *tirosh*, the Hebrew word for grape juice.

A better acquaintance with the use of the word “wine,” not only in the Greek language, but also in old English, Latin and Hebrew, would have saved scholars from falling into the mistaken conclusion that *oinos* means only fermented wine. The truth of the matter is, as we have shown, that *oinos* is a generic term, including all kinds of wine, unfermented and fermented, like *yayin* in Hebrew and *vinum* in Latin. Thus the fact that the wine made by Christ at Cana is called *oinos*, offers no ground for concluding that it was fermented wine. Its nature must be determined by internal evidence and moral likelihood. The record of the evangelist, as we shall see, affords information for determining this question.

**Is *Oinos* Always Alcoholic?** The second assumption, that both the wine that ran out and the wine Jesus made were alcoholic, depends largely upon the first assumption, namely, that the word *oinos* means exclusively alcoholic wine. As stated by Kenneth L. Gentry, “The word *oinos* is used in reference to both wines in question. It has been shown that this word indicates fermented-quality grape drink, i.e. wine.”<sup>9</sup>

This assumption is discredited by two facts. First, as mentioned earlier, the word *oinos* is a generic term referring either to fermented or to unfermented wine. Thus the fact that the same word *oinos* is used for both wines in question does not necessitate that both wines be alcoholic. In his booklet *Christ, the Apostles and Wine*, Ernest Gordon responds in a similar vein to the same assumption, saying: “To the objection that the word *oinos*, wine, is used both for the intoxicating wine of the feast and the wine Christ made, and hence that both must have been intoxicating, one can quote Abbott, *Dictionary of Religious Knowledge*, ‘It is tolerably clear that the word wine does not necessarily imply fermented liquor. It signifies only a production of the vine.’ The eminent Hellenist, Sir Richard Jebb, former Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge, declared *oinos* “a general term which might include all kinds of beverages.”<sup>10</sup>

Second, the wine provided by Christ is differentiated from the other by being characterized as *ton kalon*, “the good” wine. This suggests that the two wines were not identical. The nature of the difference between the two wines will be discussed below.

**Preservation of Grape Juice.** The third assumption, that it would have been impossible to supply unfermented grape juice for a Spring time wedding about six months after vintage, rests on the assumption that the technology for preserving grape juice unfermented was unknown at the time.

The latter assumption is clearly discredited by numerous testimonies from the Roman world of New Testament times describing various methods for preserving grape juice. We have seen in Chapter 4 that the preservation of grape juice was in some ways a simpler process than the preservation of fermented wine. Thus, the possibility existed at the wedding of Cana to supply unfermented grape juice near the Passover season, since such a beverage could be kept unfermented throughout the year.

**“High-Quality Alcoholic Wine.”** The fourth assumption is that the wine Jesus provided was pronounced “the good wine” (John 2:10) by the master of the banquet, because it was high in alcoholic content. Such an assumption is based on twentieth-century tastes.

Albert Barnes, a well-known New Testament scholar and commentator, warns in his comment on John 2:10 not to “be deceived by the phrase ‘good wine.’” The reason, he explains, is that “*We 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.*”<sup>11</sup>

We noted in Chapter 4 that in the Roman world of New Testament times, the *best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration*. Pliny, for example, says that “wines are most beneficial (*utilissimum*) when all their potency has been removed by the strainer.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Plutarch points out that wine is “much more pleasant to drink” when it “neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind or passions”<sup>13</sup> because its strength has been removed through frequent filtering.

Referring to some of the same ancient authors, Barnes says: “Pliny, Plutarch and Horace describe wine *as* good, or mention that *as the best* wine which *was harmless or innocent*—*poculis 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. That would be the *best* wine certainly. 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.”<sup>14</sup>

The wine Christ made was of high quality, not because of its alcohol content, but because, as Henry Morris explains, it was “new wine, freshly created! It was not old, decayed wine, as it would have to be if it were intoxicating. There was no time for the fermentation process to break down the structure of its energy-giving sugars into disintegrative alcohols. It thus was a fitting representation of His glory and was appropriate to serve as the very first of His great miracles (John 2:11).”<sup>15</sup>

**Rabbinical Witness.** The rabbinical witness on the nature of wine is not unanimous. Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz points out in his introduction to his collection of rabbinical statements on wine and strong drink that “it is true that some Talmudic doctors have sanctioned, aye, even recommended the moderate use of wine. But it is equally true that many Talmudic Rabbins have in vigorous words condemned the drinking of wine and strong drinks. Some Rabbins have even ascribed the downfall of Israel to wine.”<sup>16</sup> An example of disapproval is the statement, often repeated with minor variations by different rabbis, which says: “When wine enters into the system of a person, out goes sense, wherever there is wine there is no understanding.”<sup>17</sup>

This awareness of the harmful effect of alcoholic wine explains why some rabbis recommended the use of boiled wine. Speaking of the latter, the Mishna says: “Rabbi Yehuda permits it [boiled wine as heave-offering], because it improves it [its quality].”<sup>18</sup> “Such a wine,” notes Kitto’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, “was esteemed [among the Jews] the richest and best wine.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere the Talmud indicates that drinking was forbidden to the accompaniment of musical instruments in festive occasions such as wedding (*Sotah* 48a; also *Mishna Sotah* 9,11). The latter is confirmed by later testimonies of rabbis quoted later in this chapter in the discussion of the Passover wine. In the light of these testimonies and considerations we would conclude that *the wine provided by Christ was described as “the good wine” because it was not intoxicating.*

**Moral Implications.** Another reason leading us to reject the assumption that “the good wine” produced by Christ was high in alcoholic content is

the negative reflection such an assumption casts upon the wisdom of the Son of God. If, in addition to the considerable quantity of alleged alcoholic wine already consumed, Christ miraculously produced between 120 and 160 gallons of intoxicating wine for the use of men, women and children gathered together at the wedding feast, then He must be held morally responsible for prolonging and increasing their intoxication. His miracle would only serve to sanction the excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages. If this conclusion is true, it destroys the sinlessness of Christ's nature and teachings.

Joseph P. Free rightly observes that the large amount of wine miraculously produced by Christ toward the end of a wedding feast proves either: "1. Excessive [alcoholic] drinking was allowable, or 2. The *oinos* in this case was grape juice. In the light of the whole Old Testament condemnation of wine, it certainly would appear that the beverage was grape juice."<sup>20</sup>

It is against the principle of Scriptural and moral analogy to suppose that Christ, the Creator of good things (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25; Col 1:16), would exert His supernatural energy to bring into existence an intoxicating wine which Scripture condemns as "a mocker" and "a brawler" (Prov 20:1) and which the Holy Spirit has chosen as the symbol of divine wrath.

Scriptural and moral consistency require that "the good wine" produced by Christ was fresh, unfermented grape juice. The very adjective used to describe the wine supports this conclusion. "It must be observed," notes Leon C. Field, "that the adjective used to describe the wine made by Christ is not *agathos*, *good*, simply, but *kalos*, *that which is morally excellent or befitting*. The term is suggestive of Theophrastus' characterization of unfermenting wine as *moral (ethikos) wine*."<sup>21</sup>

Referring to the nature of the wine produced by Christ, Ellen White says: "The wine which Christ provided for the feast, and that which He gave to the disciples as a symbol of His own blood, was the pure juice of the grape. To this the prophet Isaiah refers when he speaks of the new wine 'in the cluster,' and says, 'Destroy it not: for a blessing is in it'. . . The unfermented wine which He provided for the wedding guests was a wholesome and refreshing drink. Its effect was to bring the taste into harmony with a healthful appetite."<sup>22</sup>

**"Well Drunk."** The final assumption to be examined relates to the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) used by the banquet master. The full statement reads: "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10, KJV). The assumption is that since the

Greek word *methusthosin* “well drunk” indicates drunkenness and since drunkenness is caused, according to the statement of the banquet master, by the “good wine” customarily served first, then “the good wine” provided by Christ must also have been intoxicating, because it is compared with the good wine usually served at the beginning of a feast.

Some view this meaning of the Greek verb *methusko* “to intoxicate” as an incontestable proof of the alcoholic nature of the wine produced by Christ. For example, in a scholarly review of John Ellis’ book, *The Wine Question in the Light of the New Dispensation*, the reviewers say: “There is another incontestable proof [of the alcoholic nature of the wine produced by Christ] contained in the passage itself; the word *methusko* in Greek signifies ‘to make drunk, to intoxicate’; in the passive ‘to be drunk’; now this term is never used for designating the effects from any other than intoxicating drinks.”<sup>23</sup>

This reasoning misinterprets and misapplies the comment of the master of the banquet, and overlooks the broader usage of the verb. The comment in question was not made in reference to that particular party, but to the general practice among those who hold feasts: “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine . . .” (John 2:10, RSV). This remark, as many commentators recognize, forms parts of the stock in trade of a hired banquet master, rather than an actual description of the state of intoxication at a particular party.<sup>24</sup>

Another important consideration is the fact that the Greek verb *methusko* can mean “to drink freely” without any implication of intoxication. In his article on this verb in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Herbert Preisker observes that “*methuo* and *methuskomai* are mostly used literally in the NT for ‘to be drunk’ and ‘to get drunk.’ *Methuskomai* is used with no ethical or religious judgment in John 2:10 in connection with the rule that the poorer wine is served only when the guests have drunk well.”<sup>25</sup>

The Parkhurst Greek lexicon cites the Septuagint usage of the *methuo* word group in Old Testament passages as illustrative of the meaning “to drink freely”: “*Methuo* . . . denotes in general to drink wine or strong drink more freely than usual, and that whether to drunkenness or not. Pass[ively] to drink freely and to cheerfulness, though not to drunkenness . . . John 2:10. And in this sense the verb is plainly used by the LXX (i.e. Septuagint), Gen 43:34; Cant 5:1; and also, I think, in Gen 9:21.”<sup>26</sup> The latter meaning is respected by the Revised Standard Version which renders it more accurately “when men have drunk freely.”

The verb *methusko* in John 2:10 is used in the sense of satiation. It refers simply to the large quantity of wine generally consumed at a feast, without any reference to intoxicating effects. Those who wish to insist that the wine used at the feast was alcoholic and that Jesus also provided alcoholic wine, though of a better quality, are driven to the conclusion that Jesus provided a large additional quantity of intoxicating wine so that the wedding party could continue its reckless indulgence. Such a conclusion destroys the moral integrity of Christ's character.

**The Object of the Miracle.** The stated object of the miracle was for Christ to manifest His glory so that His disciples might believe in Him. This objective was accomplished: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11). Christ's presence at a marriage feast was intended to show divine approval of the marriage institution and of the innocent enjoyments of social life. Yet all of these considerations were subservient to the manifestation of Christ's glory in fulfillment of His Messianic mission. The glory of God is revealed especially in His act of creation (Ps 19:1-2). Likewise, Christ's "eternal power and deity" (Rom 1:20) were manifested at the beginning of His miracles through an act of creation: "He . . . made the water wine" (John 4:46).

The wine of the miracle must have been identical to the wine found in the grape-clusters, because this is the only wine that God produces. "There is not a hint," writes R. A. Torrey, "that the wine He [Christ] made was intoxicating. It was fresh-made wine. New-made wine is never intoxicating. It is not intoxicating until some time after the process of fermentation has set in. Fermentation is a process of decay. There is not a hint that our Lord produced alcohol, which is a product of decay and death. He produced a living wine uncontaminated by fermentation."<sup>27</sup>

"I am satisfied," states William Pettingill, "that there was little resemblance in it [wine made by Christ] to the thing described in the Scripture of God as biting like a serpent and stinging like an adder (Prov 23:29-32). Doubtless rather it was like the heavenly fruit of the vine that He will drink new with His own in His Father's kingdom (Matt 26:29). No wonder the governor of the wedding feast at Cana pronounced it the best wine kept until the last. Never before had he tasted such wine, and never did he taste it again."<sup>28</sup>

Christ's miracles were always directed to benevolent ends. He "came not to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:56). If it were true that Christ miraculously manufactured an intoxicating wine, then that miracle would be a notable exception among His miracles. It would be a malevolent manifestation of His power. He would have manifested shame rather than glory.



Christ was aware of the powerful influence His example would have on contemporary and future generations. If, with all this knowledge He created an intoxicating wine, He would have revealed diabolic rather than divine power and glory. His disciples could hardly have believed in Him, if they had seen Him do a miracle to encourage drunkenness.

Leon C. Field aptly observes that Christ “was not Mohammed, holding out to men the allurements of sensual paradise, but a ‘man of sorrow,’ whose stern requirement of all who came after him was, that they should deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him (Matt 16:24). And it was by the personal embodiment and the practical encouragement of self-denial and abstinence, and not by the example or sanction of luxury and self-indulgence, that he won his followers and achieved his victories.”<sup>29</sup>

## PART 2

### NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS

**Importance of the Saying.** Christ’s allusions to wine in Matthew 9:17 and Luke 5:39 are seen by moderationists as an indication of His approval of the moderate use of alcoholic wine. While the miracle of the wine at the wedding of Cana allegedly proves that Jesus *made* alcoholic wine, the two sayings to be examined now supposedly show that Jesus *commended* the moderate use of alcoholic wine. The first saying occurs in the three parallel passages (Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38). The second is found only in Luke 5:39 as an additional statement not found in the narratives of either Matthew or Mark. Since Luke incorporates both sayings, we shall confine ourselves to the passage as found in Luke, which says: “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, ‘the old is good’” (Luke 5:37-39).

**“New Wine”: Fermented or Unfermented?** The phrase “new wine” (*oinos neos*) occurs in the New Testament only in this passage and those parallel to it. The question here is the nature of the “new wine.” Is it fermented or unfermented? A common view is that it denotes wine recently pressed, but already in a state of active fermentation. Such wine, it is said, could only be safely placed in new wineskins, because they alone were elastic enough to withstand the pressure of the gas-producing fermentation.

This view is expressed, for example, by Jimmy L. Albright in his dissertation on “Wine in the Biblical World.” He writes: “The biblical

mention of bursting wineskins (Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37) shows that gas-producing fermentation took place in the wines produced in Israel, a chemical action that began within a few hours after the pressing of the grapes. The juice usually had begun to ferment as it stood in the lower pressing vats but was soon poured into jars or into skins. . . . Freshly made wine was put into new wineskins; old skins would burst under the pressure.”<sup>30</sup>

In a similar vein R. C. Lenski comments: “When it is fresh, the skin stretches to a degree, but when it is old it becomes stiff and bursts quickly under pressure. People therefore never put new wine, which still ferments and causes pressure, into old, dried-out skins.”<sup>31</sup>

This popular interpretation is very imaginative but not factual. Anyone familiar with the pressure caused by the gas-producing fermentation knows that no bottle, whether of skin or glass, can withstand such pressure. Job knew this when he said: “Behold, my heart is like wine that has no vent; like *new wineskins*, it is ready to burst” (Job 32:19). The *Encyclopedia Biblica* acknowledges this fact, saying: “It is impossible that the must could ever have been put into skins to undergo the whole process of fermentation, as is usually stated, the action of the gas given off in the early stages of the process being much too violent for any skins to withstand. Where a large quantity of grapes had to be trodden, it was necessary to relieve the wine vat by transferring the must immediately to earthenware jars, of which the Jews possessed a large variety.”<sup>32</sup>

**Unfermented Grape Juice.** “The difficulty connected with this parabolic word,” as Alexander B. Bruce rightly points out, “is not critical or exegetical, but scientific. The question has been raised: could even new, tough skins stand the process of fermentation?” The answer is obviously negative. Thus, Bruce himself suggests that “Jesus was not thinking at all of fermented, intoxicating wine, but of ‘must,’ a non-intoxicating beverage, which could be kept safely in new leather bottles, but not in old skins which had previously contained ordinary wine, because particles of albuminoid matter adhering to the skin would set up fermentation and develop gas with an enormous pressure.”<sup>33</sup>

Some argue that the “new wine” spoken of must have been “a new wine which had not fully fermented, but which had come so near the completion of that process that it could with safety be put into new skins, whose elasticity would be sufficient to resist the ‘after-fermentation’ which would ensue.”<sup>34</sup> The weakness of this hypothesis is twofold. First, wine which was near the completion of the process of fermentation could have safely been stored in old wineskins as well, because the neck opening would

have provided an adequate release for the remaining fermenting gas. Second, the fermentation process, when permitted, was carried on not in wineskins, but in large jars, known as *habith* in Hebrew and *dolium* to the Romans.<sup>35</sup>

*The only “new wine” which could be stored safely in new wineskins was unfermented must, after it had been filtered or boiled.* The skin would be prepared like the amphora, by smearing it with honey or pitch, and after the must was poured in, it would be tightly closed and sealed. The reason that a *new* skin was required for *new* wine is that an old skin would almost inevitably have, as Lees and Burns explain, “some of the decayed albuminous matter adhering to their sides.”<sup>36</sup> This would cause the new wine to ferment. On the other hand, if new wineskins were used to store unfermented new wine, no fermentation-causing agents would be present in the skins themselves. Thus, the wine would be preserved from fermentation and the wineskins from rupture.

**A Pagan Testimony.** It is significant to note in this regard that Columella, the renowned Roman agriculturist who was a contemporary of the apostles, emphasizes the need to use a *new amphora* to preserve fresh must unfermented: “That must may remain always sweet as though it were fresh, do as follows. Before the grape-skins are put under the press, take from the vat some of the freshest possible must and put it in a *new wine-jar* [*amphoram novam*], then daub it over and cover it carefully with pitch, that thus no water may be able to get in. Then sink the whole flagon in a pool of cold, fresh water so that no part of it is above the surface. Then after forty days take it out of the water. The must will then keep sweet for as much as a year.”<sup>37</sup>

A similar method was used with new wineskins, which were prepared, like the amphora, by being smeared with honey and pitch, and after being filled with must, were sealed and buried in the earth. Any of the processes described in the previous chapter, such as filtration, boiling, exclusion of air, sulphur fumigation, and reduction of the temperature below 40° F. (4° Celsius), would have been counted on to ensure the preservation of the new wine unfermented in new wineskins. Any two or all of these methods could be combined to ensure the prevention of fermentation.

**The Meaning of the Saying.** This interpretation is further confirmed by the symbolic meaning of Christ’s saying. The imagery of new wine in new wineskins is an object lesson in regeneration. As fittingly explained by Ernest Gordon, “The old wineskins, with their alcoholic lees, represented the Pharisees’ corrupt nature. The new wine of the Gospel could not be put into them. They would ferment it. ‘I came not to call the self-righteous but repentant sinners.’ The latter by their conversion become new vessels, able

to retain the new wine without spoiling it (Mark 2:15-17, 22). So, by comparing intoxicating wine with degenerate Pharisaism, Christ clearly intimated what his opinion of intoxicating wine was."<sup>38</sup>

"It is well to notice," Ernest Gordon continues, "how in this casual illustration, he [Christ] identifies wine altogether with unfermented wine. Fermented wine is given no recognition. It could be put into any kind of wineskin, however sorry and corrupt. But new wine is like new cloth which is too good to be used in patching rags. It is a thing clean and wholesome, demanding a clean container. The natural way in which this illustration is used suggests at least a general, matter-of-fact understanding among his Jewish hearers that the real fruit of the vine, the good wine, was unfermented."<sup>39</sup>

### PART 3

#### IS OLD WINE IS BETTER?

**Importance of the Saying.** In Luke Christ's saying about new wine in fresh wineskins is followed by a similar and yet different statement: "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good'" (Luke 5:39). Though this statement is not found in the other Gospels, it forms an integral part of the narrative. Moderationists attach fundamental importance to this statement because it contains, in their view, Christ's outspoken commendation of alcoholic wine. Kenneth L. Gentry, for example, speaks of "the well-nigh universal prevalence of men to prefer old (fermented) wine over new (pre- or unfermented) wine. The Lord himself makes reference to this assessment among men in Luke 5:39: 'And no one, after drinking old wine, wishes for new; for he says, The old is good enough.'"<sup>40</sup>

Everett Tilson sees Luke 5:39 as one of the most challenging texts against those who favor abstinence. He writes: "This attempt to defend Jesus' preference for the 'new' [unfermented] to the 'old' [fermented] wine falls victim to the passage in Luke 5:39, long one of the most difficult passages for biblical literalists who favor abstinence. Without a word of criticism, as if expressing a truism with which he himself agrees, Luke records Jesus as saying: 'And no one after drinking old wine desires new.' Why? 'The old is good,' he answers (5:39)—though far more likely to be both fermented and intoxicating!"<sup>41</sup>

**Meaning of "New Wine."** The first question to address in our study of this passage is whether the "new wine" here has the same meaning as in the two preceding verses. Some think it does not. They see the "new wine" of

---

verse 38 as being wine not fully fermented and that of verse 39 as fully fermented wine but without the mellowness which comes with age. Lees and Burns, the authors of *The Temperance Bible-Commentary*, favor the view that the “new wine” of verse 38 is “identical in nature, and representative of the same Christian blessings, with the ‘old wine’ of verse 39—being the new *preserved* and *improved* by age.”<sup>42</sup>

The meaning of “new wine” in this passage cannot be determined by its general usage in Scripture because in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the phrase *oinos neos*—“new wine” is used to translate both fermented wine as in Job 32:19 and unfermented grape juice as in Isaiah 49:26. In the latter it translates the Hebrew *asis* which designates unfermented grape juice.

In the passage under consideration it is legitimate to infer that “new wine” has the same meaning in the whole passage, because it is used consecutively without any intimation of change of meaning. The metaphors in both sayings are used without confusion or contradiction. This means that if the “new wine” of verse 38 is, as shown earlier, unfermented grape juice, the same must be true of the “new wine” of verse 39.

**Meaning of “Old Wine.”** Before discussing whether or not Christ expressed a judgment on the superior quality of “old wine” over “new wine,” it is important to determine whether the “old wine” spoken of is fermented or unfermented. From the viewpoint of quality, age “improves” the flavor not only of fermented wine but also of unfermented grape juice. Though no chemical change occurs, grape juice acquires a finer flavor by being kept, as its fine and subtle particles separate from the albuminous matter and other sedimentations. Thus, the “old wine” esteemed good could refer to grape juice preserved and improved by age.

The context, however, favors the meaning of fermented wine, since Christ uses the metaphor of the “old wine” to represent the old forms of religion and the “new wine” the new form of religious life He taught and inaugurated. In this context, fermented old wine better represents the corrupted forms of the old Pharisaic religion.

**Is “Old Wine” Better?** In the light of this conclusion, it remains to be determined if Christ by this saying is expressing a value judgment on the superiority of “old [fermented] wine” over “new wine.” A careful reading of the text indicates that the one who says “The old is good” is not Christ but anyone who has been drinking “old wine.” In other words, Christ is not uttering His own opinion, but the opinion of those who have acquired a taste

for the old wine. He says simply that anyone who has acquired a taste for old wine does not care for new. We know this to be the case. Drinking alcoholic beverages begets an appetite for stimulants and not for alcohol-free juices.

Christ's saying does not represent His judgment regarding the superiority of old, fermented wine. Several commentators emphasize this point. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Norval Geldenhuys says: "The point at issue here has nothing to do with the comparative merits of old and new wine, but refers to the predilection for old wine in the case of those who are accustomed to drink it."<sup>43</sup>

The same point is emphasized by Henry Alford in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke. He says: "Observe that there is *no objective comparison whatever* here between old and new wine; the whole stress is on *desireth* and *for he saith*, and the import of *better* is *subjective*: in the view of him who utters it."<sup>44</sup> R. C. H. Lenski states the same truth most concisely: "It is not Jesus who calls the old wine 'good enough,' but he that drank it. A lot of old wine is decidedly bad because it has not been prepared properly; age is one thing, excellence with age quite another."<sup>45</sup>

In a similar vein, Dr. Jack Van Impe writes: "Does not Jesus say [in Luke 5:39] that old wine is better? Not at all. He simply says that one *who has been drinking* old wine says it is better. This shows the Lord's understanding of the habit-forming effect of beverage alcohol. His statement stands true today. Try to sell grape juice on skid row and you will probably have no takers. Those who drink old wine (intoxicating wine) prefer it. They are hooked on it. . . . The secondary message of the parable, then, actually argues for the superiority of new (unfermented) wine, using it as a picture of salvation."<sup>46</sup>

**The Context of the "Old Wine."** The view that old, fermented wine is better than new wine, would be false even if everyone on earth believed it! And in the passage we are considering is contradicted by the context in which it occurs and by the whole purpose of the illustration. In the immediate context Jesus uses the same word (*palaios*) of old garments, which He obviously did not esteem as better than new ones. The statement about "old wine" seems to contradict the preceding one about "old garment," but the contradiction disappears when one understands the purpose of the illustration.

In his article on "*oinos*" ("Wine") in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Heinrich Seeseman notes the apparent contradiction and the significance of the context: "Luke 5:39 seems to contradict what goes before, since it favors the retention of the old. In the context of Luke, however, it is regarded as a warning against over-estimation of the old."<sup>47</sup>

The purpose of the illustration is not to praise the superiority of old wine but to warn against an over-estimation of the old forms of religiosity promoted by the Pharisees. Such religiosity consisted, as verse 33 indicates, in the fulfillment of such external ascetic practices as frequent fasting and public prayer. To justify the fact that His disciples did not adhere to such external forms of religiosity, Christ used four illustrations: wedding guests do not fast in the presence of the bridegroom (vv. 34-35); new cloth is not used to patch an old garment (v. 36); new wine is not placed in old wineskins (vv. 37-38); new wine is not liked by those accustomed to drink the old (v. 39).

The common purpose of all the four illustrations is to help people accustomed to the old forms of religion, and unacquainted with the new form of religious life taught by Christ, to recognize that the old seems good only so long as one is not accustomed to the new, which in and of itself is better.

In this context, the old fermented wine seems good only to those who do not know the better new wine. In his book *Alcohol and the Bible*, Stephen Reynolds perceptively points out the broader implications of Christ's illustration about the old wine. He says: "Christ warns against the over-estimation of Pharisaism (old wine), but the figure of speech carries with it more than the thought that the Gospel should be regarded more highly than Pharisaism. It also strongly suggests that to those who are perceptive of truth, new wine (unfermented grape juice) is preferable to old (intoxicating) wine. Only the natural man with corrupted taste thinks otherwise."<sup>48</sup>

## PART 4

### WAS JESUS A GLUTTON AND A DRUNKARD?

**Importance of the Text.** More than nineteen centuries ago it was said of Jesus: "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Matt 11:19; cf. Luke 7:34). A particular of this accusation has been repeated until today: Jesus was a drinking man! Lovers of alcoholic beverages love to affirm that Jesus was a drinking man in order to shelter themselves under the cover of His example.

The full text of this passage reads as follows: Jesus said: "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a glutton man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" (Luke 7:33-35).

Moderationists attach fundamental importance to this passage. Their reason is clear. They believe it offers an unmistakable proof that Jesus *used* alcoholic wine. While at the wedding of Cana Christ allegedly *made* fermented wine, and in His parables about the new wineskins and the old wine He *commended* alcoholic wine; in His description of His own lifestyle, He openly admitted to have *used* alcoholic wine.

Kenneth Gentry clearly states this argument, saying: “*Jesus himself drank wine*. As a matter of fact, in Luke 7:33-35 he makes reference to his practice of drinking wine as a vivid illustration of a distinctive difference between himself and his forerunner, John the Baptist.”<sup>49</sup>

Horace Bumstead expresses the same opinion even more emphatically, saying: “The Bible sanctions the use of wine by the example of Christ. This sanction is undeniable and emphatic. Undeniable because we have the statement of fact in Christ’s own words; emphatic because his example as a user of wine is expressly contrasted by himself with the example of his forerunner, John the Baptist, who, being a Nazarite, was an abstainer from wine.”<sup>50</sup>

Irving Raymond views Christ’s contrast to John as a “direct evidence” of His drinking habits. He writes: “Jesus Christ undoubtedly followed the usual customs of His day and drank wine at daily meals and at different kinds of celebrations. For proof of his assertion there is direct evidence both from what others said of Him and from what He Himself actually did. In contrast to St. John the Baptist, ‘The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber.’”<sup>51</sup> This reference constitutes for Raymond “sufficient grounds . . . to assert that not only did Jesus Christ Himself use and sanction the use of wine but also that He saw nothing intrinsically evil in wine.”<sup>52</sup>

**Two Different Lifestyles.** The reasoning that “John drank no wine, while Christ did, therefore we may drink” ignores several crucial considerations. First of all, the phrase “eating and drinking” is used idiomatically to describe not so much the difference in their eating and drinking habits, as the difference in their social lifestyles.

Christ’s lifestyle was eminently social; therefore, in the common parlance of that time, He came “eating and drinking,” even though He was dependent for food and drink upon the gracious hospitality of friends. John’s lifestyle was fundamentally eremitic—away from society in the solitude of the wilderness; therefore, in common parlance, he came “neither eating bread nor drinking wine”(NIV). The two phrases serve to emphasize the contrast between John’s lifestyle of full *social isolation* and Christ’s lifestyle of free *social association*. The emphasis is not on alcohol but on social lifestyle.



---

Ernest Gordon accurately describes the contrast implied by Christ's statement, saying: "It contrasts the isolation of John's life with the social character of Christ's. John was a wilderness prophet. He neither ate nor drank *with others* and avoided human companionship. Into the wilderness were driven the insane and devil-possessed. Hence the suggestion that he himself was of this class. Our Lord associated freely with others at meals and elsewhere. He too was slandered, called a glutton, and charged with being *oinopotes, a drinker* of (intoxicating) wine. There is no proof that he was either."<sup>53</sup>

**Two Different Missions.** The difference in lifestyle between Jesus and John is indicative of their different missions. John was called to prepare the way for Christ's ministry by preaching a message of repentance and reformation. In order to fulfill this mission he was called to rebuke the excesses of his time by living an abstemious life in the wilderness, away from the haunts of people. Jesus was anointed to another mission, which included proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. In order to fulfill this mission Jesus did not withdraw into the wilderness, but reached the people in their homes, towns and villages.

As the austerity of John's lifestyle led his slanderers to charge him with being demon-possessed, so the sociability of Jesus' lifestyle led the same critics to charge Him with indulgence in sensuous delights, with being "a glutton and a drunkard." Both charges were groundless, because both Jesus and John lived exemplary lives of self-denial. They followed different lifestyles because they had their different mission.

**John, a Nazirite.** An important reason for Jesus' saying of John the Baptist that he came "drinking no wine" (Luke 7:33), is the fact that John was a Nazirite from his mother's womb. This is the way most commentators interpret Luke 1:15, where the angel instructs Zechariah regarding John, saying: "He shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." Nazirites were people who showed their total consecration to God by abstaining not only from "wine and strong drink" but also from grape juice and grapes (Num 6:1-4).

Jesus, not being a Nazirite, was not under the obligation to abstain from drinking grape juice, made from the fruit of the vine. We know He drank at the Last Supper. It is not necessary to assume that because Jesus, contrary to John, "came drinking," that He drank *all* kinds of wine, both fermented and unfermented. If that were true for drinking, the same would be true for eating. Yet, no one is arguing that Jesus ate all kinds of food, both good and bad, clean and unclean.

Of whatever food or drink the Lord consumed, it was healthful designed to provide for His physical needs and not to gratify self-indulgence. “My food,” Jesus said, “is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). It is hard to believe that Jesus would have fulfilled His Father’s will by partaking of intoxicating wine which the Scripture clearly condemns. Thus, it is unwarranted to assume that the kind of food and drink Jesus consumed was calculated to gratify an intemperate appetite robbing Him of clear mental perception and spiritual affection.

**No Mention of “Wine.”** Another significant point often overlooked is that Jesus did not mention “wine” in describing His own lifestyle. While of John the Baptist Jesus said that he came “eating no bread and drinking no wine,” of Himself He simply said: “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking.” Some argue that the antithetic parallelism, in which the thought of the first statement is contrasted with the opposite in the second statement, “demands that ‘wine’ be understood to be assumed in the second part of the statement.”<sup>54</sup>

The argument seems plausible but the fact remains that if Jesus had wanted it known that, contrary to John the Baptist He was a wine-drinker, then He could have repeated the word “wine” for the sake of emphasis and clarity. By refusing to specify what kinds of food or drink He consumed, Christ may well have wished to deprive His critics of any basis for their charge of gluttony and drunkenness. The omission of “bread” and “wine” in the second statement (Matthew omits them in both statements) could well have been intended to expose the senselessness of the charge. In other words, Jesus appears to have said, “My critics accuse me of being a glutton and drunkard, just because I do not take meals alone but eat often in the presence of other people. I eat *socially*. But my critics actually do not know *what* I eat.”

**Drunk with Grape Juice?** Some argue, “Were it the case that Jesus did *not* drink wine, how could it be alleged that he was a drunkard?”<sup>55</sup> The assumption is that Christ could have never been accused of being a drunkard unless He drank alcoholic wine, for the simple reason that grape juice does not make a person drunk.

The weakness of this assumption is its failure to realize that the charge is a lie, based not on factual observations but on a fiction fabricated by unscrupulous critics. Assuming that His critics actually saw Jesus drinking something, they would have readily accused Him of being a drunkard, even if they saw Him drinking grape juice, or water, for that matter. On the day of Pentecost, as we shall see in Chapter 6, critics charged the apostles with being drunk on grape-juice (*gleukos*—Acts 2:13). This goes to show that no matter what Jesus drank, His unscrupulous critics would have maligned Him as a drunkard.

**Critics' Charge.** To infer that Jesus must have drunk wine because His critics accused Him of being a “drunkard” means to accept as truth the word of Christ’s enemies. On two other occasions his critics accused Jesus, saying: “You have a demon” (John 7:20; 8:48). If we believe that Christ must have drunk some alcoholic wine because His critics accused Him of being a drunkard, then we must also believe that He had an evil spirit because His critics accused Him of having a demon. The absurdity of such reasoning shows that using critics’ accusations is not safe grounds for defining Biblical teachings.

Jesus answered the baseless charge of His critics, saying: “Yet wisdom is justified by all her children” (Luke 7:35). Textual evidence is divided between “children” and “works,” but the meaning of this cryptic statement remains the same, namely, that wisdom is to be judged by its results. The wisdom of God is vindicated by the works of goodness to which it gives birth. Thus, to infer that Jesus drank wine because of the aspersions of His critics shows a complete lack of wisdom. The results of His life of self-denial speak for themselves.

## PART 5

### THE COMMUNION WINE

**Importance of the Episode.** Christ’s use of “wine” at the Last Supper to represent His redeeming blood (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24) is seen by moderationists as the clinching proof of the Lord’s approval of its use. Horace Bumstead expresses this conviction emphatically, saying: “To secure the permanence of his example in regard to [alcoholic] wine even to the remotest parts of the earth and to the latest periods of history, he [Christ] chooses wine for one of the elements to be employed in his memorial feast throughout all lands and during all ages.”<sup>56</sup>

Fundamental importance is attached to the “wine” of the Last Supper because Christ not only used it, but even *commanded it to be used until the end of time*. The sequence in which the “wine” episodes have been examined in this chapter reflects somehow the order of importance attributed to them by moderationists. They claim that at the wedding of Cana Christ *made* alcoholic wine; in the parables of the new wineskins and of the old wine, He *commended* alcoholic wine; in His description of His lifestyle (“eating and drinking”) He admitted having *used* alcoholic wine; and in the account of the *Last Supper*, He *commanded* alcoholic wine to be used until the end of time.

The first three claims have already been examined and found unwarranted. It remains now to examine the last. This we shall do by looking at two major arguments.

### 1. Is the “Fruit of the Vine” Alcoholic Wine?

**“Fruit of the Vine.”** After offering the cup to His disciples as the symbol of His blood of the new covenant, Jesus said: “I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt 26:29; cf. Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). Moderationists maintain that the phrase “fruit of the vine” is a figurative expression which was used as “a functional equivalent for [fermented] ‘wine.’”<sup>57</sup> Consequently the cup Jesus offered to the disciples contained alcoholic wine.

It is true that the phrase “fruit of the vine” was *sometimes* used as equivalent to *oinos* (wine), but that does not mean that the wine used at the Last Supper must have been fermented. We have shown in Chapter 2 that *oinos*, like the Hebrew *yayin*, was a generic term for the expressed juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, uses *oinos* to translate *yayin* and *tiros* in such passages as Jeremiah 40:10-11 and Judges 9:13, where the idea of fermentation is *excluded*.

**Josephus’ Testimony.** More important still is the fact that the phrase “fruit of the vine” was used to designate fresh, unfermented grape juice. A clear example is provided by the Jewish historian, Josephus, who was a contemporary of the apostles. Writing about the dream of Pharaoh’s cupbearer who had been imprisoned with Joseph, he says: “He therefore said that in his sleep he saw three clusters of grapes hanging upon three branches of a vine . . . and that he squeezed them into a cup which the king held in his hands; and when he had strained the wine, he gave it to the king to drink.”<sup>58</sup> In interpreting the dream, Joseph told the cupbearer to “to expect to be loosed from his bonds in three days’ time, because the king desired his service, and was about to restore him to it again; for he let him know that God bestows *the fruit of the vine* upon men for good; which wine is poured out to him and is a pledge of fidelity and mutual confidence among men.”<sup>59</sup>

Two things are significant about this passage. First, Josephus calls the juice that was squeezed from the three clusters of grapes (*gleukos*), which William Whiston translated as “wine,” because at the time of his translation, namely in 1737, “wine” meant grape juice, whether fermented or unfermented. In this case the context clearly indicates that *gleukos* was freshly

---

squeezed grape-juice. Second, Josephus explicitly calls the freshly squeezed grape-juice “the fruit of the vine” (*gennema tes ampelou*). *This establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt that the phrase “fruit of the vine” was used to designate the sweet, unfermented juice of the grape.*

Considering how often the New Testament writers mention the Last Supper, their entire avoidance of the term *oinos* (wine) in its connection is remarkable. The two terms used instead are “the cup” and “the fruit of the vine.” The consistent avoidance of the term “wine,” especially by Paul in his extended description of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34), suggests that they may have wished to distinguish the content of the cup from what was commonly known as fermented wine.

**Natural Produce.** Christ calls the content of the cup “the fruit of the vine” (*gennema tes ampelou*). The noun *gennema* (fruit) derives from the verb *gennaō*, to beget or produce, and signifies that which is produced in a natural state, just as it is gathered. In Luke 12:18, for example, the rich man who had a plentiful harvest says: “I will pull down my barns and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain (*ta gennemata* “produce”) and my goods.” The basic meaning of *gennema*, as this and other examples in the Septuagint (Gen 41:34; 47:24; Ex 23:10) indicate, is the natural fruit or produce of the earth.

In our particular case it can best apply to grape juice as the natural produce of the grapes, which are “the fruit of the vine.” Josephus, as we have just seen, offers us a clear example of this meaning. Fermented wine is not the natural “fruit of the vine” but the unnatural fruit of fermentation and disintegration. To apply the phrase “the fruit of the vine” to alcoholic wine which is the product of fermentation and decay, as Frederic Lees puts it, “is just the same absurdity as to call death the fruit of life.”<sup>60</sup> It is also absurd to imagine that the “fruit of the vine” that Christ promised to drink again with His followers in the Kingdom, will be fermented wine. We have reasons to hope that the new earth will be free from intoxicating substances.

It seems that in His divine wisdom Christ chose to designate the content of the cup, the memorial of His redeeming blood, “the fruit of the vine” so that future generations of Christians would find no sanction in His words for using alcoholic wine at the Lord’s Supper.

It is noteworthy that the word “vine” is used only on two occasions in the Gospels, and both are in the context of the Last Supper: the first time occurs in the account of the celebration of the Last Supper, as just noted, and the second in Christ’s parting counsel to His disciples following the Supper (John 15:1, 4, 5). In the latter instance, Jesus represents Himself as the

---

genuine living vine and His disciples as the branches dependent upon Him for spiritual life and fruitfulness. The sequence suggests that after Jesus offered to His disciples the natural “fruit of the vine” as the memorial of His redeeming blood, He presented Himself to them as the “living vine” to encourage His disciples to abide in Him as the branches abide in the vine, so that they also, who had just partaken of “the fruit of the vine,” might bear “much fruit” (John 15:5). The “fruit” in both instances is a fresh, natural product which can hardly be identified with fermented wine.

## 2. Was the Passover Wine Alcoholic?

**Jewish Practice.** A second major argument used to defend the alcoholic nature of the wine contained in the “cup” of the Last Supper, is the alleged prevailing Jewish custom of using fermented wine at Passover. As Everett Tilson puts it, “If the Jews of Jesus’ time knew of the prohibition of ordinary wine during this period, it seems strange that the Mishnah in its six thousand words of directions for the observance of the Passover should contain no allusion whatever to it.”<sup>61</sup>

This argument deserves serious consideration because if it is really true that at the time of Christ, the Jews used only fermented wine for the customary four cups drunk during the Passover meal, it would be possible though not inevitable, that Jesus used fermented wine was used during the Last Supper.

We must never forget that Christ’s teachings and practices were not necessarily conditioned by prevailing customs. Jesus often acted contrary to prevailing religious customs of fasting, hand-washing, and burdensome Sabbathkeeping. In fact, His independent spirit is revealed in the very institution of the Lord’s Supper. He offered to His disciples the symbolic cup only once, instead of the customary four times, and He used only the bread as the symbol of His body, leaving out the roasted lamb and the bitter herbs as symbols of the ordinance. Thus, it would not have been surprising if Christ had acted contrary to prevailing custom by using unfermented grape juice, especially since He viewed leaven or fermentation as the symbol of moral corruption (Matt 16:6, 12).

**No Preference Given to Fermented Wine.** But Jesus may not have needed to act against a prevailing custom. There are indications that there was no uniformity in the use of Passover wine by the Jews. Such absence of uniformity is present among modern Jews as well. Louis Ginzberg (1873-1941), a distinguished Talmudic scholar who for almost forty years was chairman of the Talmudic and Rabbinic Department at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, provides what is perhaps the most exhaustive analysis of the Talmudic references regarding the use of wine in Jewish religious ceremonies.

He concludes his investigation, by saying: “We have thus proven on the basis of the main passages both of the Babylonian Talmud and that of Jerusalem that unfermented wine may be used *lekatehillah* [optionally] for *Kiddush* [the consecration of a festival by means of a cup of wine] and other religious ceremonies outside the temple. In the temple its use is sanctioned only *bediabad* [after the act]. Indeed, in no way is fermented wine to be given any preference over unfermented in the ceremonies outside the temple. Raba summarizes the law well in the statement: ‘One may press the juice of grapes and immediately recite the *kiddush* over it.’”<sup>62</sup>

After examining the views of two Jewish codes regarding the use of fermented wine in Jewish religious ceremonies, Ginzberg again concludes: “It is thus seen that according to the views of the two most generally accepted Jewish codes, the *Tur* and the *Shulham* ‘*Aruk*, no precedence whatever is given to fermented over unfermented wines. It is not even *mitzvah min hamubhar* [a priority commandment] to use fermented wines.”<sup>63</sup>

Ginberg’s conclusion is confirmed by *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. In its article on “Jesus” it says: “According to the synoptic Gospels, it would appear that on the Thursday evening of the last week of his life Jesus with his disciples entered Jerusalem in order to eat the Passover meal with them in the sacred city; if so, the wafer and the wine of the mass or the communion service then instituted by him as a memorial would be the unleavened bread and the unfermented wine of the Seder service (see Bickell, *Messe und Pascha*, Leipsic, 1872).”<sup>64</sup>

John Kitto’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* also refers to the use of unfermented wine at the Passover meal: “The wine used would of course be unfermented, but it is not certain that it was always the fresh expressed juice or ‘pure blood of the grape’ (Deut 32:14); for the Mishnah states that the Jews were in the habit of using *boiled wine*. ‘They do not boil the wine of the heave-offering, *because it diminishes it*,’ and consequently thickens it, thus rendering the mingling of water with it when drunk necessary; but it is immediately added, ‘Rabbi Yehudah permits this, *because it improves it*’ (*Teromoth Perek*, c. xi).”<sup>65</sup>

**A Rabbinical Fabrication.** Testimonies such as these clearly discredit the claim that only fermented wine was used at the time of Christ during the Passover meal. It would appear that unfermented wine was also used at Passover. The references to fermented wine, according to Lees and Burns, are not found in the text of the *Mishnah* itself—a collection of Jewish expositions and customs compiled about A.D. 200 by Rabbi Yehuda—but in later annotations of the Talmud: “The Talmud was copiously annotated by

Maimonides and Bartenora, celebrated rabbins of the Middle Ages; and it is from their notes, and not from the text of the Mishnah, that references to the intoxicating nature of Passover wine have been extracted.”<sup>66</sup>

The Mishnah expressly specifies that the search for ferment on the night of the Passover extended to the cellars where all the fermented beverages made from grain were to be excluded. These included the *cutakh* of Babylon, the *sheker* of the Medes, and the *hamets* of Idumea. Maimonides and Bartenora, distinguished Spanish rabbis of the twelfth century, in their comments on the Mishnah, argue that the prohibition of fermented drinks applies only to liquors made from grain, but not to those made from fruits. The reason given by Maimonides is that “the liquor of fruit does not engender fermentation, but acidity.”<sup>67</sup>

It is hard to imagine that some rabbis could believe in good faith that fruit beverages such as wine do not ferment. One wonders whether such an imaginative argument was not fabricated to legitimize the use of alcoholic wine. If that were true, it would only serve to show that Rabbis understood that the law of the Passover prohibiting the use of any “fermented thing” (Ex 13:7) during the seven days of the feast, extended also to fermented wine.

**Later Testimonies.** There is much evidence that among the Jews the custom of using unfermented wine at Passover has survived through the centuries. The *Arba Turim*, a digest of Talmudic law compiled in the thirteenth century by Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, says of the four Passover cups: “If needful, he must sell what he has, in order to keep the injunction of the wise men. Let him sell what he has, until he procures *yayin or zimmoogim*—wine or raisins.”<sup>68</sup> Raisins were used to make Passover wine by boiling chopped raisins in water and then straining their juice. The learned Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel, in his book *Vindicia Judaeorum (The Claims of the Jews)*, published in Amsterdam, 1656), says of the Passover: “Here, at this feast, every confection [*matzoth*] ought to be so pure as not to admit of any *ferment* or of anything that will readily *fermentate*.”<sup>69</sup>

In his book on *Modern Judaism*, published in 1830, J. Allen writes regarding the Passover wine: “They [the Jews] are forbidden to drink any liquor made from grain, or *that has passed through the process of fermentation*. Their drink is either pure water or raisin-wine prepared by themselves.”<sup>70</sup>

Rabbi S. M. Isaac, an eminent nineteenth-century rabbi and editor of *The Jewish Messenger*, says: “The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, *including the marriage feast*, ever use any kind of fermented drinks. In their oblations and libations, both private and public, they employ the fruit



---

of the vine—that is, fresh grapes—unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction. Fermentation is to them always a symbol of corruption.”<sup>71</sup>

Rabbi Isaac’s statement is not quite accurate; Jewish sources are not unanimous on the kind of wine to be used at Passover. The eighth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1895) explains the reason for the conflicting views: “Wine also to the quantity of four or five cups was drunk by each person. Considerable dispute has been raised as to whether the wine used on this occasion was fermented or unfermented,—was the ordinary wine, in short, or the pure juice of the grape. Those who hold it was unfermented appeal mainly to the expression ‘unfermented things,’ which is the true rendering of the word translated ‘unleavened bread.’ The rabbins would seem to have interpreted the command respecting ferment as extending to the wine as well as to the bread of the passover. The modern Jews, accordingly, generally use raisin wine, after the injunction of the rabbins.”<sup>72</sup>

The last statement is not quite correct either, for we have seen not all rabbis extended the law of “unfermented things’ to the wine. The two different interpretations of the Mosaic law regarding “unfermented things” (Ex 13:7) are indicative of different religious traditions among the Jews. The Orthodox Jews, who are conservative, use mostly unfermented wine, while the Reformed Jews, who are liberal, use mostly fermented wine.

In the introduction to his compilation of Talmudic statements regarding wine and strong drink, Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz, an Orthodox Jew, says: “The four cups of wine used at the Seder table (the table set in order with Passover symbols in accordance with the ritual), on Passover night, at the home service are not ordained in the Jewish Bible. Moses, the Prophets in Israel and the Men of the Great Synod have never prescribed or commanded the drinking of wine or any other intoxicating liquors at any religious function whatever. This custom is but a Rabbinic institution.

“Yet, the greatest Rabbinic authority in orthodox Israel of today, namely, the ‘Shulchan Aruch,’ clearly and distinctly permits the use of ‘boiled wine’ (raisins boiled in water), for the four cups of wine at the Seder table. “It is permissible to recite the prescribed *Kiddush* (sanctification), on Passover night, over boiled wine and over wine mixed with honey. (*Shulchun Aruch Druch Chayim* Cup 273, parag. 9).”<sup>73</sup>

Our sampling of both ancient and modern Jewish testimonies, should suffice to discredit the claim that only fermented wine was used at the time of Christ during the Passover meal. The Jews differed in their practice of this

matter as they were influenced by two different rabbinical interpretations of the Mosaic prescription regarding the exclusion of “fermented things” from their dwellings during Passover.

Our ultimate concern is to determine not the Jewish custom but the conduct of Christ. On this, as we shall see, there can be no controversy. Christ would not have ignored the law regarding fermentation (Ex 13:6-7) by celebrating Passover with fermented wine, which could not have served fittingly to represent His incorruptible life-giving blood.

### 3. Jesus Used the *Unfermented* “Fruit of the Vine”

The foregoing discussion has dealt with two of the major arguments advanced in favor of the fermented nature of Passover wine. Another important argument, namely, the alleged exclusive use of fermented wine for the Lord’s Supper during Christian history will be examined later in this chapter. At this point I wish to present four major reasons for supporting the Saviour’s use of the *unfermented* “fruit of the vine” at the Last Supper.

**Obedience to the Mosaic Law.** Jesus used unfermented grape juice at the Last Supper because He understood and observed the Mosaic law requiring the absence of all fermented articles during the Passover feast. The law forbade the use and presence in the house of *seor* (Ex 12:15), which means leaven, yeast or whatever can produce fermentation. As Leon C. Field explains, “It means literally ‘the sourer,’ and is applicable to any matter capable of producing fermentation—to all yeastily or decaying albuminous substances—and so may be translated ‘ferment.’”<sup>74</sup>

Whatever had been subject to the action of *seor*—that is fermentation, was also forbidden. This was called *hametz* and is translated “leavened bread” in the KJV (Ex 12:15; 13:7). The word “bread,” however, is not in the text; thus a more accurate translation is “fermented thing.” For seven days the Jews were to partake of *matzoth*, usually translated “unleavened bread” (Ex 13:6-7). As in the case of *hametz*, the word “bread” is not in the text, thus, a more accurate translation is “unfermented things.”

This translation is confirmed by Robert Young, author of *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. In his *Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible*, Young renders Exodus 12:14, 19 as follows: “. . . for anyone eating anything fermented from the first day till the seventh day, even that person hath been cut off from Israel. . . anything fermented ye do not eat, in all your dwellings ye do not eat leavened things.” Thus the entire passage of Exodus 13:6-7 may with literal accuracy be rendered: “Seven days you shall eat of unfermented things, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord.

---

Unfermented things shall be eaten for seven days; no fermented thing shall be seen with you in all your territory.”

Compliance with the Mosaic law would require the exclusion of fermented wine. The rabbis debated this question at great length and, as we have seen, some circumvented the law by arguing that the juice of fruits, such as wine, do not ferment. There is no reason to believe that Jesus, who had come to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17), would violate the Passover law against the use of “fermented things,” especially since He recognized and affirmed the moral symbolism of fermentation when He warned His disciples to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt 16:6). “Leaven” for Christ represented corrupt nature and teachings, as the disciples later understood (Matt 16:12).

Paul gives to “leaven” the same symbolic meaning when he admonishes the Corinthians to “cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:7-8).

The exclusion of fermented things during the Passover feast was *not* merely to remind the Israelites of the haste with which they left Egypt (Deut 16:3), having no time to put leaven in their dough. This is evident from Exodus 12:8, 39 where the command to eat unleavened bread was given before the departure from Egypt, when there was plenty of time for the dough to rise.

The primary purpose of the law against leaven is found in the symbolic meaning Scripture attaches to leaven which, as we have seen, is sin and corruption. Ellen White brings out this purpose of the law, saying: “Among the Jews, leaven was sometimes used as an emblem of sin. At the time of the Passover the people were directed to remove all the leaven from their houses, as they were to put away sin from their hearts.”<sup>75</sup> If ferment, the symbol of corruption and insincerity, was out of place at the Jewish Passover, how much more unsuitable it should be at the Christian Lord’s Supper!

The symbolic, moral significance attached to leaven is further indicated by its exclusion from the cereal offering (Lev 2:11), the sin offering (Lev 6:17), the consecration offering (Ex 29:2), the Nazarite offering (Num 6:15) and the showbread (Lev 24:5-9). But salt, because it represents preservation from corruption, was required with sacrifices: “With all your offerings you shall offer salt” (Lev 2:13). If leaven was not allowed with the sacrifices, which were a type of Christ’s atoning blood, how much more out of place would be fermented wine to represent His atoning blood!

Jesus understood the meaning of the letter and spirit of the Mosaic law regarding “unfermented things,” as indicated by His teaching (Matt 16:6, 12). This gives us reason to believe that the cup He “blessed” and gave to His disciples did not contain any “fermented thing” prohibited by Scripture. We cannot imagine that our Lord disregarded a Biblical command by choosing fermented wine to perpetuate the memory of His sacrifice, of which all the other sacrifices were but types.

**Consistency of Symbol.** A second reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is the consistency and beauty of the blood symbolism which cannot be fittingly represented by fermented wine. Leaven, we have seen, was used by Christ to represent the corrupt teachings of the Pharisees and is viewed in Scripture as an emblem of sin and corruption. Could Christ have offered His disciples a cup of fermented wine to symbolize His untainted blood shed for the remission of our sins? Could the redeeming and cleansing blood of Christ have been represented aptly by an intoxicating cup which stands in the Scripture for human depravity and divine indignation?

We cannot conceive that Christ bent over to bless in grateful prayer a cup containing alcoholic wine which the Scripture warns us not to look at (Prov 23:31). A cup that intoxicates is a cup of cursing and not “the cup of blessing” (1 Cor 10:16); it is “the cup of demons” and not “the cup of the Lord” (1 Cor 10:21).

Up to that moment the redeeming blood of Christ had been represented by the blood of goats and bulls (Heb 9:13-14); henceforth the new emblem was to be the wine of the Lord’s Supper. The blood of Christ was free from defilement and corruption. There was no taint of sin in His veins. “He whom God raised up saw no corruption” (Acts 13:37) either in life or in death. To symbolize the purity of His blood (life) poured out for the remission of sin, Jesus took a cup and over its content, declared: “This is *my* blood” (Matt 26:28). The content of the cup could hardly have been fermented wine, because the latter cannot properly symbolize the incorruptible and precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18-19).

Fermented wine is an appropriate emblem for decay and death, for fermentation destroys most of the nutrients found in grape juice. On the other hand, unfermented grape juice, on account of its innocent and nutritious properties, is a proper symbol of the blessings of salvation and immortal life bestowed upon us through the blood of Christ. His blood is said to purify our “conscience from dead works” (Heb 9:14), but fermented wine weakens our moral inhibitions and awakens our baser passions, thus causing the defile-

ment of our consciences. Can such a product properly represent the cleansing power of Christ's redeeming blood? Hardly so. It is more fitted to represent moral disease and guilt than pardon and purification.

The value of a symbol is determined by its capacity to help us conceptualize and experience the spiritual reality it represents. Grape juice untouched by fermentation supplies life-sustaining nutrients to our bodies, thus it has the capacity for helping us to conceptualize and to experience the assurance of salvation represented by Christ's blood. Ellen White aptly says: "The Passover wine, untouched by fermentation, is on the table. These emblems Christ employs to represent His own unblemished sacrifice. Nothing corrupted by fermentation, the symbol of sin and death, could represent the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot'" (1 Pet 1:19).<sup>76</sup>

**The Language of the Last Supper.** A third reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is suggested by the language in which its institution is recorded. The words have been preserved with singular uniformity in the synoptic Gospels and almost in the same form in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We will briefly consider three phrases of the narrative.

After blessing and breaking the bread Jesus "took a cup" (Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23; cf. Luke 22:17; 1 Cor 11:25). Most authorities suggest that the reference is to the third of the four cups of the Passover meal, called the "cup of benediction" (*Cos ha-Berachah*). This cup by which the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted retained its name as "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10:16). Evidently the name was derived from the blessing Christ pronounced over its contents. Such could never be the intoxicating wine of which God clearly disapproves in the Scripture. As mentioned earlier, we cannot imagine Christ bending over prayerfully to bless a cup containing intoxicating wine. The supposition is sacrilegious. Such cup would be a cup of cursing rather than a cup of blessing, "the cup of demons" rather than "the cup of the Lord" (1 Cor 10:21).

After blessing the cup, Jesus gave it to His disciples and said: "*Drink of it, all of you*" (Matt 26:27, cf. Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17). Christ's invitation to drink the memorial cup of His blood is extended to "*all*" without exception. There is no reason that anyone should refuse the cup, if its content is unfermented, nutritious grape juice. But if its content is fermented, intoxicating wine, many of Christ's faithful followers cannot and should not partake of it.

The cup Jesus offered to His disciples contained not just a sip of wine, as do today's communion cups, but about three-quarters of a pint of wine. According to the Talmud, each person at Passover was supplied with at least

---

four cups of wine, and had permission to drink extra in between. Each cup, says J. B. Lightfoot, was to contain “not less than the fourth part of a quarter of a hin, besides what water was mingled with it.”<sup>77</sup> A hin contained twelve English pints, so the four cups would amount to three-quarters of a pint each.

Three pints of alcoholic wine is sufficient to make any person, except a heavy drinker, grossly intoxicated. This is apparently what happened to some of those who drank alcoholic wine at Passover. An example is its effect on Rabbi Judah. He drank no wine “except at religious ceremonies, such as . . . the Seder of Passover (four cups). The Seder wine affected him so seriously that he was compelled to keep his head swathed till the following feast-day—Pentecost.”<sup>78</sup>

To imagine that Christ would sanction such ill-effects by personally offering a sizeable cup of alcoholic wine to His disciples, is tantamount to destroying the moral integrity of His character. Believers who truly accept Christ as their sinless Saviour instinctively recoil from such a thought.

Christ commands “all” of His followers to drink the cup. If the content of the cup were alcoholic wine, not all Christians could drink. There are some to whom alcohol in any form is very harmful. Young children participate at the Lord’s table should certainly not touch wine. There are those to whom the simple taste or smell of alcohol awakens in them a dormant or conquered craving for alcohol. Could Christ, who taught us to pray “Lead us not into temptation,” have made His memorial table a place of irresistible temptation for some and of danger for all?

This may be a reason that the Catholic Church eventually decided to deny the cup to the laity, limiting it to the clergy. Protestants strongly object to this practice and have restored to the people the visible symbol which for several centuries was withheld from them. Yet, they also for reasons of safety have limited the amount of wine to a mouthful. The quantity of wine in the tiny cups is so small that it must be sipped rather than supped. The wine of the Lord’s Supper can never be taken *freely* and *festally* as long as it is alcoholic and intoxicating.

Another significant element of the language of the Last Supper is the phrase “*fruit of the vine*,” used by Jesus to describe the content of the cup. We noticed earlier that this designation best applies to natural, unfermented juice. Fermented wine is not the natural “fruit” of the vine but is the result of disintegrating forces. Thus, the very designation used by Christ, “fruit of the vine” supports the unfermented nature of the wine used at the Last Supper.

**The Survival of the Practice.** A fourth reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is the survival of such a practice among certain Christian groups or churches. A significant example is the apocryphal *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle*, which circulated in the third century. A heavenly voice instructs the local Bishop Plato, saying: “Read the Gospel and bring as an offering the holy bread; and having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when He rose from the dead on the third day.”<sup>79</sup> This is a clear testimony of the use of freshly pressed grape juice in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Another indication is provided by the view expressed by Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200), Bishop of Lyons, that the communion bread and wine are the first fruits offered to God: “Giving directions to His disciples to offer to God the first-fruits of His own created things . . . He [Christ] took that created thing, bread, and gave thanks, and said, ‘This is My body.’ And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong, He confessed to be His blood.”<sup>80</sup>

The concept of “the first fruits” was applied not only to the bread and wine, but also to the actual grapes and grain offered on the altar. In his classic study *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Joseph Bingham explains that some of the Canons of the African Church prescribe that “no other first-fruits are allowed to be offered at the altar but only grapes and corn, as being the materials of bread and wine, out of which the eucharist was taken.”<sup>81</sup> In some places the custom developed of distributing the actual grapes and grain together with the bread and wine. To rectify this innovation, the Council of Trullo (A.D. 692) ordered to have “a distinct consecration, and a distinct distribution, if the people were desirous to eat their first-fruits in the church.”<sup>82</sup> The identification of the communion bread and wine with the first-fruits and the consecration of grain and grapes as first-fruits distributed to the people together with bread and wine, indicates how the latter were perceived as the natural, unfermented produce of the land.

The practice of pressing preserved grapes directly into the communion cup is attested by the third Council of Braga (A.D. 675), which reports that Cyprian (died 258 A.D.) condemned those who “used no other wine but what they pressed out of the cluster of grapes that were then presented at the Lord’s table.”<sup>83</sup> Such a practice shows the concern of some Christians to obey Christ’s words by offering a genuine “fruit of the vine” made out of fresh or dried grapes presented and pressed at the Lord’s table.

Cyprian condemned not so much the use of freshly pressed wine (*expressum vinum*) but the failure to mix it with water. Apparently, the practice of mingling wine with water originated, as Leon C. Field points out, “not necessarily in the weakening of alcoholic wine, but in the thinning of boiled wines and the thick juices of the crushed grapes.”<sup>84</sup> Instructions in this regard had already been given three centuries before by Pope Julius I (A. D. 337) in a decree which says: “If necessary let the cluster be pressed into the cup and water mingled with it.”<sup>85</sup>

Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-1274) quotes and supports Julius’ decree, because “must has already the species of wine [*speciem vinum*] . . . consequently this sacrament can be made from must.”<sup>86</sup> The same view is expressed by other Western theologians such as Jacobus a Vitriaco, Dionysius Bonsalibi, and Johannes Belethus.<sup>87</sup> The latter speaks of the custom “well known in certain places” of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, especially on August 6, Day of the Transfiguration, with new wine or freshly squeezed grape juice: “Let us notice that on this same day the blood of Christ is set forth from new wine, if it can be found, or from ripe grapes pressed into the cup.”<sup>88</sup>

The use of unfermented wine is well documented, especially among Eastern Churches. Leon C. Field, G. W. Samson, Frederic Lees and Dawson Burns, provide valuable information in their respective studies about such churches as the Abyssinian Church, the Nestorian Church of Western Asia, the Christians of St. Thomas in India, the Coptic monasteries in Egypt, and the Christians of St. John in Persia, all of which celebrated the Lord’s Supper with unfermented wine made either with fresh or dried grapes.<sup>89</sup> The reader is referred to these authors for documentation and information about these oriental churches.

Our inquiry into several aspects of the communion wine, such as the Jewish Passover wine, the language of the Last Supper, the Passover law of fermentation, the consistency of the symbol, and the survival of the use of unfermented grape juice at the Lord’s Supper, has shown that all of these indicate our Lord used and commanded the use of unfermented, nutritious grape juice to perpetuate the memory of His blood shed for the remission of our sins.

## CONCLUSION

We have examined at considerable length the major wine-related stories or sayings of Jesus that are commonly used to prove that our Savior *made, commended, used* and *commanded* the use of alcoholic wine until the end of time. We have found these claims to rest on unfounded assumptions, devoid of textual, contextual and historical support.



The “good wine” Jesus *made* at Canaan was “good” not because of its high alcoholic content but because it was fresh, unfermented grape-juice. The “new wine” Jesus *commended* through the parable of the new wineskins is unfermented must, either boiled or filtered, because not even new wineskins could withstand the pressure of the gas produced by fermenting new wine. Jesus’ description of Himself as “eating and drinking” does *not* imply that He *used* alcoholic wine but that He associated with people freely at their meals and elsewhere. The “fruit of the vine” that Christ *commanded* to be used as a memorial of His redeeming blood was not fermented wine, which in the Scripture represents human depravity, corruption and divine indignation, but unfermented and pure grape juice, a fitting emblem of Christ’s untainted blood shed for the remission of our sins.

The claim that Christ used and sanctioned the use of alcoholic beverages has been found to be unsubstantiated. The evidence we have submitted shows that Jesus abstained from all intoxicating substances and gave no sanction to His followers to use them.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 108

2. Norman L. Geisler, “A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1982): 49.

3. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 50.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 54; see also Howard H. Charles, *Alcohol and the Bible* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1981), p. 19.

5. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 50.

6. William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 115.

7. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 52.

8. For example, Howard H. Charles says: “Even though we may wish it otherwise, honest exegesis compels the candid admission that on this occasion Jesus deliberately added to the stock of wine available for consumption at the wedding feast” (n. 4), p. 19.

9. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 50.

- 
10. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine, An Exegetical Study* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 13.
  11. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Luke-John* (London, 1875), vol. 2, p. 197.
  12. Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24, trans. W. H. S. Jones, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961).
  13. Plutarch, *Symposiac* 8, 7.
  14. Albert Barnes (n. 11), p. 197.
  15. Henry M. Morris, *The Bible Has the Answer* (Nutley, New Jersey, 1971), p. 163.
  16. Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz, *Midrash Yayin Veshechor. Talmudic and Midrashic Exegetics on Wine and Strong Drink* (Detroit, 1923), p. 7.
  17. *Midrash Rabbah* Nosso 10; cf. *Shir Hashirim Rabba* 2; cited by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz (n. 16), pp. 33, 39.
  18. Cited in John Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 ed., s. v. "Wine," vol. 2, p. 951.
  19. Ibid.
  20. Joseph P. Free, *Archeology and Bible History* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1950), p. 355.
  21. Leon C. Field, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* (New York, 1883), p. 57.
  22. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 149.
  23. As quoted in John Ellis, *A Reply to "The Academy's" Review of "The Wine Question in the Light of the New Dispensation"* (New York, 1883), p. 182.
  24. See, for example, John Charles Ellicot, ed., *The Four Gospels* in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1954), vol. 6, p. 394; William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia, 1956), p. 84; Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (Nashville, n. d.), vol. 5, p. 527; G. H. MacGregor, *The Gospel of John* (London, 1953), p. 53.
  25. Herbert Preisker, "Methe, Methuo, Methuskomai," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1967), vol. 4, p. 547, emphasis supplied.

- 
26. John Parkhurst, *A Greek and English Lexicon to the New Testament*, 7th edition (London, 1817), s. v. "Methuo."
  27. R. A. Torrey, *Difficulties in the Bible* (Chicago, 1907), pp. 96-97.
  28. William L. Pettingill, *Bible Questions Answered* (Wheaton, Illinois, n. d.), pp. 223-224.
  29. Leon C. Field (n. 21), p. 63.
  30. Jimmy L. Albright, "Wine in the Biblical World: Its Economic, Social, and Religious Implications for New Testament Interpretation" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980), pp. 129, 137.
  31. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio, 1942), p. 318.
  32. *Encyclopedia Biblica*, eds. T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, 1903 ed., s. v. "Wine and Strong Drink," vol. 4, p. 5315.
  33. Alexander Balman Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels in The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 500. A similar argument is presented by Ernest Gordon (n. 10), p. 20.
  34. Horace Bumstead, "The Biblical Sanction for Wine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 38 (January 1881): 82.
  35. See *Encyclopedia Biblica* (n.32), p. 5315; also William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, s. v. "Vinum." For a description of the storage of large jars after the first fermentation, see James B. Pritchard, *Gibeon: Where the Sun Stood Still* (Princeton, 1962), pp.90-98.
  36. Frederic Richard Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (London, 1894), p. 266.
  37. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 29, trans. E. S. Forster and Edward H. Heffner, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955).
  38. Ernest Gordon (n. 10), p. 20.
  39. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
  40. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 54.
  41. Everett Tilson, *Should Christians Drink?* (New York, 1957), p. 31.
  42. Lees and Burns (n. 36), p. 295.

- 
43. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 198.
  44. Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (Boston, 1875), vol. 1, p. 324.
  45. R. H. Lensk, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio, 1953), p. 320.
  46. Jack Van Impe, *Alcohol: The Beloved Enemy* (Royal Oak, Michigan, 1980), pp.121-122.
  47. Heinrich Seeseman, "Oinos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, 1968), vol. 5, p. 163.
  48. Stephen M. Reynolds, *Alcohol and the Bible* (Little Rock, Arkansas, 1983), p. 42.
  49. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 48.
  50. Horace Bumstead (n. 34), p. 86.
  51. Irving Woodworth Raymond, *The Teaching of the Early Church on the Use of Wine and Strong Drink* (New York, 1927), p. 81.
  52. Ibid.
  53. Ernest Gordon (n. 10), p. 19.
  54. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 49.
  55. Ibid.
  56. Horace Bumstead (n. 34), pp. 86-87.
  57. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 54.
  58. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2, 5, 2, trans. William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, 1947), p. 48.
  59. Ibid.
  60. Frederic Richard Lees, *Text-Book of Temperance* (London, 1869), p. 50.
  61. Everett Tilson (n. 41), p. 33.
  62. Louis Ginzberg, "A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies," *American Jewish Year Book* 1923 (New York, 1922), p. 414.

- 
63. Ibid., p. 418, emphasis supplied.
  64. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 edition, s. v. "Jesus," vol. 5, p. 165.
  65. John Kitto, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 edition, s. v. "Passover," vol. 2, p. 477.
  66. Lees and Burns (n. 36), p. 279.
  67. *Chametz Vematzah* 5, 1, 2.
  68. Cited in Lees and Burns (n. 36), p. 282.
  69. Ibid.
  70. John Allen, *Modern Judaism* (London, 1830), p. 394.
  71. Cited in William Patton, *Bible Wines. Laws of Fermentation* (Oklahoma City, n. d.), p. 83.
  72. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 8th ed., 1859, s. v. "Passover."
  73. Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz (n. 16), p. 12.
  74. Leon C. Field (n. 21), p. 74.
  75. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D. C. 1941), pp. 95-96.
  76. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 653.
  77. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Temple-Service and the Prospect of the Temple* (London, 1833), p. 151.
  78. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 edition, s. v. "Wine," by David Eisenstein, vol. 12, p. 534.
  79. *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 8, pp. 532-533.
  80. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4, 17, 5, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 1, p. 484.
  81. Joseph Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church* (London, 1852), vol. 2, p. 755.
  82. Ibid.

---

83. Ibid., p. 760.

84. Leon C. Field (n. 21), p. 91.

85. Gratian, *De Consecratione*, Pars III, Dist. 2, c. 7, cited by Leon C. Field (n. 21), p. 91.

86. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York, 1947), vol. 2, part III, question 74, article 5, p. 2443.

87. These and other authors are cited and discussed by Leon C. Field (n. 21), pp. 91-93.

88. Cited by Leon C. Field (n. 21), p. 92.

89. Leon C. Field (n. 21), pp. 91-94; G. W. Samson, *The Divine Law as to Wines* (New York, 1880), pp. 205-217; Lees and Burns (n. 36), p. 280-282.

## Chapter 6

# WINE IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

Fundamental importance is attached to the teachings and practices of the Apostolic Church because, as the mother church of Christendom, she serves as a model for Christians and Christian churches in general. The sixteenth-century reformation movements, for example, aimed at reforming the church by recovering what they perceived to be the teachings and practices of the Apostolic Church.

The importance of the Apostolic Church extends to her teachings regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. The way the apostles understood, preached and practiced the teachings of Jesus and of the Old Testament regarding alcoholic beverages serves not only to validate the conclusions we have reached so far, but also to clarify whether we as Christians today should take our stand on the side of moderation or on the side of abstinence.

**Objective and Procedure.** This chapter examines the apostolic teaching regarding the use of wine in particular and of intoxicating substances in general. The specific references to “wine” (*oinos*) outside the four Gospels are only thirteen,<sup>1</sup> eight of which occur in the book of Revelation, where “wine” is used mostly symbolically, either to represent human depravity or divine retribution. This could suggest that we have only a total of five texts (Rom 14:21; Eph 5:18; 1Tim 3:8; 5:23; Titus 2:3) by which to determine the attitude of the Apostolic Church toward drinking.

In reality, however, the New Testament provides considerably more information on this subject through over twenty passages admonishing Christians to be “sober” or “temperate.” These admonitions, as we shall see, are in most cases directly related to drinking practices. Thus, our determination of the New Testament teaching on drinking should be based both on those texts which speak specifically of wine and on those which offer general admonitions on sobriety and temperance.

The chapter is divided into four parts, the first three of which deal with wine-texts and the last one with the admonitions to sobriety and to temperance. Thus, the outline of the chapter is as follows:

1. Acts 2:13: "Filled with New Wine"
2. 1 Corinthians 11:21: "One is Hungry and Another is Drunk"
3. Ephesians 5:18: "Do Not Get Drunk with Wine"
4. Admonitions to Sobriety

## PART 1

### ACTS 2:13: "FILLED WITH NEW WINE"

**Importance of the Text.** The apostles had scarcely begun their Messianic proclamation when they were accused of drunkenness. On the day of Pentecost the first company of believers received the gift of tongues enabling them to preach the Gospel in the languages of the people gathered for the feast at Jerusalem. While thousands believed in Christ as a result of the miracle, others began mocking the disciples, saying: "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13).

Some interpret this text as indicating the customary drinking of alcoholic wine in the earliest apostolic community. This interpretation rests on three major assumptions. First, the mockers would not have accused Christians of being drunk unless they had seen some Christians drinking on previous occasions.<sup>2</sup> Second, the "new wine" (*gleukos*) was a "sweet wine" of alcoholic nature<sup>3</sup> which could make a person drunk if consumed in large quantity. Third, Peter in his response denied the charge not by saying, "How can we be drunk when we are abstainers?" but by pointing to the early hour of the morning: "These men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day" (Acts 2:15).

**Unwarranted Interpretation.** This interpretation is unwarranted for three major reasons. It assumes that the accusation of the mockers was based on factual observation of Christian drinking. This is a gratuitous assumption, because mockers do not necessarily base their slander on factual observation. Even if they did, what they presumably had seen was Christians under the influence of the Holy Spirit rather than of alcoholic spirits. It is possible that they were misled by what they saw. The Jewish philosopher Philo, who lived at that time, tells us that the most sober persons, "abstainers," when under the influence of divine inspiration seemed to others to be in a drunken state.<sup>4</sup>



This possibility, however, seems hardly applicable here, because if the mockers really wished to charge the disciples with drunkenness, they would have accused them of being filled with “wine” (*oinos*) and not with “grape-juice” (*gleukos*). The term “*gleukos*” was used to designate unfermented grape juice. Pliny, for example, explicitly explains that what the Greeks call “*aigleucos*, this is our permanent must.” He goes on to tell how to prevent its fermentation.

**The Meaning of “*Gleukos*.”** Several Greek lexicons and scholars acknowledge that *gleukos* designates exclusively unfermented grape juice.<sup>6</sup> For example, Horace Bumstead, the author of one of the most scholarly defenses of the moderationist view, offers this clear and conclusive explanation: “*Gleukos*, as in classical Greek, corresponds to the Latin *mustum*, meaning the newly expressed juice of the grape, and so has a less wide range of meaning than [the Hebrew] *tiros*h or *asis*. It occurs only once [Acts 2:13] and I see no necessity for trying to prove it intoxicating, as some have done, including Robinson. . . . It seems to me that Alford, and others, in arguing for the intoxicating character of *gleukos*, as a *sweet* wine, have lost sight of the classical distinction already pointed out between *gleukos*=*mustum*, sweet, because unfermented grape juice, and *oinos glukus*=sweet wine, so-called because, though fermented, it was rich in sugar.”<sup>7</sup>

Earlier in his lengthy article (71 pages) published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Bumstead explains more fully that “with the Greeks the product of the wine-press could be sweet in three different senses: first, as *gleukos* (corresponding to the Latin *mustum*), when it was sweet from the lack of vinous fermentation; second, as *oinos glukus*, when it was fermented, but sweet from the presence of considerable untransformed sugar; and third, as *oinos hedus*, when it was sweet from the absence of acetous fermentation, or souring.”<sup>8</sup> *What this means is that when gleukos occurs by itself, as in Acts 2:13, it refers specifically to unfermented grape juice.*

**The Irony of the Charge.** In view of the meaning of *gleukos* as unintoxicating grape juice, the irony of the charge is self-evident. What the mockers meant is “These men, too abstemious to touch anything fermented, have made themselves drunk on grape juice.” Or as Ernest Gordon puts it in modern speech, “These dries are drunk on soft drink.”<sup>9</sup> Bumstead perceptively asks, “If this was not the point of their ‘mocking’ how can the use of *gleukos*, instead of the common word *oinos*, be accounted for?”<sup>10</sup> The inadequacy of the cause, grape juice, to produce the effect, drunkenness, is designed to add point to the derisive jest.

---

One can hardly fail to see in the irony of the charge that the apostles were drunk on grape juice (their usual beverage) an indirect but very important proof of their abstinent life-style and inferentially of the abstemious life-style of their Teacher.

**Historical Confirmation.** In his epistles, Peter, who acts as the spokesman of the Jerusalem Church in the first twelve chapters of Acts, alludes, as we shall see later in this chapter, to the practice of abstinence in the apostolic church. Later historical confirmation of this practice is provided by the testimony of Hegesippus, a church historian who, as Eusebius tells us, “lived immediately after the apostles.”<sup>11</sup> Writing regarding “James, the brother of the Lord, [who] succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles,” Hegesippus says: “He was holy from his mother’s womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh.”<sup>12</sup> We can assume that the strict abstinent life-style of James, who for a time served as the presiding officer of the Jerusalem Church, served as an example for Apostolic Christians to follow.

An investigation of early Christian sources on the life-style of such Jewish Christian sects as the Ebionites, the Nazarenes, the Elkesaites and the Encratites, might provide considerable support for abstinence from fermented wine in the Apostolic Church.<sup>13</sup> The fact that some of these sects went to the extreme of rejecting altogether both fermented and unfermented wine and using only water, even in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, suggests the existence of a prevailing concern for abstinence in the Apostolic Church. Such a concern apparently assumed fanatical forms among certain religious groups. It is my intention to pursue this research as time becomes available and to publish it as an additional chapter in a future edition of this book. Time restraints have not made this research possible at this time.

**Peter’s Response.** The assumption that Peter’s response to the charge of drunkenness implies that the apostles used some kind of fermented wine, because he did not flatly deny the charge, is discredited by two major considerations. Peter used the argument best suited to the character of the mockers. Had he said, “How can we be drunk when we never drink?” the jeering rejoinder might have been, “Except when no one sees you!” An appeal to their abstemious life-style would have been useless since it was already challenged. Thus, Peter met them on social grounds, challenging the credibility of their assumption. In effect he replied: “How can your assumption be right that we are drunk when it is only nine o’clock in the morning? You know, as well as I do, that people get drunk in the evening and not in the morning.” Such a reply fit in the circumstance and exposed the insincerity of the mockers.

A second reason that Peter may have chosen not to deny flatly that they drank at all is suggested by the use of the word *gleukos* by the mockers. This word, we just observed, means unfermented grape juice which Christians, except the Nazirites, generally drank. To deny that Christians drank at all would have meant denying that they drank *gleukos* (“grape juice”), but that was not true.

**Conclusion.** Summing up we can say that Acts 2:13 provides an indirect but telling proof that the apostles abstained from alcoholic beverages. As Ernest Gordon says, “There would be no point in referring to unfermented wine as a source of intoxication and the strange actions following, if it were not generally understood that the apostles used no intoxicating wine.”<sup>14</sup>

## PART 2

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:21

#### “ONE IS HUNGRY AND ANOTHER IS DRUNK”

**Importance of the Text.** Moderationists see in Paul’s reference to “drunkenness” at the communion table in the Corinthian church an unmistakable proof that alcoholic wine was used in the Apostolic Church both privately at home and publicly at the Lord’s Supper. Paul’s statement reads as follows: “When you meet together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk” (1 Cor 11:20-21).

The reasoning of moderationists is that the problem of drunkenness at Corinth can only be explained by their use of alcoholic wine. As someone put it, “How could the Corinthians get drunk on Communion wine if it were not fermented?”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it is argued that “it is significant to note that even in the light of their drunkenness, Paul does *not* issue a ‘cease and desist’ order in this matter.”<sup>16</sup> The argument is clear. Paul condemned the abuses at Corinth but not the use of alcoholic wine. We shall examine this claim by considering three points: (1) The Nature of the Feast; (2) The Meaning of the Verb *Methuo*; (3) The Implications of Paul’s Admonition.

#### 1. The Nature of the Feast

**A Selfish Love Feast.** To better appreciate the problems that developed at Corinth in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper, we must understand the social customs of the time. It was customary for groups of people belonging to secular or religious organizations to meet together for

common meals. In particular there was a certain kind of fellowship meal called *eranos* to which each participant brought food pooled together to make a common feast. The early Church adapted this custom, developing it into what came to be known as the *Agape* or Love Feast. All the church members brought what they could to the feast, and when all the food was pooled together, they sat down to a common meal. It was a lovely way of producing and nourishing real Christian fellowship. Many churches practice something similar today when they have a pot-luck meal together after church service.

In the church at Corinth the Love Feast seems to have been incorporated within the Lord's Supper, as we shall show below. Its celebration, however, degenerated into a selfish feast. The art of sharing was lost. The rich did not share their food with the poor but ate it by themselves in little exclusive groups. The result was that at the meal some were hungry while others were filled to satiety. Class distinctions, which should have been eliminated at the communion table, were accentuated. Good order and decency were disregarded, and the solemnity of the occasion was lost.

Unhesitatingly and unsparingly Paul rebukes this state of affairs, first of all by reminding the Corinthians of the purpose of their assembling together, namely, "to eat the Lord's supper" (1 Cor 11:20, KJV). The meaning of Paul's rebuke could be paraphrased as follows: "Though you come together professedly to partake of the Lord's Supper, you really do not celebrate it in a manner deserving of the name. For in eating, each one who has brought provisions goes ahead to eat eagerly and selfishly, ignoring the poor who have not been able to bring anything. The result is that while a member is *hungry* and unsatisfied, another is *filled* to satiety. Don't you have houses in which to eat and drink? Why do you transform the house of worship, dedicated to brotherly love, into a place of selfish feasting, putting to shame those who have nothing? There is no way I can commend you for such selfish conduct" (paraphrase of 1 Cor 11:20-23).

**Private Supper or Lord's Supper?** Paul's rebuke suggests that Christians in Corinth had unwisely confused the Lord's Supper with a social meal; possibly they had even reduced the Lord's Supper to a social festival similar to the festivals observed among the Greeks. The latter suggestion seems more probable, because there is no indication in the passage that a fellowship meal preceded the actual Lord's Supper.

Paul's statement, "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (1 Cor 11:20) clearly indicates that the purpose of the gathering was to celebrate the Lord's Supper, which, however, they had transformed into an ordinary festivity, presumably patterned after the feasts

---

in honor of idols. This leads us to the following conclusion: *all* that was done at Corinth was irregular and improper. The Christians had entirely mistaken the nature of the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper, converting it into a secular festivity, where even intemperance prevailed.

Many have supposed that the fellowship meal at Corinth was derived from the Last Supper which Jesus instituted *after* eating the Passover with His disciples. But it must be observed that the Passover was never seen by Christians as corresponding to a *preliminary* fellowship meal to be followed by the Lord's Supper. Instead, Passover was a sacred festival which was understood to be superseded by the Lord's Supper. There is no evidence in the Corinthian passage before us, or in any other New Testament passage, that the Lord's Supper was observed in connection with a fellowship meal. This means that whatever was done at Corinth was irregular, improper and against the very instructions that Paul had "received from the Lord" and had "delivered" to the church (1 Cor 11:23).

In the light of this fact, any alleged "drunkenness" occurring at the Communion table of the Corinthian church can hardly serve to prove the existence of drinking of alcoholic beverages in the Apostolic Church. A local perversion can scarcely be indicative of a general Christian practice. Moreover, if the Corinthians deviated from the instructions "delivered" unto them, then their misconduct is more a *warning* than an example for us.

## 2. The Meaning of the Verb *Methuo*

**"Filled to the Full."** It is generally assumed that drunkenness occurred at the Communion table of the Corinthian church. But is this true? Those who believe so base their conclusion on the common translation of the verb *methuei*, namely, "is drunk." The whole phrase in the RSV reads: "One is hungry and another is drunk" (1 Cor 11:21). On the basis of this translation many reason that if intoxicating wine was used by the Corinthians without apostolic rebuke, it can also be used by Christians today.

The fundamental fallacy of such reasoning is that it assumes that *methuo* means only "to be drunk." But our study of its usage in John 2:11 has shown that the verb *methuo* does not always signify intoxication and drunkenness. The context determines its exact meaning. In this case *methuei* is used antithetically to *peina* "hungry" and this requires that the verb be understood in the generic sense of "satiated" rather than in the narrow sense of "drunk." Leon C. Field makes this point clearly and conclusively: "*Methuei*, in this case, is plainly contrasted with *peina* which is correctly rendered as 'hungry.'

The antithesis, therefore, requires the former to be understood in the generic sense of ‘surfeited,’ not in the narrow sense of ‘drunken.’ The overfilled man is compared to the underfilled man. This is the interpretation adopted by the great body of expositors, ancient and modern.”<sup>17</sup>

**Scholarly Support.** Among the expositors cited by Field are Chrysostom, Bengel, Grotius, Wycliff, Kuinoel, Bilroth, MacKnight, Newcome, Bloomfield, Clarke, Lightfoot, Dean Stanley, and Whedom.<sup>18</sup> Another who could be mentioned is Clement of Alexandria, who lived only a century and a half after Paul. In his *Instructor* (book 2, 1), Clement, as A. W. Samson points out, “contradicts the suggestion that intoxicating wine was there used. He indicates that it is *food* rather than the *drink* of the feast to which Paul refers, and that he reproves them for ‘clutching at the delicacies,’ for ‘eating beyond the demands of nourishment.’”<sup>19</sup>

Adam Clarke makes the same point in his commentary on this text: “The people came together, and it appears brought their provisions with them; some had much, others had less; some ate to excess, others had scarcely enough to suffice nature. ‘One was hungry, and the other was drunken, *methuei*, was filled to the full;’ this is the sense of the word in many places of Scripture.”<sup>20</sup>

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, provides numerous examples where *methuo* is used in the generic sense of “filled to the full.” One of them is Psalm 23:5 which says: “my cup overflows” (*methuskon*—full to the brim). Another example is Psalm 65:10: “Thou waterest its furrows abundantly [*methuson*].” Yet another is Jeremiah 31:14: “I will feast [*methuso*—sate] the soul of the priests with abundance.” Examples such as these clearly show that *methuo* is often used in Scripture in a generic sense to express full satisfaction, satiety.

### 3. The Implications of Paul’s Admonition

**No Allusion to Drunkenness.** Paul’s rebuke and admonition suggest that drunkenness was not the problem at the Communion table of the Corinthian church. His words of rebuke are, “What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?” (v. 22). If drunkenness had been the problem, presumably Paul would have said, “Do you not have houses to eat and get drunk in?” The fact that Paul in his rebuke makes no allusion to “drunkenness” suggests that the problem at Corinth was not intoxication with alcoholic wine but rather one of excessive indulgence in eating and drinking.

---

If it were true that the Corinthian Christians were guilty of the awful sin of becoming inebriated during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Paul would have condemned their sacrilegious conduct in different and much sterner language. In the previous chapter Paul does not hesitate to call the participation of some Corinthians at pagan religious meals as "to be partners with demons" (1 Cor 10:20). Then he adds: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (1 Cor 10:21). Earlier in the same epistle Paul categorically states that no "drunkards . . . will inherit the kingdom of God" and he admonishes the members "not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is . . . [a] drunkard" (1 Cor 6:10; 5:11). On the basis of this admonition it is fair to suppose that if some got drunk at the Communion table, Paul would have warned the rest to stay away from them.

**Implication of the Admonition.** Paul does not use strong language in condemning the abuses occurring in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. He merely admonishes the Corinthians to satisfy their hunger at home to avoid both the indecorum that had been manifested and the condemnation to which it had exposed them: "So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another — if any one is hungry, let him eat at home—lest you come together to be condemned" (1 Cor 11:33-34). This admonition suggests that the problem at Corinth was indulgence in eating rather than intoxication by drinking alcoholic wine. Had the Corinthian church members been drunk at the Communion table, then Paul could hardly have said earlier in the same letter that in the past some of them were drunkards "but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

**Conclusion.** In the light of the above considerations we conclude that Paul's reference in the King James Version to "drunkenness" at the Communion table of the Corinthian church, offers no support for a moderate use of alcoholic wine either privately at home or publicly at the Lord's Supper. First, because whatever was done at Corinth, was a departure from the instructions Paul had "delivered" to the church and thus their actions are more of a *warning* than an example for us. Second, because the problem at the Communion table, as we have shown, appear not to have been intoxication with alcoholic wine but indulgence in eating.

## PART 3

## EPHESIANS 5:18

## “DO NOT GET DRUNK WITH WINE”

**Importance of the Text.** After admonishing the Ephesians to abstain from immorality and impurity, Paul particularizes his admonition saying: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Moderationists see in this passage a clear Biblical sanction of moderate drinking. They argue that what Paul condemns here is the *abuse* and not the *moderate use* of alcoholic wine. “The condemnation of misuse of wine,” writes Markus Barth, “does not preclude a proper use of alcoholic beverage.”<sup>21</sup>

Had Paul intended to forbid wine-drinking altogether, they claim, he would have said, as Kenneth Gentry puts it, “Drink no wine at all.” Instead he said, “Be not *drunk* with wine” (Eph 5:18).<sup>22</sup> The next phrase, “for that is debauchery” (RSV) or “wherein is excess” (KJV), is similarly interpreted as referring to the state of drunkenness and not to wine as the active principle of debauchery. Horace Bumstead, for example, maintains that “to connect *en ho* [in which] with *oinos* [wine], as some do, instead of with *methu-skesthe oino* [drunk with wine], is inconsistent with the employment of so strong a word as *methuskethe* [drunk].”<sup>23</sup>

We shall examine the above claim by considering five points: (1) The Structure of the Passage, (2) The Relative Clause, (3) Ancient and Modern Translations, (4) The Meaning of *Asotia*, and (5) Rabbinical Testimonies.

### 1. The Structure of the Passage

**Two Contrasting Statements.** The passage consists of two major statements placed in contrast (antithesis) to each other: “drunk with wine” *versus* “filled with the Spirit.” The antithesis suggests that the contrast is not between moderation and excess, but between fullness of wine and fullness of the Spirit. The two statements point to an inherent incompatibility of nature and operation between the *sources* of such fullness, namely, inebriating wine and the Holy Spirit. The fact that inebriating wine and the Holy Spirit are mutually exclusive, because no one can be filled with half of each, precludes the sanction for a moderate use of intoxicating wine.

This point is made clearer by quoting the preceding text, which says: “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is,” namely, that we should be filled not with ardent spirits but with the Holy



Spirit. Thus, the structure of the passage suggests that Paul is not recommending a supposedly safe and moderate ingestion of wine, but a full infilling of the Holy Spirit. It is scarcely conceivable that a person “filled with the Spirit” would crave intoxicating wine.

**Two Similar Passages.** Numerous commentators, not themselves abstainers, illustrate this text by referring to two similar texts. The first is Luke 1:15 where the angel says to Zechariah concerning John the Baptist: “And he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.” The second passage is from the story of Pentecost and consists of two verses: “For these men are not drunk . . .” “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:15, 4).

In both of these passages the infilling of the Holy Spirit is connected to abstention from intoxicating drink. The striking similarity between these two passages and Ephesians 5:18 suggests that in the latter text also the infilling of the Holy Spirit precludes the drinking of alcoholic beverages.

In his comment on Luke 1:15, Hermann Olshausen aptly says: “Man feels the want of strengthening through spiritual influences from without; instead of seeking for these in the Holy Spirit, he in his blindness has recourse to the *natural* spirit, that is, to wine and strong drink. Therefore, according to the point of view of the Law, the Old Testament recommends abstinence from wine and strong drinks in order to preserve the soul free from all merely natural influences, and by that means to make it more susceptible of the operations of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>24</sup>

**“Drink no Wine at All.”** The antithesis between wine and Holy Spirit present in Luke 1:15 and Acts 2:15, 4 may have been borrowed by Paul to express a similar truth in Ephesians 5:18. This may explain why Paul wrote “Do not get drunk with wine” instead of “Drink no wine at all.” Like Luke, he may have wished to emphasize the contrast between fullness of wine and fullness of the Spirit.

Another reason that Paul may have chosen not to say “Drink no wine at all” is suggested by 1 Timothy 5:23, where he recommends the use of “a little wine” for medical purposes: “for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” This text will be examined in Chapter 7. The fact that Paul believed that there was a legitimate, though limited, use of “wine” would logically have precluded him from prohibiting the use of wine altogether in any form. We must also remember that the generic term *oinos* “wine,” as we have shown in Chapter 2, could refer either to fermented or unfermented grape juice. Had Paul said “Drink no wine at all” without qualifications, he would have excluded even the drinking of wholesome, nourishing grape juice.

## 2. The Relative Clause

**The Antecedent of the Relative Pronoun.** Paul's admonition "Do not get drunk with wine" is followed by a warning which in the RSV is rendered "for that is debauchery." The question to be considered now is, What is debauchery? Is it wine as the causative agent of debauchery or drunkenness as a state of debauchery? The answer depends on which of the two is taken to be the antecedent of the relative clause "*en ho*--in which." A literal translation of the Greek text would read: "And do not get drunk with wine, in which [*en ho*] is debauchery [*asotia*—literally, 'unsavableness']." The RSV rendering of "*en ho*—in which" with "for that" makes the condition of being drunk with wine, rather than wine itself, the subject of "debauchery." This construction of the sentence, as Leon Field points out, "is expressly founded on the assumption that the use of wine is elsewhere allowed in the New Testament, and not on any exegetical necessities in the text itself."<sup>25</sup>

From a grammatical viewpoint, the subject of "in which" can be either the previous word "wine" or the drunkenness spoken of in the preceding clause. This fact is recognized by such commentators as R. C. H. Lenski, who says: "'In which' refers to the condition of being drunk with wine or to '*wine*' as here used, a means for becoming drunk."<sup>26</sup> Robert Young, the author of the *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, renders the relative clause "in which" accurately in his Bible translation: "And be not drunk with wine, *in which* is dissoluteness, but be filled in the Spirit."<sup>27</sup>

**Preference for "Wine."** Historically, numerous translators and commentators have seen "wine" rather than the state of drunkenness as the antecedent of "in which." The reason is suggested by the position of *oino* ("with wine"), which in Greek comes immediately after the verb "drunk" and before the relative "in which." Though the immediate juxtaposition of "wine" between the verb and the relative is not absolutely determinative, it strongly suggests that the warning of the relative clause is about wine as the active cause of dissoluteness rather than drunkenness as a state of dissoluteness.

Support for this view is provided also by the fact that the words "Do not get drunk with wine," as *The Interpreter's Bible* commentary points out, "are cited from Prov. 23:31 (the LXX according to Codex A)."<sup>28</sup> If Paul is quoting Proverbs 23:31 as found in the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, then we have reason to believe that Paul is warning against wine as such, since the text in Proverbs condemns the use of intoxicating wine ("Do not look at wine when it is red"), rather than its abuse.

**Ancient Translations.** This understanding of Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation of intoxicating wine itself is supported by numerous ancient

and modern translations. Tertullian (about A. D. 160-225), who is regarded as the father of Latin Christianity, renders the text as follows: “*et nolite inebriari vino, in quo est luxuria*” (“And be not inebriated with wine, in which is voluptuousness”).<sup>29</sup> The connection between *vino* “with wine” and *quo* “which” is unmistakable in this Latin translation, because the relative *quo* has the same neuter gender of *vino*, upon which it depends.

Besides his translation, Tertullian reveals his understanding of the text as a prohibition against wine drinking in his usage of the text in his treatise *Against Marcion*, where he says: “‘Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess,’—a precept which is suggested by the passage of the prophet, where the seducers of the consecrated [Nazirites] to drunkenness are rebuked: ‘Ye gave wine to my holy ones to drink’ [Amos 2:12]. This prohibition from drink was given also to the high priest Aaron and his sons.”<sup>30</sup>

About two centuries after Tertullian, Jerome translated Ephesians 5:18 in exactly the same way in his famous Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate (about A. D. 400). The Vulgate has served through the centuries as the official Latin Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

Jerome’s understanding of this text as an admonition to abstain from the use of wine is indicated also by his usage of the text. In a letter to Laeta, a lady who wrote to him asking how she should bring up her infant daughter, Jerome says: “Let her learn even now not to drink wine ‘wherein is excess’” (Eph 5:18).<sup>31</sup> In another letter to Eustochium, Jerome relates the story of a noble Roman lady, Paula, who on her visit to the Holy Land “called to mind the cave in which Lot found refuge, and with tears in her eyes warned the virgins her companions to beware of ‘wine wherein is excess’ [Eph 5:18]; for it was to this that the Moabites and Ammonites owe their origin.”<sup>32</sup> Jerome’s understanding of Ephesians 5:18 is significant since he is regarded as the most famous early Christian translator of the Bible.

**Modern Translations.** Several classical and modern translations have followed the Vulgate in its faithful literalness. For example, the French Synodal Version reads: “Ne vous enivrez pas de vin: car le vin porte à la dissolution” (“Do not inebriate yourselves with wine, for wine leads to dissoluteness”). To remove any possibility for misunderstanding, the translators have repeated the word “wine” in the relative clause. Other French translations, such as the David Martin and the Version d’Ostervald also establish a clear connection between wine and the relative clause. Both read: “Ne vous enivrez point de vin, dans lequel il y a de la dissolution” (“Do not inebriate yourselves with wine, in which there is dissolution”).

In English one could argue that the antecedent of “in which” is the drunkenness spoken of in the preceding clause. This uncertainty is caused by the fact that in the English language the relative pronoun “which” has no gender, and consequently can be connected to any antecedent. In French, however, “lequel” (“in which”) is masculine and thus can only refer to “vin” (“wine”) which is also masculine. The connection between the two is unmistakable in these French translations.

The same clear connection between “wine” and “dissoluteness” is found in the two Spanish versions, Cipriano de Valera (A. D. 1900) and Nácar, Colunga, where the relative clause reads respectively: “en el cual hay disolucion” (“in which is dissoluteness”) and “en el cual está el desenfreno” (“in which is excess”). In both instances the relative “cual” (“which”) is preceded by the masculine article “el,” because it refers to the masculine noun “vino” (“wine”). The connection is even clearer in the Spanish Catholic Version which reads “vino fomento da la injuria” (“wine which causes harm”). A similar rendering is found in the margin of the New American Standard Bible which reads: “wine, in which is dissipation.”

The Good News German Bible (“Die Gute Nachricht”) provides another clear example where wine is the subject of the relative clause: “Betrinkt euch nicht; denn der Wein macht haltlos” (“Do not get drunk; because wine makes one unsteady or unprincipled”).<sup>33</sup> The Italian Protestant version Riveduta by Giovanni Luzzi, as well as the Catholic Version produced by the Pontifical Biblical Institute, follow the sentence construction of the French and Spanish versions cited above. The Riveduta reads: “E non v’inebriate di vino; esso porta alla dissolutezza” (“And do not inebriate yourselves with wine; it [wine] leads to dissoluteness”). The antecedent of “esso” (“it”) is unmistakably “vino,” because it is of the same masculine gender as “vino,” since it depends upon it.

The sampling of ancient and modern translations cited above should suffice to show that historically many translators have understood the relative clause of Ephesians 5:18 as representing a condemnation not of drunkenness but of wine itself. If these translators are correct, as I believe they are for the reasons mentioned above, then Ephesians 5:18 provides a powerful indictment against the actual use of intoxicating wine and not merely against its abuse. A look at the noun *asotia*, rendered by the RSV as “debauchery,” will help us appreciate the nature of the condemnation.

### 3. The Meaning of *Asotia*

**Moral Dissoluteness.** The noun *asotia* occurs in two other places in the New Testament, namely, in Titus 1:6 and in 1 Peter 4:4, and in both places

it is rendered as “profligacy” in the RSV. The word is compounded of the negative *a* and a noun from the verb *sozein*, to save. Literally it signifies the absence of salvation—a state of hopeless moral dissoluteness. Albert Barnes explains that *asotia* denotes that “which is unsafe, not to be recovered, lost beyond recovery; then that which is abandoned to sensuality and lust; dissoluteness, debauchery, revelry. The meaning here [Eph 5:18] is that all this follows the use of wine.”<sup>34</sup>

The possible connection between wine as the causing agent of “drunkenness” and *asotia*, the condition of moral dissoluteness, suggests that the passage views not only the abuse but also the use of wine as intrinsically evil. Leon C. Field expresses this view, noting that “it would be difficult to indicate any other arrangement of the words of this passage which would so clearly and forcibly express the idea that insalvableness *inheres* in wine as its essential characteristic.”<sup>35</sup>

**Alcohol Affects the Mind.** The reason that the use of intoxicating beverages can easily place a person in a state of *asotia*, that is, of moral corruption inimical to the reception of saving truth, is that alcohol deranges the functions of the mind, which is the channel through which the Holy Spirit works. This is why Paul urges Christians to be filled not with wine but with the Holy Spirit.

“Let Christians,” counsels Albert Barnes, “when about to indulge in a glass of wine, think of this admonition [Eph 5:18]. Let them remember that their bodies should be the temple of the Holy Ghost rather than a receptacle for intoxicating drinks. Was any man ever made a better Christian by the use of wine? Was any minister ever better fitted to counsel an anxious sinner, or to pray, or to preach the gospel, by the use of intoxicating drinks? Let the history of wine-drinking and intemperate clergymen answer.”<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. Rabbinical Testimonies

**Condemnation of Wine.** Rabbinical literature provides several examples to support and illustrate our interpretation of Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation not only of the abuse but also of the use of intoxicating wine. We shall cite several examples in order to dispel the mistaken notion that the Jews, like the Bible writers, saw nothing intrinsically evil in the moderate use of wine. This popular notion has greatly influenced the interpretation of those Biblical teachings dealing with alcoholic beverages.

In their commentary on the New Testament based on rabbinic comments, Strack and Billerbeck give numerous rabbinical statements under

Ephesians 5:18. They introduce such statements, by noting: “In rabbinical writings there are numerous warnings against wine.”<sup>37</sup> For our purpose we shall quote the following statements cited by these authors: “Wine separates man from the way of life and leads him in the pathway of death, because wine leads to idolatry. . . . Thus we learn that wherever [Scripture] speaks of wine, there you find also dissoluteness. . . . For this Isaiah said: ‘The strength of the law is in salvation, but the strength of wine is in sorrow. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine’ (Is 5:22). For this we read: ‘Who has a woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? . . . Those who tarry long over wine’ (Prov 23:29-30). When wine enters the body, out goes sense; where ever there is wine there is no understanding.”<sup>38</sup>

Similar rabbinic warnings against wine are found in the compilation of Talmudic statements on wine by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz. Here are some: “Whenever wine enters a person, his mind becomes confused.”<sup>39</sup> “Rabbi Isaac said, ‘The evil spirit entices a person only while he is eating and drinking, and when one becomes merry by wine, then the evil spirit has the mastery over him. . . . The drinking of wine causes the evil inclinations to be awakened within a person, as it is written, ‘And they made their father [Lot] drink wine that night etc.’ (Gen. 19:33).”<sup>40</sup>

**Permanent Prohibition.** Another statement attributed to Rabbi Eliezer makes the prohibition against drinking wine a permanent law for all times: “Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Aaron, ‘Do not drink wine nor strong drink.’ Do not assume that this injunction against wine and strong drink was only for the past, namely as long as the holy Temple at Jerusalem was still in existence, as it is written, ‘When ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation,’ but you have to guard against wine for all times to come, for wine is an omen of curse.”<sup>41</sup> An extreme example of how evil intoxicating beverages were in the mind of some Jews is the rabbinic statement that “Samuel did not pray in a house that contained intoxicating drinks (Talmud Babli Erubin 65a).”<sup>42</sup>

**Conclusion.** The foregoing analysis of Ephesians 5:18 has shown that this text provides *no Biblical sanction for moderate use of alcoholic beverages*. On the contrary, the structure of the passage as well as the possible connection between “wine” and the relative clause, a connection recognized by numerous ancient and modern translations, makes this text *a most powerful Biblical indictment of intoxicating wine*.

The intent of Paul in this passage is to show the irreconcilable contrast that exists between the spirit of fermented wine and the Holy Spirit. In the life

of a believer the two are mutually exclusive. Summing up, the thought of Ephesians 5:18-19 can be paraphrased as follows: “Do not get drunk with wine, because the use of wine places a person in a state of *asotia*, that is, of moral corruption inimical to the reception of saving truth. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Find enjoyment not in the stimulation of wine but in the inspiration of the Spirit who causes you to sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”

## PART 4

### ADMONITIONS TO ABSTINENCE

**Importance of Two Terms.** In their epistles Paul and Peter employ two terms (*sophron* and *nephalios*) both of which are usually rendered as “temperate” or “sober.” The two terms are not synonymous, since technically speaking *sophron* denotes mental sobriety and *nephalios* physical sobriety or abstinence. On account of their affinity of meaning, however, the two terms are often merged or used interchangeably. This happens because each term describes the same virtue, though from a different standpoint.

“Physical abstinence,” explains Leon Field, “is the condition of the clearest mental sobriety, and mental sobriety is the characteristic of the strictest physical abstinence. So it happens that the term signifying mental sobriety is used metaphorically for physical abstinence, and *vice versa*.”<sup>43</sup>

We shall now consider the meaning and usage of the two terms separately. The study will show that in both secular and Biblical Greek, the primary meaning of the two terms and their derivatives, is to abstain from all intoxicating substances. This means, as we shall see, that several of the apostolic injunctions to sobriety are primarily injunctions to abstinence from intoxicating beverages.

#### 1. Mental Sobriety

**The Meaning of *Sophron*.** The term *sophron* and its related word group occur 15 times in the New Testament, 9 of which are in the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>44</sup> The RSV renders them as “temperate” in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 2:2, “sober” in Titus 2:12, Acts 26:25 and Romans 12:3, “right mind” in Mark 5:15, Luke 8:35 and 2 Corinthians 5:13, “sane” in 1 Peter 4:7, “self-controlled” in Titus 1:8 and “sensibly” and “sensible” in 1 Timothy 2:9 and Titus 2:5.

The word *sophron* is compounded of *saos* “safe” or “sound” and *phren* “mind.” Thus, literally it signifies “sound-minded.” The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines it as “‘rational,’ in the sense of what is intellectually sound.”<sup>45</sup> Most Greek lexicons concur in defining the group words related to *sophron* as “sound mind.” Arndt and Gingrich render “to be in one’s right mind;”<sup>46</sup> Donnegan, “sound in intellect, not deranged;”<sup>47</sup> Green, “of a sound mind, sane, staid, temperate, chaste.”<sup>48</sup>

While retaining the primary idea of mental soundness, *sophron* and its related words are never divorced from the idea of physical abstinence, which provides the basis for a sound mind. The Romans expressed this in the well-known proverb *mens sana in corpore sano* (“a sound mind in a sound body”).

**Classical, Jewish and Christian Writers.** The idea of abstinence is often present in the use and interpretation of the word *sophron* by classical, Jewish, and Christian writers. In his *Rhetoric* Aristotle (384-322 B. C. ) defines *sophrosune* as “the virtue by which men act with reference to the pleasures of the body as the law commands.”<sup>49</sup> In his *Ethics* he says: “By *abstaining* from pleasures we become sober [*sophrones*].”<sup>50</sup> And again he states: “He who *abstains* from physical pleasure, and in this very thing takes delight, is sober [*sophron*].”<sup>51</sup>

In the Jewish work known as *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (from about the first century A.D.) the term *sophron* is used as a clear reference to abstinence from wine: “But if ye would live soberly [*sophrosune*] do not touch wine at all, lest ye sin in words of outrage, and in fightings and slanders, and transgressions of the commandments of God, and ye perish before your time.”<sup>52</sup>

The Jewish philosopher Philo (about 20 B.C.-50 A.D.) frequently uses the word group with the meaning of abstention from sensual desires in general and from wine in particular.<sup>53</sup> He views the *sophrosune* as a person who is free from the drunkenness of the world. This is indicated especially by his use of the opposite of *sophrosune*, namely, *aphrosune*, to describe a person who “inflamed by wine drowns the whole life in ceaseless and unending drunkenness.”<sup>54</sup>

In the patristic writings, as in the classical authors, *sophrosune* is employed with reference to physical abstinence. Clement of Alexandria (about A. D. 150-215), for example, in discussing the life-style of young people, says: “I therefore admire those who have adopted an austere life, and who are fond of water, the medicine of temperance [*tes sophrosunes*], and flee



as far as possible from wine, shunning it as they would the danger of fire.”<sup>55</sup> This meaning of *sophron* and its word group as abstinence and chastity is, according to Ulrich Luck, “a widespread understanding”<sup>56</sup> not only in Hellenistic Judaism but also in the writings of the early church. His scholarly article in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* provides numerous examples of such usage.

**Paul’s Admonition.** In the epistles of Paul and Peter, several admonitions to sober-mindedness explicitly relate to physical abstinence on which the existence and exercise of sobriety rest. This is indicated especially by the close connection in which they stand with such terms as *me paroinos*, *enkrate* and *nephalios*, all of which, as we shall see, refer primarily to abstinence from intoxicating wine.

In 1 Timothy 3:2-3 Paul states: “Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, *temperate, sensible*, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money.” The two terms “temperate, sensible” are here used to translate the Greek *nephalion* and *sophrona*. The first, as we shall show below, means “abstinent” and the second “of sound mind,” or “sober-minded.” “The order of terms,” as Lees and Burns point out, “is instructive. The Christian overseer is to be *nephalion*, ‘abstinent’—strictly sober in body, in order that he may be sober in mind.”<sup>57</sup> The two words occur in the same order in Titus 2:2, though the word “serious” is placed between them. In 1 Timothy 3:2-3 the two words stand in close connection with *me paroinon*, a term which literally means “not near wine.” On the significance of the latter, more will be said below.

In Titus 1:6-8, where Paul repeats to a large extent what he said in 1 Timothy 3 about the qualifications for the office of bishop/elder, the order is somewhat different: “. . . hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself [*sophrona*], upright, holy, and self-controlled [*enkrate*]” (v. 8). Here *sophrona* (“sober-minded”), translated “master of himself” by the RSV, precedes *enkrate*, a term which as we shall see below, is also employed in the sense of abstinence.

**Peter’s Admonition.** A clearer connection between sober-mindedness and physical abstinence is found in 1 Peter 4:7: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane [*sophronesate*] and sober [*nepsate*] for your prayers.” The verb *nepsate* is the (aorist) imperative form of *nepho*, which some etymologists derive from the prefix *ne* “not” and *pino* “to drink,” thus literally, not to drink, while others from *ne* “not” and *poinos* (for *oinos* “wine”), thus literally, “without wine.”

The basic meaning of the verb *nepho*, as most Greek authorities cited below recognize, is “to be sober, in contradistinction to being drunk.” Thus, what Peter is actually saying in 1 Peter 4:7 is “keep mentally sober and physically abstinent for your prayers.” It is not difficult to see the connection among mental sobriety, physical abstinence and prayer life. Persons who use intoxicating beverages weaken their mental alertness, and consequently either ignore their prayer life or pray for the wrong things.

In conclusion, some of the apostolic admonitions to mental sobriety, expressed through the *sophron* word group, are clearly connected to physical abstinence, which determines the existence and exercise of mental sobriety.

## 2. Physical Abstinence

**The Meaning of the Verb *Nepho*.** The adjective *nephalios* and the verb *nepho* are used in the New Testament mostly to denote physical abstinence. The adjective *nephalios* occurs only three times in the pastoral epistles and is consistently rendered by the RSV as “temperate” (1 Tim 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2). The verb *nepho* occurs six times and is translated by the RSV five times “be sober” (1 Thess 5:6, 8; 1 Pet 1:13; 4:7; 5:8) and once “be steady” (2 Tim 4:5). Before examining the meaning and usage of these two words in the New Testament, we want to verify how they are defined in Greek lexicons and used in Greek literature.

The basic meaning of *nepho*, as mentioned earlier, is abstention from intoxication. In his article on this word group in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, O. Bauernfeind states: “The concept which underlies the verb *nepho* ‘to be sober’ and the whole word group is formally negative. It is the opposite of intoxication, both 1. in the literal sense of intoxication with wine, and 2. in the figurative sense of states of intoxication attributable to other causes.”<sup>58</sup> The Jewish philosopher Philo illustrates this definition when he says: “So too soberness [*nephein*] and drunkenness are opposites.”<sup>59</sup>

There is noteworthy unanimity among Greek lexicons on the primary meaning of this verb. Liddell and Scott give as the first meaning of *nepho*, “to be sober, drink no wine.” In his *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Lampe renders it, “be temperate, drink no wine.”<sup>60</sup> The first example given by Lampe is from Origen’s treatise *Against Celsus*, where the pagan philosopher Celsus accuses a Christian teacher of acting “like a drunken man, who, entering a company of drunkards, should accuse those who are sober [*nephontas*] of being drunk.” To such an accusation Origen responds, saying, “But let him show, say from the writings of Paul, that the apostle of Jesus gave way to drunkenness, and that his words were not those of soberness.”<sup>61</sup>

Donnegan defines *nepho* as “to live abstemiously, to abstain from wine;”<sup>62</sup> Greene, “to be sober, not intoxicated;”<sup>63</sup> Robinson, “to be sober, temperate, abstinent, especially in respect to wine;”<sup>64</sup> Abbott-Smith, “to be sober, abstain from wine.”<sup>65</sup>

**The Meaning of the Adjective *Nephalios*.** The adjective *nephalios* is defined by these lexicographers in harmony with their rendering of the verb. For example, Lampe gives as the first meaning of *nephalios*, “without wine, temperate.”<sup>66</sup> His first supportive example is from Clement of Alexandria, who says: “I therefore admire those who have adopted an austere [*nephalion poton*=abstemious drink] life, and who are fond of water, the medicine of temperance, and flee as far as possible from wine, shunning it as they would the danger of fire.”<sup>67</sup>

Among other lexicographers not cited above there is Hesychius, who gives as the primary meaning of *nephalios*, “not having drunk.”<sup>68</sup> In Stephanus’ Thesaurus the *nephalios* is said to be “he who abstains from wine.”<sup>69</sup> In the Greek Dictionary of Byzantium, published in Athens in 1839, *nephalios* is defined as “one who does not drink wine.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly Bauernfeind defines *nephalios* as “holding no wine.” He explains that originally the word was used “for the offerings without wine” and subsequently for “the sober manner of life of those who make them.”<sup>71</sup>

**Hellenistic Testimonies.** Numerous instances of the use of *nepho* and *nephalios* in the sense of abstention from wine occur in classical Greek literature.<sup>72</sup> For our purpose it is of greater significance to look into the usage of Hellenistic writers. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, the compound verb *eknepho* and the verbal noun *eknepsi* are found in Genesis 9:24, 1 Samuel 25:37 and Joel 1:5. In each instance the meaning is to become sober, without the influence of wine.

The testimonies of the two famous Jewish writers, Josephus and Philo, are significant for our investigation, since they were contemporaries of Paul and Peter. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus writes of the priests: “Those who wear the sacerdotal garments are without spot and eminent for their purity and sobriety [*nephalioi*], not being permitted to drink wine as long as they wear those garments.”<sup>73</sup> Similarly, in his *Wars of the Jews*, Josephus says of the priests, “They abstained [*nephontes*] chiefly from wine, out of this fear, lest otherwise they should transgress some rules of their ministration.”<sup>74</sup>

Like Josephus, Philo explains in his *De Specialibus Legibus* that the priest must officiate as *nephalios*, totally abstinent from wine, because he has to carry out the directions of the law and must be in a position to act as the final

earthly court.<sup>75</sup> In his treatise *On Drunkenness*, Philo, speaking of those who “swill themselves insatiably with wine,” says: “For such deliberately and under no compulsion put the cup of strong drink to their lips, and so it is also with full deliberation that these men eliminate soberness [*nephalion*] from their soul and choose madness in its place.”<sup>76</sup>

**Implication of Testimonies.** The natural and necessary inference from the mass of testimonies cited above is that Peter and Paul must have been familiar with the primary meaning of the verb *nepho* and its adjective *nephalios* as abstinence from intoxicating beverages. This being the case, they employed these terms with such a primary meaning in at least some of their admonitions to sobriety. Even if in some instances they used these terms figuratively to refer to mental rather than physical sobriety, in no case would the underlying idea of total abstinence be lost.

Those who interpret the apostolic injunctions to sobriety as referring either to mental sobriety or to a moderate use of wine base their interpretation on the assumption that Scripture condemns not the use but the abuse of wine. For example, in *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, Moulton and Milligan define *nephalios* as “sober, temperate; abstaining from wine, either entirely (Josephus Ant. 3, 12, 2) or at least from its immoderate use: 1 Tim 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2.”<sup>77</sup> But the three texts cited contain no suggestion of abstention from the immoderate use of wine. They simply express Paul’s admonition to bishops, women and older men to be *nephalious*.

If Josephus, Philo and a host of other writers used *nephalios* in the primary sense of “abstaining from wine,” why should not Paul have used it in the same way? Dean Alford argues that such meaning had become obsolete in the apostles’ day.<sup>78</sup> This can hardly be true, as attested by the above cited testimonies of Josephus and Philo. Moreover, long after the apostolic age, Greek writers use the word in the primary sense of abstinence. For example, the philosopher Porphyry (about 232-303) says “But be sober [*nephalion*] and drink without wine.”<sup>79</sup>

**Translators’ Bias.** The foregoing considerations lead us to wonder whether *nepho* and *nephalios* have been consistently translated in the New Testament with the secondary sense of being “temperate, sober, steady,” rather than in the primary sense of being “abstinent,” because of the translators’ predilection for drinking. By interpreting these terms figuratively, translators and expositors have been able, as Ernest Gordon puts it, to “save the face of wine while condemning drunkenness.”<sup>80</sup>

The bias toward wine can be detected even in some Greek lexicons. Besides Moulton and Milligan cited earlier, mention can be made of Liddell

and Scott. They define *nepho* as “to be sober, drink no wine,” and they give a host of supportive references. Then they give the metaphorical meaning as “to be self-controlled, to be sober and wary” and they give 1 Thessalonians 5:6 and 1 Peter 4:7 in addition to a few pagan texts as supportive references. As we shall see below, the two New Testament texts support more the former than the latter meaning.

With regard to the adjective *nephalios* Liddell and Scott define it as “make a libation without wine . . . unmixed with wine” when referring to offerings, and they give a battery of supportive texts. When referring to persons, they render it as “sober” and give 1 Timothy 3:2, 11, Titus 2:2 and Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 12, 2, as supportive texts. The texts of Timothy and Titus, as we shall discuss below, favor the primary meaning of abstinence. Josephus’ statement, as we have already seen, leaves no doubt that to him *nephalios* meant “not being permitted to drink wine.” All of this shows that none of the references given really support the figurative meaning of mental sobriety. It would seem that the passages in Timothy and Titus are first translated “sober” or “temperate” rather than abstinent, and then they are cited as proof of the use of such meaning. Having looked at the meaning of *nepho* and *nephalios* in writers outside the Bible, we shall now endeavor to determine their meaning in the epistles of Peter and Paul.

### 3. *Nepho* as Physical Abstinence

**1 Thessalonians 5:6-8.** Paul’s first usage of *nepho* occurs in his letter to the Thessalonians. After warning the Thessalonians about the sudden and unexpected manner of Christ’s coming “like a thief in the night” (1Thess 5:2), he admonishes them saying: “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober [*nephomen*]. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober [*nephomen*], and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thess 5:6-8).

In this passage Paul twice admonishes the Thessalonians to “be sober” (*nephomen*). What is the meaning of *nephomen* in its context? Is Paul exhorting the Thessalonians to be mentally vigilant or physically abstinent or both? The context suggests that both mental vigilance and physical abstinence are included.

The passage consists of a number of contrasting parallels: light and darkness, day and night, waking and sleeping, to be sober and to be drunk. Since Paul contrasts the sons of the day who are sober with those of the night who are drunk, it is evident that in this context the exhortation to “be sober”

means not only to be mentally vigilant but also physically abstinent. In the Scripture mental vigilance is closely connected with physical abstinence from intoxicating beverages. The unfaithful servant who failed to watch for the return of his master began “to eat and drink and get drunk” (Luke 12:45).

Another indication that Paul wishes *nephomen* to be taken both literally and figuratively is the connection between sobriety and wakefulness: “Let us keep awake and be sober” (v. 6). The first verb, *gregoromen*, refers to mental watchfulness and the second, *nephomen*, to physical abstinence. Otherwise it would be a needless repetition (tautology): “Let us keep awake and be awake.” It is evident that Paul connects mental watchfulness with physical abstinence, because the two go together. Mental vigilance in the New Testament is often connected with physical abstinence. This will become clearer as we consider the other passages in question.

**1 Peter 1:13.** In addition to 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8, the verb *nepho* occurs three times in the first epistle of Peter (1:13; 4:7; 5:8). In all three instances, the word is translated “be sober” in the RSV. The casual reader might think that Peter’s admonition to “be sober” means to be prudent, vigilant or temperate, without reference to alcohol. But a closer examination indicates that, as in 1 Thessalonians, the verb here also refers to both mental vigilance and physical abstinence. Note should be taken of the fact that in all three texts, Peter’s exhortation to “be sober” occurs in the context of readiness for the imminent return of Christ. This implies that Peter, like Paul, grounds his call to a life of abstinence and holiness in the certainty and imminence of Christ’s return.

The first usage of *nepho* in 1 Peter occurs in 1:13: “Therefore gird up your minds, be sober [*nephontes*], set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Here Peter, like Paul, correlates mental vigilance (“gird up your minds”) with physical abstinence (“be sober”). Earlier we have shown that there is noteworthy unanimity in Greek lexicons and literature on the primary meaning of *nepho* as “be abstinent, drink no wine.” This pattern of associating mental sobriety with physical abstinence is consistent in all the three usages of *nepho* in 1 Peter.

The admonition to “be abstinent” assumes a radical form in 1 Peter 1:13 because it is followed immediately by the adverb “*teleios*,” which means “perfectly” or “completely.” Thus, the correct translation is, “be completely or perfectly abstinent.” Most translators, presumably because of their bias against abstinence, have chosen to use *teleios* to modify the following verb *elphisate* (“set your hope”), thus, rendering it “set your hope *fully*” (RSV) or

“hope to the end” (KJV). But the idiom used elsewhere in the New Testament for “to the end” is not *teleios* per se, but a compound such as *mechri telous* or *heos telous* (Heb 3:6, 14; 1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:13).

Grammatically the adverb *teleios* can be used to modify either the preceding verb *nephontes* or the following verb *elpisate*, since in the Greek there is no punctuation that separates the adverb from the verb. A similar example is Jesus’ statement, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Most translators and expositors have chosen to place the comma before rather than after “today,” because of their belief in the survival of the soul apart from the body at the moment of death. Similarly in 1 Peter 1:13, most translators have chosen to put the comma before rather than after *teleios*, because of their belief that the Bible teaches moderation rather than total abstinence.

It is noteworthy that in the Vulgate, the famous Latin translation which has served as the official Catholic Bible throughout the centuries, Jerome translates *teleios* as a modifier of *nephontes*, thus, “*sobrii perfecte*” (“perfectly sober”). In my view Jerome’s translation reflects accurately the intent of Peter, who repeats his call to sobriety three times in his epistle. Thus, the correct translation should be: “Therefore gird up your minds, being wholly abstinent, set your hope upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

**1 Peter 4:7.** The verb *nepho* is used for the second time in 1 Peter 4:7: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane [*sophronesate*] and sober [*nepsate*] for your prayers.” We noticed earlier, in our study of the term *sophron*, that here Peter exhorts Christians to keep mentally vigilant and physically abstinent. The meaning of *nepho* as abstinence from wine is suggested also by the context, where Peter contrasts the past life-style of “licentiousness, passions, *drunkenness*, revels, carousing and lawless idolatry” (1 Pet 4:3) with the new life-style of temperance and abstinence.

The passage may be paraphrased as follows: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be sober in mind and abstemious in life in order that you might be able to maintain a healthy devotional life at this critical time.”

**1 Peter 5:8.** The third usage of *nepho* occurs in 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober [*nepsate*], be watchful [*gregoresate*]. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.” Just as in the previous two instances, here also Peter associates mental vigilance with physical abstinence, because the two are mutually dependent. The language corresponds to 1 Thessalonians 5:6, though Paul mentions first mental vigilance

and second physical abstinence. The correlation between the two conditions is self-evident. Intoxicating drinks diminish the power of conscience and reason, thus weakening inhibitions to evil-doing. The ultimate result is that the Devil is better able “to devour,” literally, “drink down” (*katapino*) such persons.

The contrast between *nepsate* (from *ne piein*, “not to drink”) and *katapiein* (from *kata piein* “to drink down”) has been recognized by Adam Clarke, who comments: “It is not every one that he can swallow down. Those who are sober and vigilant are proof against him; these he may not swallow down. Those who are drunk with the cares of this world, and are unwatchful, these he may swallow down. There is a beauty in this verse, and striking apposition between the first and last words, which I think have not been noticed;—Be sober, *nepsate*, from *ne* not, and *piein*, to drink—do not swallow down—and the word *katapien*, from *kata*, down, and *piein*, to drink. If you swallow strong drink down, the devil will swallow you down. Hear this, ye drunkards, toppers, tipplers, or by whatsoever name ye are known in society, or among your fellow-sinners, strong drink is not only your way to the devil, but the devil’s way into you. Ye are such as the devil particularly may swallow down.”<sup>81</sup>

**Correlation with Luke 12:41-46.** Peter’s exhortations to vigilance and abstinence appear to have been inspired by the parable of the *drunken* servant which *Christ spoke directly to Peter* (Luke 12:41). In that parable the faithful steward is commended for watching over his master’s household while the unfaithful one is condemned for beginning “to eat and drink and get drunk” (Luke 12:43-45).

Allusions to this parable appear several times in 1 Peter. For example, 1 Peter 4:10 says, “as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” This is strikingly similar to Luke 12:42, “the faithful and wise steward whom his master will set over his household.” Similarly 1 Peter 4:5, “him who is ready to judge the living and the dead,” appears to be an echo of Luke 12:46, “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him . . . and will punish him.” Also 1 Peter 5:3, “Not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock” harks back to the unfaithful servant of Luke 12:45 who began “to beat the menservants and the maidservants.”

The allusions in 1 Peter to Luke’s parable of the unfaithful servant, who is caught *drunk* and punished by his returning master, strongly support the translation of *nepho* in its primary sense of abstaining from wine. Furthermore, the allusions help us understand why 1 Peter 1:13 would urge abstinence in radical terms: “*nephontes teleios*” (“be completely abstinent”).



Summing up our study of the five usages of *nepho*, two by Paul (1 Thess 5:6, 8) and three by Peter (1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8), we can say that all show an amazing consistency in urging both mental vigilance and physical abstinence. Moreover, we have found that the primary meaning of *nepho* as abstinence from intoxicating beverages is supported in 1 Thessalonians by the contrasting parallel between the sons of the day who are sober and the sons of the night who are drunk. In 1 Peter, support for the abstinence meaning of *nepho* comes both from the allusions to the parable of the drunken servant of Luke 12 and from the context of 1 Peter 4:7, where the apostle refers to the past life-style of “drunkenness” (1 Pet 4:3). It is also significant that all five admonitions to abstinence are given in the context of preparation for the imminent return of Christ. To this point we shall return after examining the usage of the adjective *nephalion*.

#### 4. *Nephalios* as Physical Abstinence

**Three texts.** The adjective *nephalios* occurs only three times in the New Testament. It is used by Paul in his description of the qualifications desired of bishops, women and older men. The first two instances occur in 1 Timothy 3:2, 11: “Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, *temperate* [*nephalion*], sensible [*sophrona*], dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard [*me paroinon*] . . . The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but *temperate* [*nephalious*], faithful in all things.” The third instance is found in Titus 2:2, “Bid the older men be *temperate* [*nephalious*], serious, sensible [*sophronas*], sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness.”

Earlier we noticed that *nephalios* occurs together with *sophron* in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 2:2, the first to denote physical abstinence and the second mental vigilance. Several commentators recognize that the connection between the two requires a literal interpretation of *nephalios*, as being abstinence from wine. Adam Clarke, for example, though himself a moderationist, offers this comment on 1 Timothy 3:2: “He must be *vigilant*, *nephaleos*, from *ne*, *not* and *pino*, to *drink*. *Watchful*; for as one who drinks is apt to *sleep*, so he who abstains from it is more likely to *keep awake*, and attend to his *work* and *charge*.”<sup>82</sup> Commenting on the same verse Albert Barnes says, “This word (*nephalios*) occurs only here and in verse 11; Titus 2:2. It means, properly, *sober*, *temperate*, *abstinent*, especially in respect to wine; then, *sober-minded*, *watchful*, *circumspect*.”<sup>83</sup>

**“No Drunkard.”** Some argue that the literal interpretation of *nephalios* as abstinent is contradicted by *me paroinos*, rendered “no drunkard” by the RSV. Their reasoning is that the latter negates the former. Paul

could not have enjoined a bishop first to be abstinent and then “no drunkard,” that is, moderate in the use of wine. This apparent contradiction can be resolved by recognizing that *me paroinos* does not necessarily imply moderation. In his word-by-word exposition of 1 Timothy 3:2, Jerome interprets *me paroinos* as totally abstinent. He writes: “‘not a drunkard’ (*non vinolentum*), for he who is constantly in the Holy of Holies and offers sacrifices, will not drink wine or strong drink, since wine is debauchery [*luxuria*—Eph 5:18].”<sup>84</sup> For Jerome, *me paroinos* meant that like the priests in the Old Testament, the bishop must be totally abstinent.

Another resolution to the apparent contradiction can be found by recognizing that the meaning of *paroinos* goes beyond “addicted to wine, drunken”<sup>85</sup> to the complementary idea of being “near wine,” that is, near a place where wine is consumed. The word *paroinos* is composed of *para*, “near,” and *oinos*, “wine.” “The ancient *paroinos*,” as Lees and Burns explain, “was a man accustomed to attend drinking parties, and, as a consequence, to become intimately associated with strong drink.”<sup>86</sup>

Understood in this sense, *paroinos* does not weaken *nephalios*. On the contrary, it strengthens it. What Paul is saying is that a bishop must be not only abstinent, but must also avoid places where wine was consumed. This fits well with Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 5:11, “I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, *drunkard*, or robber—not even to eat with such a one.”

A similar admonition is found in the so-called *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, compiled in the fourth century from earlier canons. The 54th canon reads: “If any one of the clergy be taken eating in a tavern, let him be suspended, excepting when he is forced to bait at an inn upon the road.”<sup>88</sup> The reason for this injunction is presumably the concern over the public image of a clergyman seen eating in a tavern where people often got drunk. The same concern is apparent in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 where Paul mentions those qualities which affect first the bishop’s personal example at home and then his public reputation before the church and society.

**Dual Meaning of *Paroinos*.** Albert Barnes, a respected commentator of the New Testament, specifically mentions the dual meaning of *paroinos*, saying: “The Greek word (*paroinos*) occurs in the New Testament only here [1 Tim 3:3] and in Titus 1:7. It means, properly, *by wine*; that is, spoken of what takes place *by* or *over* wine, as revelry, drinking-songs, etc. Then it denotes, as it does here, one who sits *by* wine; that is, who is in the habit of drinking it. . . . It means that one who is in the *habit* of drinking wine, or who

---

is accustomed to sit with those who indulge in it, should not be admitted to the ministry. The way in which the apostle mentions the subject here would lead us fairly to suppose that he did not mean to commend its use in any sense; that he regarded it as dangerous and that he would wish the ministers of religion to avoid it altogether.”<sup>89</sup>

The meaning of *paroinos* as “near wine,” that is, near a drinking place, is supported by ancient and modern Greek lexicons. The *Lexicon Graeci Testamenti Alphanumericum*, published in 1660, defines *paroinos* in Greek and Latin as “*para to oino, apud vinum,*” which may be translated “near or in the presence of wine.”<sup>90</sup> Liddell and Scott define the related word *paroinios* as “befitting a drinking party.”<sup>91</sup> A colleague at Andrews University of Greek nationality, Dr. Elly Economou, alerted me to the fact that the meaning just given is still current in modern Greek. Her modern Greek-English lexicon defines *paroinos* as: “Drunken. Done (or said) in drinking (at table).”<sup>92</sup> The only example given in the lexicon is “*paroinon asma,* a convivial song.”<sup>93</sup>

In the light of the foregoing considerations Paul enjoins a Christian bishop (overseer) to be not only *nephalios*, that is, abstinent, but also *me paroinon*, that is, not present at drinking places or parties. The Christian minister must not only be himself abstinent, but he must also withhold his presence and sanction from places and associations which could tempt his abstinence or that of others.

Some will argue that this conclusion is negated by Paul’s admonition to deacons to be “not addicted to much wine” (1 Tim 3:8; cf. Titus 2:3) and to Timothy, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1Tim 5:23). These texts will be examined together with a few others in Chapter 7, a chapter devoted specifically to an analysis of the few misunderstood texts regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. Our study will show that these texts substantiate rather than negate Paul’s admonitions regarding abstinence.

**The Reason for Abstinence.** The reason given by Peter and Paul for living abstinent and godly lives is not just medical but eschatological. Healthful and holy living is commended in the Scripture not merely for the sake of personal health and goodness, but primarily for the sake of God’s desire to dwell within us in this present life (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:13) and to fellowship with us in the life to come. The preparation to live in the holy presence of Christ at His coming requires that we learn to live clean and godly lives now. This is the fundamental reason given by Paul in Titus, for admonishing not only bishops but also older men, older women, younger men and slaves to live sober and godly lives.

After admonishing each group individually, Paul gives this final and fundamental reason for his previous exhortations: “For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:11-14).

In this passage Paul appropriately connects the abstention from worldly passions with God’s design for us to live sober-mindedly [*sophronos*], righteously and devoutly in this present world. We noticed earlier the close connection existing between mental sobriety and physical abstinence. The suppression of worldly passions presupposes the abstention from intoxicating beverages, since the latter contributes to the former. This is accomplished not merely through human effort but primarily through “the grace of God” which has appeared, not to sanction indulgence but to train us to avoid whatever interferes with the highest development of our Christian character. The purpose of God’s grace, manifested through Jesus Christ, is not only “to redeem us” by paying the *penalty* of all our past iniquities, but also “to purify” us by providing *power* “to live sober, upright and godly lives,” while awaiting “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

It is this hope of being ready to receive Christ, and to be received by Him on the day of His glorious appearing, that should motivate every Christian to “purify himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). It is to this hope that Peter also appeals when he urges mental vigilance and physical abstinence in those three texts considered earlier. His admonition to “gird up your minds, be completely abstinent” is followed immediately by the exhortation “set your hope upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13). Similarly, in 1 Peter 4:7 the admonition to “keep sane and sober [abstinent]” is predicated on the fact that “the end of all things is at hand.” The same is true of the exhortation to mental and physical sobriety in 1 Peter 5:8, which is preceded by the hope to “obtain the unfading crown of glory” on the day “when the chief Shepherd is manifested” (1 Pet 5:4).

For Christians like the Seventh-day Adventists, who accept the the Biblical teachings on the Second Advent literally rather than simply existentially—that is as a future realization of our present expectations rather than a present experience of the future—the apostolic admonition to abstain from intoxicating beverages assumes added significance. To be abstinent represents a tangible response to God’s invitation to make concrete preparation for the actual coming of our real Savior.

## 5. *Enkrateia* as Physical Abstinence

**Meaning of *Enkrateia*.** Closely related to *nephalios* is the Greek word *enkrateia* which is used five times in the New Testament (Acts 24:25; Gal 5:23; 2 Pet 1:6; 1 Cor 9:25; Titus 1:8). The word *enkrateia* derives its meaning from the stem *krat* which “expresses the power or lordship which one has either over oneself or over something.”<sup>94</sup> This power over oneself is especially manifested in the capacity to abstain from all forms of evil.

The RSV translates *enkrateia* consistently as “self-control” in 1 Corinthians 9:25 while the KJV renders it as “temperate.” Some moderationists find in these texts a support for their view. Their reasoning is that the primary meaning of the Greek *enkrateia* and of the English “temperance” is not “total abstinence” but “moderation or discreetness” or “to resist all temptation to excess in anything.”<sup>95</sup>

The truth of the matter is radically different. While the term “temperance” has come to mean in modern English “moderation,” historically its primary meaning has been “abstinence.” This is true for the English “temperance,” the Latin “*temperantia*” and the Greek “*enkrateia*.” Leon C. Field provides an extensive historical documentation supportive of “abstinence” as the primary meaning of “temperance/*temperantia/enkrateia*.”<sup>96</sup> A similar documentation is provided by Walter Grundmann in his article on “*enkrateia*” in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.<sup>97</sup> The reader is referred to these studies for ample documentation. For our immediate purpose we shall cite only a few texts by way of illustration.

**Sample Texts.** Sir Thomas Elyot, an English author of the sixteenth century, wrote in his *Governor* (1531): “He that is temperate, fleeth pleasure voluptuous and with the absence of them is not discontented, and from the presence of them he willingly *absteineth*.”<sup>98</sup> Similarly the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1640) defines “temperance [as] the habit by which we *abstain* from all things that tend to our destruction; intemperance the contrary vice.”<sup>99</sup>

The same meaning is found in Greek sources. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) says: “The self-restrained man [*enkrates*], knowing that his desires are bad, refuses to follow them on principle.”<sup>100</sup> The apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus has a section entitled “Temperance [*enkrateia*] of the Soul” which opens with these words: “Go not after thy lusts, but refrain thyself from thy appetites.”<sup>101</sup> Abstinence was highly esteemed among the Essenes. Josephus tells us, “These Essenes reject pleasure as an evil, but esteem abstinence [*enkrateian*], and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue.”<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps the most conclusive proof of the abstinence connotation of *enkrateia* is the usage of the title “Enkratites” to designate several early Christian groups who abstained from wine, flesh-meat, and some of them even from marriage.<sup>103</sup>

**Abstinence in Acts 24:25.** The New Testament writers retain the idea of abstinence in their use of *enkrateia*. The first occurrence of the word is in Acts 24:25 as one of the topics presented by Paul to Felix and Drusilla: “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance [*enkrateias*], and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (KJV). Felix was an unjust governor, addicted to licentious indulgence and living in adultery with Drusilla. In view of the notorious cruelty and licentiousness of the guilty pair, it is evident that when Paul spoke to them of *enkrateia*, his theme was not moderation but abstinence from all unlawful and sinful practices.

Wycliffe correctly renders *enkrateia* in this text by “chastitie.” This meaning is most evident in 1 Corinthians 7:9 where Paul uses the verbal form to describe the same virtue of chastity: “But if they cannot exercise self-control [*enkrateuomai*] they should marry.”

**Abstinence in 1 Corinthians 9:25.** In the same epistle Paul uses the verb a second time in a way which clearly includes the idea of abstinence: “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things [*panta enkrateuetai*]. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (1 Cor 9:25, RSV). The KJV renders the verb in question “is temperate in all things.”

Some appeal to this passage to defend the moderate use of alcoholic beverages. They believe that in this passage the apostle teaches Christians to be temperate, that is, moderate, in the use of all things including alcoholic beverages. This represents a misinterpretation of the text which has been influenced by inaccurate modern translations. The older translations recognize that the true meaning of the verb in this passage is abstinence, not moderation. The Latin Vulgate renders it “*ab omnibus se abstinet*” (“he abstains himself from all things”). Wycliffe has the same rendering, “absteyneth hym fro alle thingis.” Tyndale, Cranmer and the Geneva version follow the same translation.

This meaning is supported by the allusion to the training of athletes for the ancient games. Commentators give abundant illustrative references from ancient authors. Adam Clarke, for example, quotes the stoic philosopher Epictetus (about A.D. 100) who wrote: “Do you wish to gain the prize at the Olympic games? Consider the requisite preparations and the consequences: You must observe a strict regimen; must live on food which you dislike; you

must abstain from all delicacies; must exercise yourself at the necessary and prescribed times both in heat and cold; you must drink nothing cooling; *take no wine as formerly*.<sup>104</sup>

In his *De Arte Poetica* Horace has the famous lines which Francis translates as follows: “The youth who hopes the Olympic prize to gain, All arts must try, and every toil sustain; The extremes of heat and cold must often prove; And shun the weakening joys of wine and love [*Abstinet Venere et Bacco*—literally, “he abstains from love and wine”].<sup>105</sup>

In light of what we know about the rigorous abstinent life-style of ancient athletes, Paul’s phrase *panta enkrateuetai* can be rendered correctly as “he abstains from all [harmful] things.” This meaning is recognized by several commentators. Walter Grundmann explains that the verb under discussion in 1 Corinthians 9:25 “simply tells us that for the sake of the goal toward which he strives . . . he [the athlete] *refrains* from all the things which might offend or hamper.”<sup>106</sup> Similarly F. W. Grosheide comments that the meaning of the verb is “[he] trains himself by doing or *taking nothing* that would harm.”<sup>107</sup>

In the very next verses Paul illustrates this meaning by making a personal application. Continuing with the image of the athlete, he says, “Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:26-27). Such language scarcely supports the moderation view of temperance as a prudent use of intoxicating beverages. It rather implies a stern, self-denying discipline. It implies that to qualify for acceptance as citizens of heaven, we must subdue our craving for intoxicating substances by the power of divine grace (Phil 4:13).

**Abstinence in other Passages.** The idea of abstinence is also present in the other passages in which *enkrateia* occurs. We shall make only a brief reference to them. In Galatians 5:22 this word stands as the completion and crown of the fruit of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [*enkrateia*]; against such there is no law.” The fruit of the Spirit, including the last named, stands in opposition to the “works of the flesh” enumerated in the preceding verse and among which “drunkenness” is prominent. This suggests that *enkrateia* is seen by Paul especially as the antithesis of drunkenness.

In 2 Peter 1:6 *enkrateia* occurs among the list of virtues, sometimes called “Peter’s ladder,” and is rendered “self-control” in the RSV. The Vulgate renders it *abstinentia*, and Wycliffe “absteynence.” The adjective

---

form *enkrate* occurs once in Titus 1:8 where it corresponds to *nephalion* (“abstinent”) in 1 Timothy 3:2.

From this survey it is clear that the admonitions to sobriety and temperance in the New Testament call for a moderate use of all good things and total abstinence from all that is injurious. Applied to alcoholic beverages, the New Testament teaches total abstinence. Our study of the apostolic exhortations to sobriety expressed through the terms *sophron*, *nepho*, *nephalios*, and *enkrateia* has shown that these terms complement one another in emphasizing the Christian calling to mental vigilance and physical abstinence.

### CONCLUSION

The conclusion emerging from the investigation conducted in this chapter into the apostolic teachings regarding alcoholic beverages is abundantly clear. Contrary to the prevailing perception, the New Testament is amazingly consistent in its teaching of abstinence from the use of alcoholic beverages.

We have found that the texts commonly used to support the moderationist view provide no support to such a view. On the contrary, some of them openly contradict the moderationist view.

The irony of the charge in Acts 2:13 that the apostles were drunk on *gleukos*, that is, grape juice, their common beverage, provides an indirect but important proof of their abstinent life-style and inferentially of the life-style of their Master.

Paul’s reference to “drunkenness” at the Communion table of the Corinthian church (1 Cor 11:21) offers no support for a moderate use of alcoholic wine, because whatever was done at Corinth was a departure from the instructions Paul had delivered to the church. Thus, their conduct constitutes a warning rather than an example for us. Furthermore, our study of the meaning of the verb *methuo* (“satiated”) and of the implications of Paul’s admonitions suggests quite clearly that the problem at Corinth was indulgence in eating rather than intoxication with alcoholic wine.

The intent of Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 5:18 (“Do not get drunk with wine”) is not to sanction the moderate use of wine, but to show the irreconcilable contrast between the spirit of wine and presence of the Holy Spirit. The structure of the passage, as well as the possible connection between “wine” and the relative clause—recognized by many ancient and modern translations—makes this text one of the most powerful Biblical indictments against intoxicating wine.



The apostolic admonitions to sobriety and temperance call for a moderate use of all good things and total abstinence from all that is harmful. Our study of the Greek terms (*sophron*, *nepho*, *nephalios*, and *enkrateia*) used in the apostolic admonitions has shown how these terms complement one another in emphasizing the Christian need for both mental vigilance and physical abstinence from intoxicating substances such as alcoholic beverages. The fundamental reason given by Peter and Paul for their call to a life of vigilance and abstinence is eschatological, namely, preparation to live in the holy presence of Christ at His soon coming.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Rom 14:21; Eph 5:18; 1 Tim 3:8; 5:23; Titus 2:3; Rev 6:6; 14:8; 14:10; 16:19; 17:2; 18:3, 13; 19:15.

2. See discussion in Stephen M. Reynolds, *Alcohol and the Bible* (Little Rock, Arkansas, 1983), p. 52.

3. See, for example, the Greek lexicons of E. Robinson and Dean Alford, s. v. “*Gleukos*.”

4. Philo, *On Drunkenness* 36.

5. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 11, 83.

6. See, for example, Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968 edition, s. v. “*Gleukos*;” James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, s. v. “*Gleukos*;” Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s. v. “*Gleukos*;” also the commentaries of R. H. Lenski and Albert Barnes on Acts 2:13. For a list of additional authors, see William Patton, *Bible Wines. Laws of Fermentatation* (Oklahoma City, n.d.), pp. 93-95.

7. Horace Bumstead, “The Biblical Sanction of Wine,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 38 (January 1881): 81.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

9. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine. An Exegetical Study* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 20.

10. Horace Bumstead (n. 7), p. 81.

11. Eusebius, *Church History* 2, 23, 4, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. 1, p. 125.

12. As quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* 2, 23, 4 (n. 11), p. 125.
13. Some information in this regard is provided by G. W. Samson, *The Divine Law as to Wines* (New York, 1880), pp. 197-210. The value of his research, however, is diminished by the lack of accurate references.
14. Ernest Gordon (n. 9), p. 20.
15. Cited in Charles Wesley Ewing, *The Bible and its Wines* (Denver, 1985), p. 107.
16. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 56.
17. Leon C. Field, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* (New York, 1883), p. 60.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 60, note 1.
19. G. W. Samson (n. 13), p. 201.
20. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (New York, 1938), vol. 2, p. 254.
21. Markus Barth, *Ephesians. Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* (New York, 1974), p. 581.
22. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 16), p. 47.
23. Horace Bumstead (n. 7), p. 88.
24. Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the New Testament* (New York, 1860), vol. 5, p. 131.
25. Leon C. Field (n. 17), p. 118.
26. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus, Ohio, 1950), p. 618, emphasis supplied. In a similar vein S. D. F. Salmond writes: "The *en ho* refers not to the *oinos* alone . . . but to the whole phrase *methuskesthe oino*—the becoming drunk with wine" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1956), vol. 3, p. 362.
27. Robert Young, trans., *The Holy Bible Consisting of the Old and New Covenants* (Edinburgh, 1911).
28. *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, 1970), vol. 11, p. 714.
29. Tertullian, *On Modesty* 17.

- 
30. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5, 18, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 3, p. 468.
31. Jerome, *Letter 107 to Laeta*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 6, p. 193.
32. Jerome, *Letter 108 to Eustochium* (n. 31), p. 200.
33. *Die Bibel in heutigem Deutsch. Die Gute Nachricht des Alten und Neuen Testaments* (Stuttgart, 1982).
34. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament. Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, 1955), p. 104.
35. Leon C. Field (n. 17), p. 119.
36. Albert Barnes (n. 34), pp. 104-105.
37. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (München, 1926), p. 609.
38. Ibid.
39. Cited in the compilation prepared by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz, *Midrash Yayin Veshechor. Talmudic and Midrashic Exegetics on Wine and Strong Drink* (Detroit, 1923), p. 39.
40. Ibid., p. 53.
41. Ibid., p. 61.
42. Ibid., p. 45.
43. Leon C. Field (n. 17), p. 119.
44. 1 Tim 2:9, 15; 3:2; Titus 1:8; 2:2, 4, 5, 6, 12; Acts 26:25; Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35; 2 Cor 5:13; 1 Pet 4:7; Rom 12:3.
45. Ulrich Luck, "Sophron," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. 7, 1097.
46. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s. v. "Sophroneo."
47. James Donnegan, *A New Greek and English Lexicon*, 1847 edition, s. v. "Sophron."

- 
48. Thomas S. Green, *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament*, 1892 edition, s. v. “*Sophron*.”
  49. Aristotle, *Rethoric* 1, 9.
  50. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2, 9.
  51. *Ibid.*, 2, 3, 1.
  52. *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Testament of Judah* 16, 3, ed., R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913), p. 320.
  53. See Ulrich Luck (n. 45), p. 1101.
  54. Philo, *On Drunkenness* 95, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *The Loeb Classical Library* (New York, 1930), p. 367.
  55. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 2, 2, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 2, p. 243.
  56. Ulrich Luck (n. 45), p. 1103.
  57. Frederic Richard Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (London, 1894), p. 367.
  58. O. Bauernfeind, “*Nepho, Nephaios, Eknepho*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1967), vol. 4, p. 936.
  59. Philo, *De Plantatione* 172, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *The Loeb Classical Library* (New York, 1930), p. 303.
  60. G. W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), s. v. “*Nepho*.”
  61. *Origen Against Celsus* 3, 76, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1972), vol. 4, p. 494.
  62. James Donnegan (n. 47), s. v. “*Nepho*.”
  63. Thomas S. Green (n. 48), s. v. “*Nepho*.”
  64. E. Robinson, *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, 1850), s. v. “*Nepho*.”
  65. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1937 edition, s. v. “*Nepho*.”

66. G. W. Lampe (n. 60), s. v. “*Nephalios*.”
67. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 2, 2, (n. 55), p. 242.
68. Hesechius of Alexandria, *Hesyhii Alexandri Lexicon*, 1858 edition, s. v. “*Nephalios*.”
69. Stephanus, as cited by Leon C. Field (n. 17), p. 122.
70. Demetrios C. S. Byzantios, *Lexicon Epitomou tes Ellenikes Glosses*, 1939 edition, s. v. “*Nephalios*.”
71. O. Baurneind (n. 58), p. 939.
72. For an extensive compilation, see Lees and Burns (n. 57), p. 362.
73. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 12, 2, trans. William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 81.
74. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 5, 5, 7 (n. 73), p. 556.
75. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 4, 183.
76. Philo, *On Drunkenness* 123 (n. 54), p. 383.
77. James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 1952 edition, s. v. “*Nephalios*.”
78. See discussion in Lees and Burns (n. 57), pp. 364-365.
79. Porphyry, *De Abstinencia* 1, 27.
80. Ernest Gordon (n. 9), p. 31.
81. Adam Clarke (n. 20), vol. 2, p. 869.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 595.
83. Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (New York, 1873), p. 139.
84. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1, 35, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 6, p. 372.
85. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968 edition, s. v. “*paroinos*.”
86. Lees and Burns (n. 57), p. 367.

- 
87. Emphasis supplied.
88. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 54, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1970), vol. 7, p. 503.
89. Albert Barnes (n. 83), p. 140.
90. *Lexicon Graeci Testamenti Alphanumericum*, 1660 edition, s. v. “*Par-oinos*.”
91. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968 edition, s. v. “*Paroinios*.”
92. G. Giannakopoulou and E. Siapenou, *Ariston Ellenoaggaikon Lexicon*, 1971 edition, s. v. “*Paroinos*.”
93. Ibid.
94. Walter Grundman, “*Enkrateia*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 339-342.
95. The authors of the quotes are Chancellor H. Crosby and Horace Bumstead, both of whom are cited and discussed in Leon C. Field (n. 17), pp. 124-126.
96. Ibid., pp. 125-129.
97. Walter Grundmann (n. 94), pp. 339-342.
98. Sir Thomas Elyot, *Governor* 3, 19, cited in Leon C. Field (n. 17), p. 125.
99. Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, cited in Leon C. Field (n. 17), p. 125.
100. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7, 1, 6, trans. H. Rackham, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1939), p. 379.
101. Ecclesiasticus 18:30.
102. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 2, 8, 2, trans. William Whiston (n. 73), p. 476.
103. Some of the early Christian writers mentioning the Encratites are Irenaeus, *Against Hereses* 1, 28; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7, 17; Hippolytus, *Philosophumena* 8, 20; Epiphanius, *Against Heresies* 46, 47.

---

104. Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 35, cited in Adam Clarke (n. 20), vol. 2, p. 239.

105. Horace, *De Arte Poetica* verse 412, cited in Adam Clarke (n. 20), p. 240.

106. Walter Grundmann (n. 94), p. 342.

107. F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 215. Irving Woodworth Raymond remarks: “Temperance occupies an important position in St. Paul’s thought. He regards it as the antithesis of drunkenness and frequently describes the virtue in athletic or military terms” (*The Teaching of the Early Church on the Use of Wine and Strong Drink* [New York, 1927], p. 87).

# Chapter 7

## A LOOK AT SOME MISUNDERSTOOD PASSAGES

The Bible is a source book and not a doctrinal manual where subjects are systematically presented in sequential order. To determine the teaching of Scripture on any given subject, all the relevant passages must be examined in the light of their immediate context and of the overall Biblical teaching .

**Analogy of Scripture.** One of the most important safeguards for the interpretation of a Biblical text is respect for the analogy of Scripture. This means that Scripture must serve as a guide to understand Scripture. Any problem text must be interpreted not in isolation but in the light of the overall teaching of Scripture. An interpretation of a passage contradicting the whole trend of Scripture must be rejected as wrong. To do otherwise means to view the Bible merely as a human literary product, plagued with inner conflicting teachings. Such a view is negated by the internal witness of Scripture, which claims that its content is not the product of private interpretation, “because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

**Procedure.** Our procedure will be to interpret each of the texts examined in this chapter syntactically that is, according to the grammatical rules governing the text; contextually, that is, in the light of its immediate or larger context; historically, that is, in the light of the circumstances and customs of the time; and analogically, that is, by respecting the overall teaching of Scripture.

In the preceding chapters we have already dealt with several misunderstood texts, especially in our study of the teachings of Jesus and of the apostolic church regarding alcoholic beverages. A few texts, however, were intentionally omitted to avoid lengthy digression from the main subject.



The objective of this chapter is to examine five major texts, three of them from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. Great importance is attached to these texts by those who find in them a Biblical sanction for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages.

The chapter is divided into five parts, each of which examines one of the following texts:

- (1) Deuteronomy 14:26: Drink “Wine or Strong Drink”
- (2) Proverbs 31:6: “Give Strong Drink . . .”
- (3) Hosea 4:11: “Wine and New Wine Take Away Understanding”
- (4) 1 Timothy 5:23: “Use a Little Wine . . .”
- (5) 1 Timothy 3:8: “Not Addicted to Much Wine.”

## PART 1

### DEUTERONOMY 14:26

#### DRINK “WINE AND STRONG DRINK”

**Importance of the Passage.** Deuteronomy 14:22-26 contains a unique ordinance regarding the annual harvest festival in which all Israel gathered together at the sanctuary to bring their tithes and celebrate God’s bountiful harvest. The ordinance consists of a general rule for those living in the proximity of the sanctuary and of a special provision for those living at a distance. The general rule states: “You shall tithe all the yield of your seed, which comes forth from the field year by year. And before the Lord your God, in the place which he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine [*tirosh* ], and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herd and flock; that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always” (Deut 14:22-23).

The special provision says: “And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to bring the tithe, when the Lord your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the Lord your God chooses, to set his name there, then you shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses, and spend the money for whatever you desire, oxen, or sheep, or wine [*yayin* ] or strong drink [*shekar*], whatever your appetite craves; and you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household.” (Deut 14:24-26).

This special provision for “the delayed tithe” is regarded by moderationists as the *locus classicus* where the Scripture clearly sanctions

the moderate use of alcoholic beverages. “The thrust of this passage is unambiguous,” writes Kenneth Gentry, “and the divine sanction is unmistakable: *shekar* [strong alcoholic drink] was not only allowed of God’s people but could be enjoyed ‘in the presence of the Lord’ (v. 26) if partaken in ‘the fear of God’ (v. 23).”<sup>1</sup>

**The Nature of the Problem.** It must be admitted that the text in question poses a problem, since it appears to grant God’s permission to those traveling to the sanctuary from distant places presumably to spend part of their tithe money to purchase not only food (“oxen, or sheep”) but also “wine or strong drink” (v. 26). The word “strong drink” renders the Hebrew noun *shekar*, a term which is used 23 times in the Old Testament. With the exception of its usage in Deuteronomy 14:26 and possibly in a couple of other texts,<sup>2</sup> *shekar* denotes an intoxicating beverage disapproved by God.

Proverbs 20:1, for example, condemns “strong drink” (*shekar*) as a “brawler.” Similarly, Isaiah pronounces a “woe” upon “those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink [*shekar* ]” (Is 5:11). “Strong drink” is also prohibited, together with wine, to the priests (Lev 10:9-11) and to the Nazarites (Num 6:2-4; Jud 13:3-5).

In view of the overwhelming divine disapproval of the use of “wine and strong drink,” how can we explain the apparent sanction of their use at the annual harvest festival described in Deuteronomy 14:26?

**Solution of the Moderationists.** Moderationists attempt to resolve this apparent tension by distinguishing between the divine disapproval of the immoderate consumption of “wine and strong drink” and the divine approval of their moderate use. Kenneth Gentry, for example, maintains that *shekar* “could be enjoyed ‘in the presence of the Lord’ (v. 26) if partaken in ‘the fear of the Lord’ (v. 23).”<sup>3</sup>

This resolution is unacceptable for two reasons. First, the phrase “that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always” (Deut. 14:23), does not qualify directly the use of “wine and strong drink,” but the return of the tithe at harvest time and the eating at the sanctuary of the harvest produce of grain, wine [*tirosh*—grape juice], oil and the firstlings of the flock (Deut. 14:23). Second, the consumption of alcoholic beverages, as we have shown in Chapter 3, is condemned in the Scripture, irrespective of the quantity used. This means either that *shekar* is here used differently than normally or that the Scripture contradicts itself. The latter would negate the divine revelation and inspiration of the Bible (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21).

**A Mosaic Concession.** A different resolution is proposed by Lael Othniel Caesar in his Master's thesis on "The Meaning of *Yayin* in the Old Testament," presented at Andrews University. Caesar suggests that "the apparent tension between Deuteronomy 14:26 and the testimony of the rest of Scripture [against the use of alcoholic beverages] is here seen as the insight of an experienced and compassionate leader into the ways of his people. The prevalence of alcohol's use in ancient Israel's daily life and festivity adequately bears out the Mosaic insight while in no way invalidating the divine requirement of abstention from alcohol."<sup>4</sup>

Caesar attempts to resolve the apparent tension between the divine disapproval of alcoholic beverages and the alleged Mosaic sanction of them in Deuteronomy 14:26 by making the latter the concession ("the insight") of a compassionate leader who knew the addiction of his own people to the use of alcohol. This resolution is contradicted by two factors: the context and common sense. The context of the passage is a call to the people to be "holy to the Lord" (Deut 14:2, 21) by not eating anything unclean (vv. 3-21). Could Moses admonish the people to live up to their holy calling by abstaining from different kinds of unclean foods, only to climax his admonition by granting them permission to freely consume intoxicating "wine and strong drink"?

Common sense dictates that if Moses knew the addiction of his people to the use of alcohol he would not have recommended that they freely spend part of their tithe money on alcoholic "wine or strong drink." Such a recommendation would represent not "the insight of an experienced and compassionate leader," but the blindness of an incompetent and irresponsible leader.

Caesar's approach to the problem leaves him with no other choice but to conclude that while "overall, the OT provides condemnation not only of drunkenness, but of alcohol drinking per se," Deuteronomy 14:26 "grants permission to use intoxicants."<sup>5</sup> Such a conclusion is tantamount to saying that the Bible is contradictory in its teaching on alcoholic beverages. It is evident that this conclusion ignores the principle of the analogy of Scripture, according to which a problem text must be interpreted in the light of the overall teaching of Scripture.

**"Satisfying Grape Juice."** Robert Teachout presents a noteworthy resolution to the apparent tension in Deuteronomy 14:26. In brief, Teachout shows in his dissertation that all the times in which *yayin* and *shekar* ("wine or strong drink") occur together, the two words uniformly constitute a hendiadys, that is, they express the same idea of wine. In most instances they refer to intoxicating wine, but in Deuteronomy 14:26 the two words *yayin* and *shekar* give together the one idea of "satisfying grape juice."<sup>6</sup>

Teachout bases his conclusion on textual and contextual considerations. Textually he notes that the word *shekar*, like *yayin*, “can refer to grape juice as well as to wine (cf. Deut 29:6; Num 28:7; Ex 29:40).”<sup>7</sup> The verb *shakar*, which is etymologically related to the noun *shekar*, means primarily “to drink deeply,” as indicated by its usage in Haggai 1:5-6 and Song of Solomon 5:1.<sup>8</sup> Thus the idea of drunkenness is not the innate meaning of the noun or verb, but is determined by its context and the beverage being imbibed.

Contextually, Teachout argues convincingly that “the context demands this understanding, since it specifically indicates that the beverage was to be imbibed ‘before the *Lord*.’ In order to be able to rejoice properly before the *Lord* over what He has provided, one would have to be sober. Since God had explicitly denied intoxicants (on pain of death—Lev 10:9) to the priests serving in His presence, it would be totally out of character for God to *command* the use of these same intoxicants by the worshippers in one of their infrequent appearances before Him, especially when they were in the company of those priests.

“The context also suggests very strongly that only fresh juice is in view in verse 26 in light of the preceding verses. In verse 23 it is clear that all who come to this harvest festival will be bringing and drinking *tirosh* not *yayin*. Whereas *yayin* can be legitimately considered to be a somewhat ambiguous term (referring to either fresh juice or fermented wine depending on the context), *tirosh* only refers to fresh grape juice in every one of its 38 occurrences in the Old Testament. [Cf. page 83, footnote 1.]

“The beverage to be consumed by those at the festival who were near enough to bring their tithe of the harvest is explicitly restricted to fresh grape juice. Therefore, it seems most inappropriate to assume that those who were so far away that they needed to exchange their tithes for money were free to buy and drink fermented wine instead. At a harvest feast the appropriate drink would be a fresh beverage. Thus both the nature of the festival and the participation of the priests (verse 29) would indicate the freshness of the beverage in verse 26.”<sup>9</sup>

These perceptive observations regarding the implications of the context provide, in my view, conclusive reasons that the phrase “wine and strong drink” could not refer to alcoholic beverages. Teachout’s proposal that the two words are used together (a hendiadys) in this passage to express the one idea of “satisfying grape juice” merits serious consideration. The frequent occurrence of *yayin* and *shekar*, either together or in a synonymous parallelism (Prov 20:1), suggests the possibility that the two words may indeed refer to a common grape beverage, which could be fermented or unfermented, depending upon the context.

**“A Sweet Beverage.”** Without discounting Teachout’s proposal, I wish to submit an alternative proposal, namely, that *shekar* in Deuteronomy 14:26 could be a sweet beverage made from dates or honey. In this case the text would read, “and spend the money for whatever you desire, oxen, or sheep, or grape juice or sweet drinks.” Support for this proposal comes from the usage of *shekar* in Isaiah 24:9 and from the root meaning of the word found in languages related (cognate) to Hebrew.

In describing the effects of divine judgment upon the earth, Isaiah says: “No more do they drink wine [*yayin*] with singing; strong drink [*shekar*] is bitter to those who drink it” (Is. 24:9). The RSV translation of *shekar* as “strong drink” obscures here the contrast between “sweet” and “bitter.” The adjective “strong,” though consistently used in conjunction with *shekar*, is not part of the word itself, but an added word. This gives the false impression to a modern reader that people drank distilled liquor in Old Testament times. This is obviously wrong because the process of distilling alcohol did not develop until around A.D. 500. Isaiah 24:9 suggests that *shekar* in the Old Testament was a beverage valued because of its sweetness, a quality which disappears as the sugar is converted into alcohol.

Leon Field correctly observes that “the contrast between ‘sweet’ and ‘bitter’ in Isaiah 24:9 (literally, ‘bitter shall be the sweet drink—*shekar*—to them that drink it,’) shows that *shekar* was valued on account of its sweetness, a quality which decreases in proportion to the amount of alcohol present. The fact that it was commanded to be consumed ‘before the Lord’ (Deut. 24:26), and to be offered in sacrifice (Num. 28:7), indicates that it included unfermented forms of fruit juice.”<sup>10</sup>

**Derivation of *Shekar*.** The derivation and later usage of *shekar* lend support to the view that the word was used to denote a sweet beverage. In Aramaic, for example, the noun *shikra*, which is related to the Hebrew *shekar*, according to G. R. Driver, “appears to have denoted various intoxicating liquors, including beer from barley and date-wine as well as mead or mixed wine.”<sup>11</sup> In Akkadian the noun *shikarum* meant “beer” made from grain. It would appear, however, that beer was not very prominent in Israel. The making of beer is a rather involved process of which no mention is made in the Bible. Moreover, as Teachout points out, “every historical incident [in the Old Testament] mentioning the drinking of an intoxicating beverage which causes subsequent drunkenness specifically refers to the fermented product of the vine.”<sup>12</sup>

In view of the abundance of palm trees in Bible lands and of the easy manufacture of palm- or date-wine, it seems probable that *shekar* in the Bible

refers not to beer but to a date beverage. This view is supported by the use of the derivatives of *shekar* in Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic to denote date-wine. Stephen M. Reynolds, one of the translators of the New International Version, observes that “the Syriac language has a cognate word which suggests that the primitive meaning of the proto-Semitic root *sh-k-r* may have been a drink made from date palm or honey [A *Compendious Syriac Dictionary* Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith, Edited by J. Payne Smith, Oxford: Clarendon Press. Article, ‘*Shakar*’]. An intoxicating date wine may have in course of time come to be the meaning, and the word may have also taken on the meaning of beer.

“There is enough evidence to say that it is unjustifiable to claim that *shekar* must essentially be an intoxicating drink, and since the circumstances of its use in Deuteronomy 14:26 are such that an intoxicant is inconsistent with God’s commands given in other places, we must assume that a non-intoxicant is intended here.”<sup>13</sup>

A similar view is expressed by *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* : “Probably the most common sort of *shekar* used in Bible times was palm- date-wine. This is not actually mentioned in the Bible and we do not meet with its Hebrew name *yen tamarin* (‘wine of dates’) until the Talmudic period. But it is frequently referred to in the Assyrian-Babylonian contract tablets (cuneiform), and from this and other evidence we infer that it was very well known among the ancient Semitic peoples. Moreover, it is known that the palm tree flourished abundantly in Bible times, and the presumption is therefore very strong that wine made of the juice of dates was a common beverage.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Encyclopedia Biblica*, edited by T. K. Cheyne and Sutherland Black, offers a similar explanation regarding the original meaning of *shekar*: “In the Assyro-Babylonian contract-tablets *shikaru* denotes intoxicating beverages generally, and in particular wine made from dates (*Del. Ass. HWB*, s.v.). Indeed it is extremely probable that in prehistoric times, while the Semitic races were still confined to their primitive home in Arabia, the principal, if not the sole, intoxicant was obtained from fermented date-juice.”<sup>15</sup>

**Fermented or Unfermented?** The last quotation is an example of the prevailing assumption that *shekar* was an intoxicating beverage, especially since in the overwhelming majority of its Old Testament occurrences, it denotes an intoxicating beverage which God disapproves. This assumption is not accurate, however, because, like *yayin* (“wine”), *shekar* is a generic term that could refer either to a sweet, unfermented beverage as suggested by Isaiah 24:9, or to a fermented, intoxicating beverage as indicated in most other instances (Prov. 20:1; 31:4-6; Is. 56:12).

John Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* explicitly acknowledges the generic nature of *shekar*, saying: "*Shekar* is a generic term, including palm-wine and other *saccharine* beverages, except those prepared from wine. That *shechar* was made inebriating by being mingled within potent drugs, we have just seen."<sup>16</sup>

Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate (about A.D. 400) defines *shekar* as a comprehensive term for different kinds of fermented drinks, excluding wine. Yet the list he gives allows for some of the drinks to be unfermented. In his *Letter to Nepotian* he writes: "*Shechar* in the Hebrew tongue means every kind of drink which can intoxicate, whether made from grain or from the juice of apple, or when honey-combs are boiled down into a sweet and strange drink, or the fruit of palm pressed into liquor, and when water is coloured and thickened from boiled herbs."<sup>17</sup>

The sweet syrup of boiled-down honey-comb could well have been kept and used unfermented, especially in view of the high sugar content. The same could be true of the juice produced by squeezing [*exprimitur*] dates. The same methods used for preserving grape juice could have been employed to preserve, for example, date juice.

In his *Analytical Concordance of the Bible*, Robert Young expresses the view that *shekar* denotes a beverage that is either fermented or unfermented. Under "strong drink" Young defines *shekar* as "Sweet drink (what satiates or intoxicates), *shekar*."<sup>18</sup> This definition indicates that *shekar* can either satiate (fully satisfy) or intoxicate, depending on the nature of the drink. After listing twenty-one Old Testament references, he gives the Greek word *sikera*, indicating also that it may or may not be fermented: "Sweet drink (often fermented), *sikera*; *shekar* Hebrew."<sup>19</sup>

**Survival of *Shekar*.** Several standard English dictionaries and Bible encyclopedias derive our English words "sugar" and "cider" from the Hebrew *shekar*. If this is true, which seems most plausible, it would support the hypothesis that originally *shekar* denoted a beverage noted for its sweetness. It is hard to imagine that the word "sugar" could have derived from a term originally associated with an alcoholic beverage having practically no sugar content nor sweet taste.

*The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia* provides a concise and yet comprehensive description of the derivatives of *shekar* in numerous languages. In its first definition of "strong drink—*shekar*," it says: "(1) Sweet Wine or Syrup. *Shechar*, luscious, *saccharine* drink or *sweet syrup*, especially sugar or *honey of dates* or of the palm-tree (debash) . . . It seems more probable, however, that the *palm syrup* or honey denoted by *shay-kawr*,

was used both as a sweetmeat or article of food, and as a *drink*, like the Hebrew *sobhe* and the Roman *sapa* (boiled wine), diluted with water, as with the modern grape and honey syrups or sherbets (Prov 9:2, 5). The derivatives of *shechar*, expressive of its first signification, are numerous. Eastward and southward, following the Arabian channel and the Saracenic conquests, we meet with the most obvious forms of the Hebrew word still expressive of sugar. Thus we have the Arabic *sakar*; Persic and Bengali, *shukkur* (whence our word for sugar-candy, *shukurkund*, ‘rock-sugar’); common Indian *jagree* or *zhaggery*; Moresque *sekkour*; Spanish, *azucar*; and Portugese *assucar* (molasses being *mel-de-assucar* ‘honey of sugar,’ abbreviated). The wave of population has also carried the original sense and form northwards, embodying the word in the Grecian and Teutonic languages. Hence Greek, *sakehar*; Latin, *saccharum*; Italian, *zuccherò*; German, *zucker* and *juderig*; Dutch, *suiker*; Russian, *sachar*; Danish, *sukker*; Swedish, *socker*; Welsh, *siwgwr*; French, *sucre*; and our own common words *sukkar* (sweetmeats), *sugar*, and *saccharine*. ‘Sukkarde’ is also an old English word clearly traceable in sense and sound to the same origin, and is used by the writers of the middle ages in the sense of dainty, dessert or sweetmeat.”<sup>20</sup>

The second definition given to *shekar* by the same Bible encyclopedia is: “(2) Date or Palm Wine. Date or *palm wine* in its fresh and unfermented state.” This meaning fits the context of both Deuteronomy 14:26 and Isaiah 24:9. In fact, the latter text is quoted in the encyclopedia immediately following the definition just given: “Bishop Lowth translates Is. 24:9 thus, ‘With songs they shall no more drink wine (*i.e.*, of grapes); The *palm wine* shall be *bitter* to them that drink it.’ . . . This is the proper meaning of the word *shekar*; Gr[reek] *sikera*. All enjoyment shall cease; the *sweetest wine* shall become *bitter* to their taste.”<sup>21</sup>

After quoting from several accounts of travelers to the Near East who testify that “palm wine, if drunk fresh, is sweet like honey; but if kept, it turns to vinegar,” the article concludes, saying: “With these facts before us, the language employed by the prophet in the sublime chapter from which we quoted above [Is 24:9], becomes beautifully apposite. His prediction is that ‘the land shall be utterly spoiled,’ that the light of joy shall be turned into the gloom of sorrow, even as the *sweet drink* which corrupts, grows *sour* and *bitter* to those who drink it. The passage clearly indicates the nature of the drink to have been *sweet* in what the Jews esteemed its most valuable condition, but *bitter* in its fermented state. Hence the drunkard is represented in Isaiah 5:20-22, as one who ‘puts bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.’”<sup>22</sup>

The major dictionaries of the English language, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1933 edition), the *Webster’s New International Dictio-*



nary (1959 edition), the *New American Encyclopedic Dictionary* (1906 edition), and *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (1893 edition), all derive the English words “sugar” and “cider” from the Hebrew *shekar* or related (cognate) words in Semitic languages.<sup>23</sup>

**Conclusion on Deuteronomy 14:26.** The preceding considerations have suggested five major reasons why the phrase “wine and strong drink” in Deuteronomy 14:26 refers to an unfermented beverage. First, the larger context of the passage, which calls the people to be “holy to the Lord” by abstaining from anything unclean (Deut 14:3-21), precludes the free consumption of intoxicating beverages at a solemn harvest festival “before the Lord” (vv. 23, 26).

Second, the immediate context (v. 23) specifies that the tithe was to be paid with fresh harvest products (grain, grape juice [*tirosh*], oil and newborn lambs and calves by those living close to the sanctuary. When consumed, the grain would be known as bread and grape juice (*tirosh*) as unfermented wine (*yayin*). It is absurd to imagine that while the worshipers who lived in proximity to the sanctuary celebrated the harvest festival by eating fresh produce, those who had come from distant places would be drinking fermented beverages.

Third, the participation of the priestly Levites in the harvest festival (v. 27) would preclude the consumption of alcoholic beverages (Lev 10:9-10). Fourth, the word *shekar*, like *yayin*, is a generic term which could denote either a fermented or an unfermented beverage. For the text in question the context presupposes the latter.

Fifth, the derivation of *shekar* as well as its usage in Isaiah 24:9 and in cognate words of Semitic and Indo-European languages, indicate that the word originally denoted a sweet beverage, which could become bitter when allowed to ferment.

## PART 2

### PROVERBS 31:6

#### “GIVE STRONG DRINK . . .”

**Importance of the Passage.** In Proverbs 31:6-7 we find this apparent paradoxical counsel: “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.” A superficial reading suggests that this text offers a plain prescription to drown trouble in alcohol.

Some interpret this text as a recommendation to use moderately intoxicating liquor as a tranquilizer to relieve pain, stress and tension. Is this the intent of this passage? If not, what is the meaning of this admonition? To answer these questions we shall look first at the context and then at the text.

**The Context.** The immediate context of verse 6 contains a strong admonition to kings and rulers to abstain from wine and strong drink because these would impair their remembrance of the laws and consequently their capacity to be just in their judicial duties.

The context makes a value judgment on alcoholic beverages, by prohibiting not their abuse but their actual use. It does not say, "It is not for kings to drink *much* wine." Rather it says, "It is not for kings to drink *wine*" (v. 4). In the light of this categorical prohibition of the use of wine in verses 4 and 5, the inspired writer could hardly have recommended a moderate use of alcoholic wine to relieve common pain and to release life's stress and tension.

**The Form of the Counsel.** In the light of its immediate context, the initial imperative "Give" (*tenu*) cannot be regarded as a mandatory command to give alcohol to anyone in distress. Rather it should be viewed as a conditional imperative. The sense would then be, "[If you are going to give strong drink, then] give strong drink to him who is perishing . . ."

The grammatical structure of the sentence supports this view, because it does not say, "Give wine and strong drink to the afflicted and make them forget their troubles." Rather it says, "Give wine and strong drink and let them drink and forget their trouble." This is a way of speaking common to all languages. We say, for example, "Give some people an inch, and they will take a mile." By that we mean, "If we give some people an inch, then they will take a mile." This may be defined as a conditional imperative, in contrast to a mandatory imperative.

The imperative "Give" may also be regarded as a conditional comparison. Kings and rulers are to abstain from alcoholic beverages (vv. 4-5) because these impair the mental clearness and judicial integrity. If not fit for responsible people, for whom are they fit? Verse 6 supplies the answer: "[If you are going to give alcoholic beverages, then] give strong drink to him who is perishing" to relieve him of his misery.

The whole passage may be described as a medal with two sides. On one side is inscribed, "Alcoholic beverages are unfit for responsible, thinking people." On the reverse side it reads, "Alcoholic beverages are only fit for

those who are dying without hope.” Verse 6, then, must be understood as a satirical and ironical counsel. After warning her royal son against the dangers of inebriating beverages, in a strain of irony Lemuel’s mother points to the wretched as the only ones for whom alcohol is fit. Can any stronger condemnation be passed upon alcoholic beverages?

**The Nature of the “Misery.”** Further light is shed on the passage by noting the nature of the trouble experienced by those to whom alcoholic beverages are granted. The text speaks of those who are “perishing” (*obed*) and in “bitter distress” (*marei naphesh*). Both terms in Hebrew denote a desperate, hopeless situation. In other words, it is not as when a person says, “I am dying of thirst. I must have a beer,” or “I cannot sleep. Let me take a sleeping pill.” But, rather as when a person cries out in distress, “The pain is killing me. Give me anything that can kill the pain.” We are dealing with the case of someone dying of excruciating agony, as by crucifixion.

The Talmud interprets Proverbs 31:6 as a recommendation to give intoxicants to deaden the pain of those being executed. *Sanhedrin* 43a says: “Rab Ehisda has said, ‘To him who went forth to be executed there was given a little frankincense mixed with wine to deprive him of consciousness.’”<sup>24</sup> In his article on “Wine” in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Heinrich Seeseman relates this passage to the “wine mingled with myrrh” (Mark 15:23) given to Christ on the Cross, but which He refused. Seeseman notes that “Jesus’ rejection of the drink shows that He accepted the suffering of the Cross to the full.”<sup>25</sup> Had He not been our Redeeming Savior, Christ could have taken that drink. The Scripture is not against the use of pain killers. However, the fact that Christ *refused* intoxicating wine even to relieve the agony of the Cross, provides a most telling testimony of His disapproval of intoxicating beverages. It is noteworthy that afterwards, when Christ was offered vinegar (*oxos*), a non-intoxicant, He accepted it (John 19:29, 30).

**Medical Use of Alcohol.** Proverbs 31:6 might lend some support to the medical use of alcohol. Note, however, that the passage *does not* say that those who are experiencing some temporary discomfort should relieve their pain by drinking alcohol. Rather it calls for others to “give” the sufferer alcohol as a pain reliever. Applied to our times, this suggests that drugs may be given to a patient *only* on the order of a qualified physician.

Even when a person is under doctor’s orders, it is well to be careful in the use of narcotics such as alcohol. There are all kinds of drugs and some of them have harmful side effects. If the ingestion of alcohol should be indicated for medical purposes, its effect is minimized by the fact that the quantity is usually small and the patient is in bed, thus least apt to need to make critical decisions which could place the lives of others at risk.

Summing up, Proverbs 31:6 does not recommend a moderate use of alcoholic beverages for the purpose of pleasure. Rather, in an ironical fashion, it suggests that alcohol is fit only to kill the excruciating pain of someone who is dying.

### PART 3

#### HOSEA 4:11

#### “WINE AND NEW WINE TAKE AWAY THE UNDERSTANDING”

**Importance of the Passage.** In the context of a divine lamentation over the spiritual apostasy of Israel, Hosea 4:11 says: “Whoredom and wine and new wine [*tirosh*] take away the heart” (KJV). Most moderationists appeal to this verse to defend their one-wine theory. They argue that Hosea 4:11 proves that both old wine (*yayin*) and new wine (*tirosh*) were fermented with full intoxicating properties. Referring to this text, Kenneth Gentry says, “The prophet laments that ‘idolatry, wine and new wine [*tirosh*] take away the understanding.’ That is, men are intoxicated by ‘new wine’ as well as by ‘wine’ (*yayin*).”<sup>26</sup>

The same view is expressed even more emphatically by John Fitzsimmond in his article on “Wine and Strong Drink” in the *New Bible Dictionary*, where he says: “*Tirosh*, sometimes translated ‘new’ or ‘sweet wine,’ has often been regarded as unfermented and therefore unintoxicating wine, but an example such as Hosea 4:11, together with the usage of the Talmud, makes clear that it is capable of being used in a bad sense equally with the others.”<sup>27</sup>

In the light of these claims, it is important to answer two questions: (1) Is the “new wine” (*tirosh*) here fermented, intoxicating wine? (2) If so, does the text allow for a moderate use of alcoholic wine? We shall endeavor to answer these two questions by examining first the general meaning of *tirosh* (“new wine”) and then its particular use in Hosea 4:11.

**The Meaning of *Tirosh*.** Considerable disagreement exists over the actual meaning of *tirosh*. For some it denotes “*wine* in the process of growth and manufacture.”<sup>28</sup> For others it means *grapes* in their solid form and not grape juice either fermented or unfermented.<sup>29</sup> For others still, it “uniformly refers to fresh, pure *grape juice*.”<sup>30</sup>

The word occurs thirty-eight times in the Old Testament. Nineteen times it is parallel to “grain” (*dagan*) and “fresh oil” (*yitzhar*), usually in the following order: grain, new wine, and oil.<sup>31</sup> Eleven times it is parallel to

“grain” alone,<sup>32</sup> and twice to “oil” alone.<sup>33</sup> Five times it occurs without any of the above words.<sup>34</sup>

A study of the context where the triplet “grain, new wine and oil” occurs clearly shows that the three words refer to the *raw harvest product* which has been threshed or pressed. This is proved also by the fact that a different triplet is used to designate the finished product ready for the consumer: “bread” (*lehem*), “wine” (*yayin*) and “oil” (*shemen*).<sup>35</sup>

Isaiah 65:8 provides a clear example where *tirosh* refers to *fresh grape juice*: “Thus says the Lord: ‘As the wine [*tirosh*] is found in the cluster, and they say, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,’ so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all.’” It is obvious that in this passage *tirosh* means *fresh grape juice*, since it speaks of the juice still on the vine.

Other texts suggest, however, that *tirosh* refers not only to grape juice but to the *grapes themselves* in solid form. In Micah, for example, *tirosh* denotes the *grapes* being trodden: “You shall sow, but not reap; you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you shall tread grapes [*tirosh*], but not drink wine [*yayin*]” (Micah 6:15). Another clear example is found in Nehemiah where the people pledge to bring the tithe of “the fruit of every tree, the wine [*tirosh*] and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God” (Neh 10:37). Here *tirosh* is clearly used as the *fruit* of the vine, which presumably is grapes and not wine.

**Possible Broader Meaning.** The above examples indicate that *tirosh* denotes either the freshly pressed grape juice or the grapes themselves. The question now is, Does *tirosh* refer also to newly fermented wine, not fully aged? With the exception of Hosea 4:11, none of the other thirty-five texts where the word occurs allow for such a meaning. Whether or not *tirosh* in Hosea 4:11 means newly fermented wine must be determined by a study of its immediate and larger context. This we shall do shortly.

It must be admitted that in later Jewish history *tirosh* was used as a designation for fermented wine. A clear example is the question asked in the Talmud: “Why is wine sometimes called ‘*Yayin*’ and at other times ‘*Tirosh*’?” The answer given is, “It is called ‘*Yayin*’ because it brings lamentation into the world, and it is called ‘*Tirosh*,’ because he who indulges in wine becomes poor.”<sup>36</sup>

It is unlikely that *tirosh* was already used to denote fermented wine at the time of Hosea in the eighth century B.C., in view of the fact that the term is consistently used to designate freshly pressed grape juice or grapes. But assuming for the sake of argument that *tirosh* means newly fermented wine

in Hosea 4:11, this would only prove that the term was used in a generic way to refer to grapes, grape juice and fermented wine. Such a generic usage should not cause surprise, since we have found the terms *yayin* (“wine”) and *shekar* (“sweet or strong drink”) also used in a generic way.

Those of us who have been trained to use words exactly, according to the meaning dictated by the dictionary, may be distressed by finding the ancients using words more freely, often according to the meaning suggested by their imagination. For example, a language teacher today would mark as wrong Cato’s use of the phrase “*vinum pendens* “ (“hanging wine”) to designate grape juice.<sup>37</sup> Yet in those days no one seemed to be distressed at the liberty an author would take in using *vinum* to denote grapes, grape juice and fermented wine. Applied to our text, we should not be distressed if *tirosh* were used in Hosea 4:11 with the meaning of “newly fermented wine,” while in the other occurrences is used with the meaning of “grapes” or “grape juice.”

**An Indictment of “New Wine.”** Assuming, without granting, that *tirosh* means “newly fermented wine” in Hosea 4:11, what would the text prove? Not moderation but abstinence. Why? Simply because the prophet does not say “Too *much* wine and new wine take away understanding,” but simply, “*Wine* and *new wine* take away the understanding.” This statement, like the similar one in Proverbs 23:31-32, represents an indictment of “wine and new wine,” irrespective of the quantity used.

**The Context of the Text.** A look at the immediate and larger context, however, excludes the possibility that *tirosh* denotes intoxicating new wine. First of all because the verb *yiqqah* (“take away”) is never used in the sense of intoxication in the Bible. Its range of meanings are “to take, to fetch, to lay hold upon, to take away, to occupy, to seize, to captivate, etc.”<sup>38</sup> Second, had the prophet meant to give a list of the major intoxicating articles which take away the understanding, he would not have mentioned “fornication” first since that does not intoxicate literally. Moreover, why did he mention two articles of the same class, listing the weaker of the two, “new wine” (*tirosh*), last? It would have been more logical for the prophet to mention two articles of a different class, listing the stronger last, such as “wine” (*yayin*) and “strong drink” (*shekar*).

The force of the objection was recognized by the translators of the Septuagint and Vulgate, who departed from the original by translating *tirosh* as “drunkenness” (*methusma*, *ebrietas*): “Fornication, wine and drunkenness take away the heart.”

The solution to the problem must be found by recognizing that what connects together “fornication, wine and grape juice” is not *physical intoxi-*

*cation* but *spiritual apostasy*. In his insightful analysis of this passage, Teachout convincingly shows that Hosea 4:11 builds upon chapter 2, where under the poignant and tragic picture of Hosea's unfaithful wife, God laments that the good things He gave her, namely, "the grain, the wine and the oil" have been "used for Baal" (Hosea 2:8). In chapter 4 the prophet is pressing a point already made earlier, namely "that *even the good things which God has provided can*, as a result of a perverted theology (which placed Baal as the source of the land's fertility and productivity), *be* linked with other more *obvious sins in removing Israel's loyalty from her God*. Hence, 'Harlotry, wine and *even the freshly pressed* grape juice of the harvest have taken away their allegiance.'"<sup>39</sup> The reason that even "grape juice" (*tirosh*) took away their allegiance or understanding is that, as explained earlier in Hosea 2:8, *tirosh* was one of the good gifts which Israel had prostituted by using it for the worship of Baal.

**The Meaning of "Whoredom, Wine and New Wine."** It is noteworthy that Teachout's basic concept was presented over a century ago (1881) by Horace Bumstead in what is perhaps the most scholarly defense of the alleged Biblical sanction for alcoholic wine, published in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (71 pages). In spite of his moderationist position, Bumstead acknowledges that *tirosh* denotes in the Old Testament "the product of the soil and press and the gift of God to the cultivator."<sup>40</sup>

This acknowledgment leads Bumstead to draw some significant conclusions worth quoting in full: "Being used constantly in this way, and never where the act of drinking is involved, except in the rare cases already referred to, *tirosh* would naturally be dissociated from evidences of the intoxicating power which it would possess only in its finished state. For this reason, also, I am quite ready to abandon the solitary text which has been so much relied upon to prove the intoxicating character of *tirosh*: 'Whoredom and wine (*yayin*) and new wine (*tirosh*) take away the heart' (Hosea 4:11). I can readily assent to the interpretation which makes this passage refer to the abuse of God's temporal blessings, which, by their very abundance, have led the children of Israel into idolatry (whoredom). This is precisely what is related in prophetic vision in the dying song of Moses, Deuteronomy 32:14, 15, 16. In this passage from Hosea whoredom seems to refer merely to the allurements of the idol worship, made more attractive by the *yayin*, the finished wine—whether used to excess or not, it does not matter—and by the *tirosh*, in this case the unfinished wine which the husbandman is preparing for future use, and both of which blessings are counted as gifts of the gods to whom the idolatrous Israelites have turned."<sup>41</sup>

Two years after the publication of Bumstead's scholarly article, L. C. Field presented a similar interpretation of Hosea 4:11 in his book, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question*, where he writes: "'To take away the heart,' in this text does not refer to intoxication, but signifies, as Bishop Lowth says, to 'deprive men of their judgment and darken their understanding. So a gift is said to 'destroy the heart.' Ecclesiastes 7:7.' The fact that three distinct things are enumerated indicates a difference. There is no parallelism in the passage. Whoredom is not *yayin*, and *yayin* is not *tirosh*. The first is undoubtedly used for illicit worship or idolatry; the second for sensual gratification; and *tirosh* for worldly possessions. The three had drawn their hearts away from 'God as the infinite Goodness and Fountain of spiritual joy.' The whole forms a striking fulfillment of the dying prophecy of Moses, Deuteronomy 32:14-16. We conclude, therefore, with reference to *tirosh*, that it does not signify wine in any sense or case, but the natural fruit of the vineyard in its solid state and regarded as the basis of wine."<sup>42</sup>

**Conclusion.** The preceding considerations indicate that Hosea 4:11 deals not with physical intoxication but spiritual apostasy. "Wine and grape juice" are mentioned as representative of the good gifts God had provided to the children of Israel, but which had been prostituted, thus leading them into idolatry. The text provides no justification for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages, first because the triplet appears to be used figuratively rather than literally; second, because even if "wine and new wine" were alcoholic, they are condemned in the text for taking away understanding, irrespective of the quantity used.

## PART 4

### 1 TIMOTHY 5:23

#### "USE A LITTLE WINE FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR STOMACH"

**Importance of the Text.** The first text which seems to come to mind to most people when the subject of wine in the Bible is brought up is 1 Timothy 5:23, where Paul counsels Timothy saying: "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." For some this text implies that "alcoholic beverages do not represent health hazards in themselves." For others this passage is a clear recommendation of the moderate use of wine. After arguing that Paul's "directives do not forbid all use of wine, but they do seek to regulate its use," Howard H. Charles writes, "Curiously enough, there is one rather well-known passage in which its use is recommended . . . (1 Timothy 5:23)."<sup>44</sup>



The advice given by Paul to Timothy has been used during the past nineteen centuries by countless people to justify their drinking alcoholic beverages. Thus, it is important for us to establish the nature of Paul's counsel and its application for us today.

**The Connection of the Passage.** Some commentators find it difficult to establish what connection Paul's advice to Timothy has with what precedes and what follows. Several of them view this text as a marginal gloss, not part of the original letter. Moffatt, for example, leaves out the text in his translation and places it in a footnote.

The difficulty in the connection can be resolved by presuming that when Paul wrote in the preceding verse "keep yourself pure" (v. 22), he suddenly remembered both the completely abstemious life-style of Timothy and his ill-health, especially his stomach problems. Thus, he immediately qualified his exhortation by adding, "No longer drink only water . . ." The connection of thought then could be expressed in this way: "Keep yourself pure by all means, but do not let your laudable anxiety for purity prevent you from taking a little wine for your stomach disorders and frequent ailments."

**The Nature of Paul's Advice.** Paul's advice to Timothy must be regarded first of all as an expression of paternal concern and not as a mandatory injunction. The apostle is not *ordering* his beloved son in the Gospel to drink wine freely; rather he advises him to use a *little* wine. It is not an effort to persuade Timothy to violate his principle and practice of abstinence.

The advice is meant specifically *for Timothy* and for the reason stated: "for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." Paul did not set up a rule for the whole Christian world to follow, nor did he prescribe wine as a panacea for all diseases. He was only recommending to his beloved fellow-worker what he thought would alleviate his ailments.

The purpose of the advice, as Albert Barnes aptly states, "was not for the pleasure to be derived from the use of wine, or because it would produce hilarity or excitement, but solely because it was regarded as necessary for the promotion of health; that is, as a medicine."<sup>45</sup> The exhortation extends *only* to the use of wine as a medicine. The only legitimate conclusion to be drawn from this exhortation is that it is proper to use a small quantity of wine for medical purposes. This conclusion will be further clarified below in discussing the nature of the wine recommended by Paul.

**The Form of the Advice.** We should also notice the way in which Paul gives his advice. Ferrar Fenton, who early in this century translated the whole Bible into modern English, points out that most translations fail to

express the full meaning of the Greek text. His literal translation is as follows: “No longer drink water alone, but use *with a little wine for the stomach*, because of your frequent infirmities.”<sup>46</sup>

As a comment to his translation, Fenton says: “The Apostle’s use of the dative case [*oino*—wine], rendered in English by the adverb ‘with’ indicates that ‘a little stomach wine’ should, as a medicament, be mixed, or ‘mingled’ as in other parts it is translated, *with the water*, as the syrup anciently prepared from grapes, and other fruits was done for use as a tonic to the stomach in cases of dyspepsia. When this fact is known, the absurdity  
22

The practice of mixing one part of wine to two, three, five or more parts of water was common in the ancient world. We noticed in Chapter 5 that some wines, especially thick grape juice syrup, were mixed even with twenty parts of water.

Two other significant elements of the form of the advice to be noticed are the use of the verb *kraomai* (“to use,” or “to take”) and of the adjective *oligos* (“little”). Note should be taken of the fact that Paul did not say to Timothy, “Drink . . .” but “Take . . .” Now “take” is the verb used by a doctor when prescribing the dosage of a medication to a patient. Similarly the adjective “little” implies a *very moderate* use of wine. The advice then is not to *freely drink* wine for a stomach problem and frequent ailments, but to “*take a little wine with water . . .*” This sounds more like a doctor’s prescription to a patient than a general principle for all people.

**The Kind of Wine.** It is generally assumed that the wine Paul recommended to Timothy was alcoholic. But this is by no means certain, for two reasons. First, because the term *oinos* (“wine”) was used in a generic way to denote either fermented or unfermented wine. Second, because there are historical testimonies attesting the use in the ancient world of unfermented wine for medical purposes.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) recommends the use of a sweet grape juice, called *glukus* in Greek, because, he says, “though called wine [*oinos*], it has not the effect of wine . . . and does not intoxicate like ordinary wine.”<sup>48</sup> Athenaeus, the Grammarian (A.D. 280), specifically counsels to use a kind of grape juice, which some called “sweet wine” (*glukon oinou*) while others *prodromos* or *protropos* (Latin names for unfermented grape juice), for stomach disorders. He writes: “Let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, especially that kind called *protropos*, the sweet Lesbian *glukus*, as being good for the stomach; for sweet wine [*oinos*] does not make

the head heavy.”<sup>49</sup> Here we have advice which sounds strikingly similar to that of Paul, with the difference that Athenaeus qualifies the kind of wine recommended, namely, sweet grape juice, called “lesbian—*effoeminatum*,” because its alcoholic potency had been removed.

Pliny (A.D. 24-79), a contemporary of Paul and author of the celebrated *Natural History*, offers similar advice regarding the medical use of wine. He introduces his subject, saying: “Innumerable kinds of artificial wine have been invented, which we will now specify, all of them being used for medical purposes.”<sup>50</sup> The first of these wines, described by Pliny, was called *adynamon* and was made in the following manner: “Ten quarts of white must and half that quantity of water are kept boiling till a considerable amount of water is boiled away . . . This drink is given to invalids [*aegris*] for whom it is feared that wine may be harmful.”<sup>51</sup>

Rackham’s translation of the Latin word *aegris* as “invalids” gives the impression that this special boiled grape juice was given only to disabled persons which is not true. The word *aegror*, as shown by any Latin dictionary, simply means “sick,” and it can refer either to physical sickness or to mental distress. Thus, the text says that boiled grape juice was given to sick persons in general and not merely to disabled patients.

It must be admitted that later on in his *Natural History*, Pliny speaks also of the medical use of fermented wine, saying: “Wine is a tonic to the stomach and a sharpener of appetite; it dulls sorrow and anxiety, expels urine and chills, and induces sleep.”<sup>52</sup> This indicates that both unfermented and fermented wines were used for medical purposes. However, Pliny acknowledges that alcoholic wine is absorbed more rapidly and goes “all the more to the head; this remark may be taken once and for all to apply to every other intoxicating liquor.”<sup>53</sup> To avoid the side effects of alcoholic wine, Pliny recommends to use for medical purposes filtered grape juice: “Wines are most beneficial when all their potency has been overcome by the strainer.”<sup>54</sup>

The testimonies of Aristotle, Athanaeus and Pliny just cited indicate that unfermented wine was known and preferred to alcoholic wine for medical purposes because it did not have the side effects of the latter. In the light of these testimonies, it is reasonable to assume that the wine recommended by Paul to Timothy may well have been unfermented. Ellen White supports this conclusion, saying: “Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach’s sake and oft infirmities, but he meant the unfermented juice of the grape. He did not advise Timothy to take what the Lord had prohibited.”<sup>55</sup>

**Timothy Had Been an Abstainer.** The advice “No longer drink *only*

water” implies that Timothy, like the priests and Nazirites, had abstained until that time from both fermented and unfermented wines, presumably in accordance with the instructions and example of Paul. Thus, the apostle may well be clarifying his position by telling Timothy that to keep himself pure did not require him to drink only water. He could rightly use some grape juice to alleviate his stomach problems and frequent ailments.

It is evident from this passage that Timothy usually drank only water. In modern language we would say that he had been a total abstainer, a “teetotaler.” Had he been in the habit of using wine, Paul would not have thus exhorted him. Timothy must have been a remarkably temperate young man to have required the authority of Paul to induce him to use a *little* wine!

Various factors must have caused Timothy to be totally abstinent. The teachings and example of his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois probably played a role. An even greater influence must have been the teaching and example of Paul himself, whom the young evangelist was likely to follow.

We have reasons to believe that Paul had instructed Timothy to be abstinent, because earlier in the same epistle he tells him to require of a Christian bishop to be not only abstinent (*nephalion*), but also a non-participant at drinking places and parties (*me paroinon*—1 Tim 3:2-3). The apostle would not have instructed Timothy to require abstinence of church leaders without first teaching him such a principles. The fact that Timothy had been drinking only water implies that he had been following his master’s counsel very scrupulously.

The abstinence of a Christian minister was presumably based on legislation prohibiting priests from using intoxicating drinks (Lev 10:9-10). The natural feeling would be that a Christian leader should be not less holy than a Jewish priest, especially since the *reason* for the Jewish law remained the same: “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses” (Lev 10:10-11).

The principle of abstinence was not violated by Paul’s recommendation, because the use of a little wine was recommended not for the pleasure of the belly but for the medical need of the stomach.

**Conclusion.** Correctly understood, Paul’s advice to Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach infirmity provides a compelling defense of the principle and practice of abstinence from alcoholic beverages in the apostolic church. It shows that Paul clearly favored the abstinent life-style of Timothy.

We have found the prudent caution of the apostle's language to be most significant. He does not say, "No longer drink water," but rather, "No longer drink *only* water." He does not say, "Drink wine," but rather "use a little wine with water." He does not say, "for the physical pleasure of your belly," but rather, "for the medical need of your stomach." Whether the wine was fermented or unfermented it does not support the regular use of wine in any way.

## PART 5

### 1 TIMOTHY 3:8

#### "NOT ADDICTED TO MUCH WINE"

**Importance of Text.** In stating the qualifications for the office of deacon, Paul says: "Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain" (1 Tim 3:8). Moderationists attach great significance to the phrase "not addicted to much wine," because they believe that it provides a clear proof of Scriptural sanction for the moderate use of alcoholic wine.

The reference to "much" (*pollo*) is seen as most important, because as Kenneth Gentry puts it "'Much' deals with the amount of intake."<sup>56</sup> This means to Gentry that Paul "only forbids *abuse* of alcoholic beverages. (Who could say he was commanding that officers not be 'devoted to much' grape juice?). No New Testament apostle ever commands anything along the lines of: 'Drink no wine at all'"<sup>57</sup> In the same vein, Fred Gealy interprets "not addicted to much wine," not as a commitment to the practice of abstinence, but as a warning not to be "heavy drinkers."<sup>58</sup>

In view of the enormous significance attached to this passage, as providing an alleged clear Biblical sanction for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages, it is important for us to ascertain the meaning of the phrase "not addicted to much wine" in the light of its context, cultural setting and the general teaching of Scripture.

**Immediate Context.** The immediate context of 1 Timothy 3:8 is often overlooked in the interpretation of the phrase "not addicted to much wine." The list of qualifications for deacons follows immediately those for bishops, to which they are connected by the adverb "likewise: (*hosautos*). This implies that what is said about the qualifications of bishops to a large extent applies also to deacons.

Regarding the office of bishop, Paul enjoins that a person aspiring to

such an office must be, among other things, *nephalios*, that is, abstinent, and *me paroinos*, that is, not present at drinking places or parties (1 Tim 3:2-3). We have shown in Chapter 6 that by the use of these words Paul teaches that a Christian minister must not only be abstinent, but he must also withhold his presence and sanction from places and associations which could tempt his abstinence or that of others.

In the context of this admonition to bishops to be abstinent, Paul says, “Deacons likewise must be . . . not addicted to much wine.” This poses a problem: Is Paul setting up a double standard, namely, abstinence for bishops (elders, pastors) and moderation for deacons? Some translations indeed give this impression. The New American Standard Bible, for example translates *me paroinon* as “not addicted to wine” (v. 3) and *me oino pollo prosechontas* as “not addicted to much wine”(v. 8). The obvious implication of this translation is that while a bishop must have no addiction to wine whatever, a deacon can be moderately addicted to wine. This hardly make sense. Paul is not setting up a double standard of moral conduct.

**Is a Little Addiction Right?** Addiction to something which is intrinsically evil is always morally wrong, whether it is moderate or excessive. To argue that “not addicted to *much* wine” allows for a moderate addiction to alcoholic beverages is to adopt a dangerous method of interpretation. Such an interpretation rests on the assumption that what is forbidden in *much* is automatically permissible in *little*; what is declared wrong in *excess* is naturally right in *moderation*. Is such an assumption true? Anyone can see that this method of interpretation is utterly indefensible. When Peter says that the pagans were surprised that Christians did not indulge in “the same excess of riot” as themselves (1 Pet 4:4, KJV), obviously he did not mean that Christians were moderate in their rioting. We cannot automatically assume that what is unlawful in excess is lawful in moderation.

The very next clause in the verse under consideration illustrates this point: “Not greedy of filthy lucre” (KJV). Did Paul by this phrase intend to sanction a moderate desire for unethical gain? It is evident that Paul’s condemnation of excess in the use of wine and in desiring filthy lucre does not represent a commendation of moderation in their use. Today we use the same form of speech when we condemn excess without implying approval of moderation. For example, an abstentionist may blame a person for going *so much* to bars, without meaning to approve occasional visits.

The survey conducted in Chapter 6 of the New Testament admonitions to sobriety and temperance has shown that *Scripture calls for a moderate*

---

*use of all good things and total abstinence from all injurious things.* Moderation in the Bible is not merely a matter of *degrees* but of *nature*. If intoxicating wine is innately evil, then drinking it with moderation does not make it good.

**The Meaning of “Much Wine.”** So far we have argued that in the light of the immediate context, the phrase “not addicted to much wine” cannot mean moderation in the use of alcoholic wine because this would contradict Paul’s requirement for bishops to be abstinent. What then does this phrase mean? The answer must be found first of all by noting that this phrase describes one of the four prerequisites to be met by a candidate aspiring to the office of deacon. This means that the primary function of the phrase “addicted to much wine” is not to establish a general principle regarding a moderate use of wine, but rather to exclude from the office of deacon any man known to be given to the use of much wine.

Albert Barnes emphasizes this important point, saying: “It is not affirmed that it would be proper for the deacon, any more than the bishop, to indulge in the use of wine in small quantities, but it *is* affirmed that a man who is much given to the use of wine ought not, on any consideration, to be a deacon.”<sup>59</sup> Barnes goes on to say, “It may be remarked here, that this qualification was everywhere regarded as necessary for a minister of religion. Even the heathen priests, on entering a temple, did not drink wine (Bloomfield). The use of wine, and of strong drinks of all kinds, was absolutely prohibited to the Jewish ministers of every rank when they were about to engage in the service of God (Lev 10:9). Why should it then be any more proper for a Christian minister to drink wine than for a Jewish or a heathen priest? Shall a minister of the gospel be less holy than they? Shall he have a feebler sense of the purity of his vocation?”<sup>60</sup>

**“Much Wine” and “Little Wine.”** Another important factor that can help us determine the meaning of “much wine” is the reference to “little wine” in 1 Timothy 5:23. The latter is the only other occurrence of the word “wine” in 1 Timothy. Our analysis of this passage has shown two things: (1) Paul advised Timothy to take only a *little* wine, not for pleasure but for medical purposes; (2) The wine recommended was most probably unfermented grape juice, as suggested by comments of some pagan authors regarding the medical use of wine and by Paul’s admonitions to abstinence.

Consistency requires that if Paul approved of Timothy’s abstinence by advising him to use only a *little* wine for medical purposes, then he could hardly have counseled deacons to drink wine moderately simply for pleasure. If Paul really believed that it was proper for a Christian to drink alcoholic wine

moderately, then he would not have given Timothy such restrictive (“little”) and qualified advice (“for the sake of your stomach”). In the light of these facts, the phrase “not addicted to much wine” is most probably a loose form of speech intended to express abstinence from the use of wine.

To interpret the phrase as implying consent to drink wine moderately would place this interpretation in open contradiction with the general teaching of Scripture and with the specific admonitions given by Paul regarding abstinence. The contradiction can be graphically illustrated as follows. If you are a bishop, you must abstain (*nephalios*) from wine and not even be near wine (*me paroinon*—1 Tim 3:2-3). If you are a deacon, you may drink wine moderately (*me oino pollo*—v. 8). If you are a woman, presumably a deaconess, you must abstain (*nephalious*—v. 11) from wine. If you are an aged man, you must abstain (*nephalious*—Titus 2:2) from wine. If you are an aged woman, you must drink moderately (*me oino pollo*—Titus 2:3). Now what would happen if a woman happened to be both aged and a deaconess? Would she be abstinent one day and moderate the next? Such an absurd contradiction can be avoided simply by recognizing that the phrase “not addicted to much wine” does not imply consent to drink moderately, but is simply a loose form of speech to express avoidance in the use of alcoholic wine.

**Respect for the Convictions of Others.** This conclusion is supported by the general principle stated by Paul in Romans 14:21: “It is right [*kalon*, morally excellent, befitting] not to eat meat or drink wine [*oinos*] or do anything that makes your brother stumble.” The apostle states this principle at the conclusion of his exhortation not to eat or drink things which, though good in themselves, could make others fall (Rom 14:21).

The controversy in Romans 14 between the “weak” and the “strong” believers over diet and days cannot be traced back to the Mosaic law, because nowhere does the Pentateuch prescribe strict vegetarianism or preference for fasting days. That the Mosaic law is not at stake in Romans 14 is also indicated by the use of the term *koinos* (“common”) which is used to designate “unclean” food (Rom 14:14). This term is radically different from the word *akathartos* (“impure”) used in the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Leviticus 11 to designate unlawful foods.

The “meat” and “wine” mentioned in Romans 14 is presumably food which had been consecrated to idols before being brought to the market. Some strongly believed that such food, even though it was good in itself, should not be eaten by Christians because it would show support for idol worship. Paul discusses this problem explicitly in 1 Corinthians 8, where he lays down a principle similar to that found in Romans 14:21, namely, “If food



---

is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall" (1 Cor 8:13).

Though the principle of abstaining from meat and wine is stated by Paul in the particular context of offending the conscience of a believer who had scruples over eating food which had been consecrated to idols, the principle is broad enough to include within its scope other circumstances or cases where the main point is involved, namely, the temptation and sin of another. In his comment on this text, Lyman Abbott says: "So great is the evil of becoming a cause of temptation to others or to yourself, that it is better to cut off the most innocent enjoyment, or even useful exercise of a God-given power, than to use it to lead yourself or others to sin."<sup>61</sup>

Applied to the deacon, this principle would require him to abstain from intoxicating beverages, lest his example tempt others to drink alcoholic beverages contrary to their sense of right. Respect for the convictions of others is in itself a good and sufficient reason for abstaining from articles which may be good in themselves. This principle was particularly relevant to deacons, who, because of their office, were called to visit members in their homes and needy people in the community. What they drank and how much they drank in their home visitation could easily endanger the convictions of others.

**A Possible Reference to Grape Juice.** Robert Teachout suggests another possible resolution to the apparent contradiction between the requirement that bishops be abstinent and that deacons be "not addicted to much wine." His suggestion is that the difference between the two statements "may well indicate a different truth," namely, that the former are instructed to abstain from alcoholic beverages, while the latter are to be moderate in the use of grape juice.<sup>62</sup>

"While this simple solution," as Teachout admits, "may, at first, appear to be forced, this would yet be an understanding fully in keeping with both a legitimate meaning of *oinos* and the immediate context. It appears most strange that *only* here (one reference in the entire Bible, a fact overlooked by most who hold such a position) is there any suggestion that the secret to drinking wine with God's approval is the amount ingested. If that were the key, it was needed as well in the Old Testament period. Yet there God explicitly approved of *yayin* ["wine"] as the epitome of His blessing upon man and indicated that it should be drunk to satiety (Song of Sol. 5:1; note also Joel 2:18, 19, etc.). However, since in the context of 1 Timothy 3 there is the overwhelming emphasis on self-control and moderation, to include the idea of such moderation in the use of God's good gifts, grape juice, is not unexpected, especially if there is cultural reason for the stricture."<sup>63</sup>

To clarify his interpretation Teachout gives two examples of Biblical admonitions in the moderate use of things which are good in themselves. The first of these is “honey,” of which he says: “Honey, a gift from God to be enjoyed (with no possible negative connotations), is highly recommended as ‘good.’ However, Proverbs 25:27 relates that even in a good thing, moderation is important: ‘It is not good to eat much honey.’”<sup>64</sup>

A second example is food which is a good gift from God (Ps 104:15). However, as Teachout explains, “gluttony, eating too much food, is a sin (Deut 21:20; Prov 23:21). Whereas some have attempted to pair drunkenness with gluttony as a sin of the same *kind*, biblically these are distinct. Drinking wine is innately wrong (Prov 20:1; 31:4) in any amount. It is important to recognize that drinking wine (in any amount) is rather analogous to eating unclean food (in any amount) as specified in Judges 13:4, 7, 14. Both of these are, according to Scripture, innately sinful (note Lev 11:44-47). Therefore, the assumption that 1 Timothy 3:8 allows deacons to drink wine moderately misses the point completely. Instead, the often repeated words requiring sobriety, temperance and self-control in the context of God’s qualifications for leadership include the caution to exercise moderation even in the enjoyment of God’s gift, grape juice.”<sup>65</sup>

Teachout finds legitimate cultural support for his interpretation in the prevailing intemperance of the Greco-Roman society. Excess in drinking is attested both by Scripture (Titus 1:12; 1 Cor 11:21, 22; 6:10-11) and by secular authors. Pliny describes with disgust “drinking matches” in which a prize was given to those who could drink the most wine.<sup>66</sup> “To enable us to take more,” Pliny says, “we reduce its [wine’s] strength by means of a linen strainer.”<sup>67</sup> This indicates that sometimes they used wines which had most of their alcoholic potency removed by filtering the must, a procedure examined at length in Chapter 4. In some instances people filled their stomachs with pure grape juice, then threw it off by emetics and repeated the draught. Lucian of Samosata (about A.D. 115-200), a pagan satirist, refers to this practice, saying: “I came . . . as those who drink grape juice [*gleukos*], swelling out their stomach, require an emetic.”<sup>68</sup>

**Home Visitation.** An additional cultural factor, not mentioned by Teachout and yet supportive of his interpretation, is suggested by the unique nature of a deacon’s ministry. It fell to the deacon to bring whatever assistance the church could provide to those in need, and to collect offerings from home to home. This would require a deacon to visit homes frequently on official assignment by the leader of the church. On account of the unique ministry in homes a deacon was called to fulfill, each of the four qualifications given by

---

Paul have to do with qualities needed for such a ministry (1 Tim 3:8).

The first quality is “serious,” because the deacon was rightly to represent the sacredness of his office. The second is “not double-tongued,” because in his home visitations a deacon was not to tell different stories to different members in order to try to please everybody. He was to uphold the truth. The third is “not addicted to much wine,” because in visiting members in their homes, a deacon would customarily be offered unfermented wine to drink. The fourth is “not greedy for gain,” because a deacon was responsible for collecting offerings from home to home and distributing them to the needy. These qualities were necessary in order for a deacon to “hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (v. 9).

Christians who had been taught by Paul to abstain from alcoholic beverages would quite naturally offer to a deacon, when he visited them in their homes, unfermented grape juice, which could have been fresh, boiled down and diluted with water, or prepared with raisins. It was customary in those days, as it is still today, to offer a drink to a welcome visitor. In the light of this cultural practice, Paul would be admonishing deacons to be moderate in drinking grape juice when visiting members, to protect their reputation and the image of the church. A deacon who drank several cups of grape juice in the homes he visited would soon become known for his gluttony.

Understood in this way, Paul’s admonitions are consistent and positive. Christians, especially church leaders, were expected to abstain from fermented wine. Deacons, who were called frequently to visit church members in their homes, were expected to be moderate in the use of unfermented wine, in order to safeguard their reputation as well as that of the church.

**Summary.** The preceding analysis of 1 Timothy 3:8 indicates that the phrase “not addicted to much wine” is not meant to sanction a moderate use of alcoholic wine. This conclusion rests on five major reasons. First, this interpretation would contradict Paul’s requirement of abstinence for bishops, deaconesses, older men and older women, and thus set up an absurd double standard. Second, even today the law of implied consent does not mean that what is forbidden in *much* is automatically approved in *little*.

Third, the primary function of this phrase is not to approve the moderate use of wine, but rather to exclude from the office of deacon any person known to be much given to the use of wine. Fourth, Paul’s advice to Timothy to take only a *little* wine for medical purposes precludes any possibility that the apostle would recommend deacons to drink intoxicating wine moderately for pleasure. Last, the immediate context as well as cultural

---

considerations suggest the possibility that the phrase may represent a recommendation for deacons to be moderate in drinking grape juice when visiting homes, in order to safeguard their reputation and that of the church.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined five wine-related passages often used to give Biblical sanction to a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. Our study of each of the texts in the light of their immediate and larger context, the historical customs of the time and the overall teaching of the Scripture, has shown that none of them contradicts the Biblical imperative of abstinence. On the contrary, we have found that all of them can be legitimately harmonized with the overall teaching of Scripture. Some of them indirectly but conclusively support abstinence from alcoholic beverages. Proverbs 31:6, for example, suggests in an ironical fashion that alcoholic beverages are fit only to kill the excruciating pain of someone who is dying. Similarly, Hosea 4:11 condemns, not the abuse, but the use of “wine and new wine” for taking away the understanding.

In a different, and yet equally convincing way, 1 Timothy 5:23 supports the principle of abstinence by the fact that Paul recommended Timothy to use only a *little* wine, not for the physical pleasure of the belly, but for the medical need of his stomach. To sum up our study of the Biblical teaching on the use of alcoholic beverages, we can say that Scripture is consistent in teaching moderation in the use of wholesome, unfermented beverages and abstinence from the use of intoxicating, fermented beverages.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 42.

2. Robert P. Teachout presents compelling arguments suggesting that in Deuteronomy 29:6 and Number 28:7 *shekar* could mean “satisfying grape juice.” See his discussion of these texts in his doctoral dissertation, “The Use of ‘Wine’ in the Old Testament” (Th. D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), pp. 238-240.

3. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 42.

4. Lael Othniel Caesar, “The Meaning of *Yayin* in the Old Testament” (Master of Arts thesis, School of Graduate Studies, Andrews University, 1986), p. 184.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

6. Robert P. Teachout (n. 2), pp. 225-240.

7. Robert P. Teachout, *Wine. The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence* (published by author, 1986), p. 66.

8. Robert P. Teachout (n. 2), pp. 212-214.

9. Robert P. Teachout (n. 7), p. 67.

10. Leon C. Field, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible-Wine Question* (New York, 1883), p. 44.

11. G. R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.*, abridged and revised (Oxford, 1965), p. 60.

12. Robert P. Teachout (n. 2), p. 224. One of the apparent exceptions is 1 Samuel 1:15, which, according to Teachout, is a hendiadys to be translated as “intoxicating wine” (p. 245).

13. Stephen M. Reynolds, *Alcohol and the Bible* (Little Rock, Arkansas, 1983), pp. 24-25.

14. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1939 edition, s. v. “Strong Drink,” vol. 2, pp. 879-880.

15. *Encyclopedia Biblica*, eds. T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, 1903 edition, s. v. “Wine and Strong Drink,” vol. 4, p. 5310.

16. *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, ed. John Kitto, 1845 edition, s. v. “Wine,” vol. 2, p. 953.

17. Jerome, *Letter to Nepotian*, cited in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (n. 14), p. 879.

18. Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 22nd edition, s. v. "Strong Drink," p. 273.

19. Ibid.

20. *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia and Scriptural Dictionary*, ed. Samuel Fallows, 1909 edition, s. v. "Strong Drink," p. 546.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p. 547.

23. These and several other dictionaries are cited in Charles Wesley Ewing, *The Bible and Its Wines* (Denver, 1985), pp. 25-34.

24. *Sanhedrin 43a*, cited in Heinrich Seeseman, "Oinos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, 1968), vol. 5, p. 164.

25. Heinrich Seeseman (n. 24).

26. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 38.

27. *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 1920 edition, s. v. "Wine and Strong Drink."

28. Horace Bumstead, "The Biblical Sanction of Wine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 38 (January 1881): 66.

29. See Frederic Richard Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible Commentary* (London, 1894), p. xxiv; also William Ritchie, *Scriptural Testimony Against Intoxicating Wine* (New York, 1866), p. 35.

30. Robert P. Teachout (n. 2), p. 180.

31. Deut 7:13; 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 28:51; 2 Chron 31:5; 32:28; Neh 5:11; 10:39; 13:5, 12; Jer 31:12; Hos 2:8, 22; Joel 2:19; Hag 1:11.

32. Gen 27:28, 37; Deut 33:28; 2 King 18:32; Ps 4:7; Is 36:17; 62:8; Hos 2:9; 7:14; 9:1-2; Zech 9:17.

33. Neh 10:37; Mic 6:15.

34. Judg 9:13; Prov 3:10; Is 24:7; 65:8; Hos 4:11.

- 
35. These words occur several hundred times. See discussion in Robert P. Teachout (n. 2), p. 195.
36. *Talmud Babli Yoma* 76b, cited in the compilation produced by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz, *Midrash Yayin Veshechor. Talmudic and Midrashic Exegesis on Wine and Strong Drink* (Detroit, 1923), p. 41.
37. Marcus Cato, *On Agriculture* 141, 1.
38. Lees and Burns (n. 29), p. 219.
39. Robert P. Teachout (n. 2), pp. 190-191.
40. Horace Bumstead (n. 28), p. 69.
41. Ibid.
42. Leon C. Field (n. 10), p. 43.
43. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 103.
44. Howard H. Charles, *Alcohol and the Bible* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania 1981), p. 20.
45. Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (New York, 1873), p. 179.
46. Ferrar Fenton, *The Bible and Wine* (London, 1911), p. 93.
47. Ibid.
48. Aristotle, *Metereologica* 387. b. 9-13.
49. Athenaeus, *Banquet* 2, 24.
50. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 18.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., 23, 22.
53. Ibid., 23, 24.
54. Ibid.
55. Ellen G. White, "The Marriage in Cana of Galilee," *The Signs of the Times* (September 6, 1899): 6.
56. Kenneth L. Gentry (n. 1), p. 47.

---

57. Ibid.

58. Fred D. Gealy, *The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus*, *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, 1960), vol. 11, p. 412. See also Everett Tilson, *Should Christians Drink?* (New York, 1957), p. 23.

59. Albert Barnes (n. 45), p. 144.

60. Ibid.

61. Lyman Abbot, cited in Leon C. Field (n. 10), p. 107.

62. Robert P. Teachout (n. 2), pp. 442-443.

63. Ibid., pp. 443-444.

64. Ibid., p. 444.

65. Ibid., p. 445.

66. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 28.

67. Ibid.

68. Lucian of Samosata, *Philopatris* 39.



# Chapter 8

## ELLEN WHITE

### AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

The Biblical principle of abstinence from alcoholic beverages was adopted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a fundamental belief largely due to the influence of Ellen G. White. Her commitment to the cause of temperance spanned the entire years of her ministry. Temperance was a favorite theme of Ellen White's writings and discourses. In retrospect she wrote in 1911, four years before her death: "I rejoice that it has been my privilege to bear my testimony on this subject [temperance] before crowded assemblies in many countries. Many times I have spoken on this subject to large congregations at our camp meetings."<sup>1</sup>

Ellen White viewed temperance as her "favorite subject"<sup>2</sup> and so frequently did she speak on it that she became known as "a speaker on temperance."<sup>3</sup> Her lectures on temperance drew her largest audiences. In the summer of 1876 at Groveland, Massachusetts, special trains brought an estimated twenty thousand people to hear her.<sup>4</sup> Her first fully reported sermon was delivered on March 6, 1869 at her home church in Battle Creek on the subject of "Christian Temperance."<sup>5</sup> Throughout her public ministry, she crusaded for the cause of temperance in large halls, tents, Protestant churches, prisons, temperance societies, rehabilitation homes, camp meetings, and private interest groups across North America and abroad.<sup>6</sup>

**Objectives of the Chapter.** In view of the fundamental role Ellen White has played in promoting the cause of temperance and defining its meaning and relevance to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this chapter examines her understanding of the importance of Christian temperance in general and of abstinence from alcoholic beverages in particular.

The study is divided into two parts. The first defines Ellen White's theological reasons for attaching enormous importance to abstention from intoxicating beverages and substances. The second presents her views on the personal and societal consequences of the use of alcoholic beverages.

The primary source for this study is the book *Temperance As Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White*, known simply as *Temperance*. This book is a compilation prepared by the office of Ellen G. White Publications as a selection drawn from the whole range of Ellen White's writings on temperance. Some of her writings included in the book are now out of print, such as the following: *Health, or How to Live* (1865); *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* (1890); *Special Testimonies* (1892-1912); and *Drunkenness and Crime* (1907). This handy compilation has greatly facilitated this study. For this I wish to express my gratitude to the trustees of Ellen G. White Publications for their insight and effort in bringing together such a valuable compilation.

## PART 1

### ELLEN WHITE'S THEOLOGY OF ABSTINENCE

#### 1. The Meaning and Importance of Temperance

**The Meaning of Temperance.** The *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White* lists only seventeen references under the heading "Total Abstinence" and over four pages of references under the heading of "Temperance." The disproportionate ratio between the two could give the impression to an uninformed reader that Ellen White's concern was to promote moderation rather than abstinence in the use of alcoholic beverages. This misunderstanding is dispelled immediately upon reading how she uses the term "temperance."

In accordance with the Biblical meaning of the term "temperance" that we ascertained in Chapter 6, *Ellen White uses the term to denote moderation in the use of all healthful things and total abstinence from all that is harmful*. In the book *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* she writes: "Those who would preserve their powers unimpaired for the service of God must observe strict temperance in the use of His bounties, as well as total abstinence from every injurious or debasing indulgence."<sup>7</sup>

Abstinence from alcoholic beverages constitutes for Ellen White a fundamental aspect of temperance. In 1899 she wrote: "True temperance calls for total abstinence from strong drink. It calls also for reform in dietetic habits, in dressing and in sleep."<sup>8</sup> In this statement she lists in order of priority the components of temperance, placing total abstinence from alcoholic beverages as the first item.

**Temperance and Abstinence.** An indication of the close connection between temperance and abstinence in the mind of Ellen White is provided by her reference to “intemperance.” She writes, “The only way in which any can be secure against the power of intemperance, is to abstain wholly from wine, beer, and strong drinks.”<sup>9</sup> Intemperance, however, extends beyond the use of alcoholic beverages to include indulgence in “appetite or passions.” In 1890 she wrote in *Signs of the Times*: “For intemperance is not limited to the use of intoxicating liquors; it has a broader meaning, and includes the hurtful indulgence of any appetite or passion.”<sup>10</sup>

While Ellen White recognizes that “temperance” has a broader meaning with its spiritual dimension and moderation in the use of healthful things, she repeatedly emphasizes the idea of abstinence. In a lecture on temperance delivered in Australia in 1893, she said: “‘Touch not, taste not,’ should be your motto. You should be temperate in eating. But, liquor—let it alone. Touch it not. There can be no temperance in its use.”<sup>11</sup> The admonition not to *touch, taste* or *handle* wine or strong drink occurs frequently in her writing. For example, she says: “With the awful results of indulgence in intoxicating drink before us, how is it that any man or woman who claims to believe in the word of God, can venture to touch, taste, or handle wine or strong drink?”<sup>12</sup>

Ellen White’s use of the term “temperance” to encompass primarily “abstinence” was in harmony with the accepted usage of her time. This is indicated by the objective of the various temperance movements, namely, to stop the manufacture and distribution of alcoholic beverages. Referring to these she writes: “The advocates of temperance fail to do their whole duty unless they exert their influence . . . in favor of prohibition and total abstinence.”<sup>13</sup>

The sampling of statements cited are adequate to show that for Ellen White “temperance” meant primarily abstinence from intoxicating substances such as alcoholic beverages and secondarily moderation in the use of good things. This means that many of her statements on temperance relate directly to the subject of abstinence, since the latter is seen as an integral part of the former. On account of this we shall use her statements on temperance in the discussion of her views on abstinence, unless the context suggests otherwise.

**Importance of Abstinence.** The enormous importance Ellen White attached to the promotion and practice of abstinence is indicated in a variety of ways. To pastors who complained that they had no time to preach on temperance she suggested to “cut their sermons short about one third” in order

to have time to speak on this vital subject.<sup>14</sup> “The subject of Christian temperance,” she wrote in 1909, “should find a place in our sermons in every city where we labor.”<sup>15</sup>

Church members were strongly urged to sign the temperance pledge for total abstinence and join temperance societies both inside and outside the church. “From the light God has given me,” she wrote in 1884, “every member among us should sign the pledge and be connected with the temperance association.”<sup>16</sup> She encouraged “temperance workers . . . to induce the drunkard to sign a pledge that henceforth he will not use intoxicating liquor.”<sup>17</sup> She also urged inviting those in high positions to sign the total abstinence pledge: “To those in high positions we are to present the total abstinence pledge, asking them to give the money they would otherwise spend for the harmful indulgences of liquor and tobacco to the establishment of institutions where children and youth may be prepared to fill positions of usefulness in the world.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the most telling indications of the great importance Ellen White attached to total abstinence is the fact that she encouraged Seventh-day Adventists to join and participate in temperance societies whose primary objective was to expose the ill effects of alcoholic beverages. Frequently mentioned is the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, whose main objectives she endorsed. So highly did she esteem this organization that she affirmed: “None who claim to have part in the work of God should lose interest in the grand object of this organization in temperance lines.”<sup>19</sup> In 1908 she reiterated, “The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union is an organization with whose efforts for the spread of temperance we can heartily unite. . . . By uniting with them in behalf of total abstinence, we do not change our position regarding the observance of the seventh day, and we can show our appreciation of their position regarding the subject of temperance.”<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Theological Understanding of Abstinence

**Abstinence as Part of Third Angel’s Message.** The reason that abstinence in particular and health reform in general were vitally important for Ellen White and the Adventist pioneers was that these were seen not merely as physiological truths, but primarily as Biblical truths to be proclaimed as part of the third angel’s message. The latter expression is derived from the flying angel of Revelation 14:9 who proclaims a final message of warning in preparation for Christ’s coming. Adventists see in the mission of this angel a prophetic representation of their own prophetic mission to warn the world and prepare a people for Christ’s soon coming.

J. H. Waggoner expressed this concept in 1866 in a statement which has become famous. Speaking of the principles of health reform, of which abstinence was a fundamental aspect, he said: “When placed on a level with the great truths of the third angel’s message by the sanction and authority of God’s Spirit, and so declared to be the means whereby a weak people may be made strong to overcome, and our diseased bodies cleansed and fitted for translation, then it comes to us as an essential part of *present truth*, to be received with the blessing of God, or rejected at our peril.”<sup>21</sup>

Waggoner’s understanding of temperance as part of the third angel’s message is fully endorsed and frequently reiterated by Ellen White. In 1888, she said, “Brethren and sisters, we want you to see the importance of this temperance question, and we want our workers to interest themselves in it, and to know that it is just as much connected with the third angel’s message as the right arm is with the body.”<sup>22</sup> Again she wrote: “Every true reform has its place in the work of the third angel’s message. Especially does the temperance reform demand our attention and support.”<sup>23</sup>

**Abstinence Part of the Gospel.** Since the third angel’s message is part of the “everlasting gospel” (Rev 14:6), Ellen White urged the presentation of total abstinence as part of the gospel. “When temperance is presented as a part of the gospel, many will see their need of reform. They will see the evil of intoxicating liquors, and that total abstinence is the only platform on which God’s people can conscientiously stand.”<sup>24</sup>

The gospel for Ellen White is the good news that Christ has not only paid the *penalty* of our past sins, but also that He provides *power* through His Spirit to overcome present sin and thus be gradually restored to God’s moral image. Within this context, temperance is seen as a vital part of the restoration process brought about by the acceptance of the power of the gospel. “With our first parents,” she writes, “intemperate desire resulted in the loss of Eden. Temperance in all things has more to do with our restoration to Eden than men realize.”<sup>25</sup>

Again, she writes: “Adam and Eve fell through intemperate appetite. Christ came and withstood the fiercest temptation of Satan, and, in behalf of the race, overcame appetite, showing that man may overcome. As Adam fell through appetite, and lost blissful Eden, the children of Adam may, through Christ, overcome appetite, and through temperance in all things regain Eden.”<sup>26</sup>

**Abstinence as Preparation for Christ’s Coming.** The statements just quoted clearly indicate that Ellen White viewed temperance as a tangible manifestation of the restoration of God’s moral image in human beings by the

power of Christ. This restoration was seen as an essential part of the preparation for Christ's return. In *The Desire of Ages* she writes: "All who would perfect holiness in the fear of God must learn the lessons of temperance and self-control. The appetites and passions must be held in subjection to the higher powers of the mind. This self-discipline is essential to that mental strength and spiritual insight which will enable us to understand and to practice the sacred truths of God's word. For this reason *temperance finds its place in the work of preparation for Christ's second coming.*"<sup>27</sup>

In Chapter 6, we noticed that most of the apostolic admonitions to mental vigilance and physical abstinence are given in the context of preparation for the imminent return of Christ. In a similar fashion Ellen White finds in the imminence of Christ's return the motivating spring for abstinence. Speaking of "the evil of liquor-drinking," she says: "If these things were presented in connection with the evidences of Christ's soon coming, there would be a shaking among the people. If we showed a zeal in proportion to the importance of the truths we are handling, we might be instrumental in rescuing hundreds, yea thousands, from ruin."<sup>28</sup> Statements such as this make one wonder if a reason that Adventists are no longer "shaken" by the use of intoxicating drinks and substances, is because of the loss of the sense of urgency to prepare for Christ's imminent return.

The practice of strict abstinence was seen by Ellen White as especially necessary for the final crisis. In a dream she saw a divine messenger rebuking some who refused to sign the temperance pledge, saying: "Neither of you have seen the necessity of health reform, but when the plagues of God shall be all around you, you will then see the principles of health reform and strict temperance in all things—that *temperance alone is the foundation of all the graces that come from God, the foundation of all victories to be gained.*"<sup>29</sup> Again she says: "It is impossible for one who loves these stimulants, and accustoms himself to their use, to grow in grace."<sup>30</sup>

**Theological Understanding of Abstinence.** It is evident from the preceding considerations that Ellen White saw temperance in general, and abstinence in particular, as moral and theological truths and not merely as physiological and social issues. It was her theological understanding of temperance that made her public discourses on this subject markedly different from those of most temperance speakers. While the latter filled their speeches with medical data, statistics and stories, Ellen White, as her husband testifies, "appealed to the people upon the subject of Christian temperance from a Bible standpoint."<sup>31</sup>

“In all our large gatherings,” Ellen White wrote, “we must bring the temperance question before our hearers in the strongest appeals and by the most convincing arguments. *The Lord has given us the work of teaching Christian temperance from a Bible standpoint.*”<sup>32</sup>

The broad theological approach to the subject of temperance is easily discernible by reading some of her temperance discourses. She herself summarizes her approach, saying: “My subject was temperance, treated from the Christian standpoint, the fall of Adam, the promise of Eden, the coming of Christ to our world, His baptism, His temptation in the wilderness, and His victory. And all this to give man another trial, making it possible for man to overcome in his own behalf, on his own account, through the merits of Jesus Christ. Christ came to bring to man moral power that he may be victorious in overcoming temptations on the point of appetite, and break the chain of slavery of habit and indulgence of perverted appetite and stand forth in moral power as a man. . . . It was so different from anything that they had ever heard on temperance that they were held as if spellbound.”<sup>33</sup>

The seven major points of Ellen White’s theological approach to temperance that are most evident in her writings can be graphically summarized as follows:<sup>34</sup> (1) It was by the indulgence of appetite that our first parents fell and the antediluvian world was destroyed. (2) The Bible teaches total abstinence by means of warnings and examples. (3) A significant warning often alluded to is the divine punishment upon Nadab and Abihu, because their minds became so beclouded by intoxicating drink that they offered “strange fire” (Lev 10:1-8). (4) The examples of abstinence most often cited are the instructions given to the wife of Manoah, Daniel’s stand for abstinence, John the Baptist, and above all Jesus Christ. (5) In the wilderness of temptation Christ endured the test of appetite which our first parents failed to bear. (6) By Christ’s power we can overcome desire for any intoxicating drink and be restored to the moral image of God. (7) Preparation for Christ’s imminent return calls for a life of holiness and abstinence.

**Moral Basis of Abstinence.** Ellen White’s theological understanding of intemperance as resulting from our fallen nature, and of temperance/abstinence as being the fruit of redemption, indicates that she viewed the drinking of alcoholic beverages as a moral rather than a medical issue, or we might say, as sin rather than as sickness. This view is unpopular today when it is customary to treat drinking problems as a disease, thus releasing people from any active responsibility for their wrongdoings. The cause of the problem is generally ascribed to some physical, cultural, or psychological factors, a breakdown of a piece in the inner machinery of the human organism.

The disease model weakens a person's resolution to deal with the problem responsibly, and it insidiously encourages more of the same behavior, since the individual knows that he or she will be excused for it and not be held directly responsible. The disease model is foreign to the teachings of Ellen White. She counsels those who feel unable to break away from drinking to plant "their feet firmly on principle, determined not to taste alcoholic drink or use tobacco." She continues, "These are poisons, and their use is a violation of God's law."<sup>35</sup>

More will be said later on Ellen White's counsel on how to overcome addiction. At this point it is important to note her fundamental conviction that the use of intoxicating substances, such as alcoholic beverages, represents "a violation of God's law." The recognition of this fact was important to Ellen White because she believed that "the foundation of all enduring reform is the law of God. We are to present in clear, distinct lines the need of obeying this law."<sup>36</sup> This conviction stems from her understanding that Scripture clearly prohibits the use of alcoholic beverages, and consequently their use represents a violation of a moral principle established by God for our physical and spiritual wellbeing.

She emphatically states: "The Lord has given special directions in His word in reference to the use of wine and strong drink. He has forbidden their use, and enforced His prohibitions with strong warnings and threatenings. But His warning against the use of intoxicating beverages is not the result of the exercise of arbitrary authority. He has warned men, in order that they may escape from the evil that results from indulgence in wine and strong drink."<sup>37</sup>

**Erosion of Conviction.** The clear conviction of Ellen White that God has forbidden the use of alcoholic beverages and "enforced His prohibition with strong warnings and threatenings," appears to be weakening in the Adventist church today. This is indicated not only by the increasing number of Adventists who indulge in occasional drinking of alcoholic beverages, but also by the uncertainty expressed by many pastors and members. During 1988 I was privileged to present and discuss the Biblical teachings on alcoholic beverages at numerous Adventist gatherings in North America, Australia, England, and Bermuda. To my surprise I discovered that not only some church members, but even some pastors, are confused on this subject. Some sincerely believed that the Bible teaches moderation rather than abstinence from alcoholic beverages.

Uncertainty regarding the Biblical teaching on alcoholic beverages can sometimes also be detected in Adventist literature. For example, the special temperance issue of the *Adventist Review* (February 25, 1982) affirms:



“More and more we seem to be encountering people, both within and without the church, who demand to be shown that the Scripture requires *total* abstinence. And unless we have done our homework, we may discover ourselves on the defensive. The truth is, *the Bible does not contain the type of concise and explicit directive enjoining total abstinence that many of us would like to see.*”<sup>38</sup> The same thought is reiterated in the next paragraph: “*total abstinence is but one of a number of areas where the Bible gives no explicit directive.*”<sup>39</sup>

Our study has shown otherwise. Scripture does give clear directives to not even “look at wine” (Prov 23:31) and to be abstinent (Lev 10:9; Prov 31:4; 1 Thess 5:8; 1 Pet 1:13; 4:7; 5:8; 1 Tim 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2). We have found that part of the problem is that some crucial Bible texts have been mistranslated, presumably to save the face of those advocating moderate drinking while condemning drunkenness.

**Clear Biblical Conviction.** There was no doubt in the mind of Ellen White that the Bible explicitly condemns the use of alcoholic beverages. In *The Ministry of Healing* she writes: “*The Bible nowhere sanctions the use of intoxicating wine. The wine that Christ made from water at the marriage feast of Cana was the pure juice of the grape. This is the ‘new wine found in the cluster,’ of which the Scripture says, ‘Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it’ (Isaiah 65:8).*”<sup>40</sup>

Ellen White continues, saying: “It was Christ who, in the Old Testament, gave the warning to Israel, ‘wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise’ (Prov 20:1, KJV). . . . It was Christ who directed that John the Baptist should drink neither wine nor strong drink. It was He who enjoined similar abstinence upon the wife of Manoah. Christ did not contradict His own teaching. The unfermented wine that He provided for the wedding guests was a wholesome and refreshing drink. This is the wine that was used by our Saviour and His disciples in the first communion.”<sup>41</sup>

In commenting on Leviticus 10:9 where God says to Aaron, “Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you,” Ellen White says: “*Here we have the most plain directions of God, and his reasons for prohibiting the use of wine; that their power of discrimination and discernment might be clear, and in no way confused; that their judgment might be correct, and they be ever able to discern between the clean and unclean. Another reason of weighty importance why they should abstain from anything which would intoxicate, is also given. It would require the full use of unclouded reason to present to the children of Israel all the statutes which God had spoken to them.*”<sup>42</sup>

In this statement Ellen White explains the reason for God's prohibition of alcoholic beverages, namely, that they impair the "power of discrimination and discernment" as well as the capacity to teach the principles God has revealed. Ellen White finds support for her belief in total abstinence in numerous Biblical passages. In her tract *Drunkenness and Crime*, she writes: "There are many solemn warnings in the Scriptures against the use of intoxicating liquors."<sup>43</sup> She continues by quoting in full Deuteronomy 29:6, Proverbs 20:1, 23:29-32, 31:4, Amos 6:6, and Ecclesiastes 10:17. She closes saying, "The Lord has given special directions in His word in reference to the use of wine and strong drink. He has forbidden their use, and enforced His prohibitions with strong warnings and threatenings."<sup>44</sup>

The most compelling example of abstinence often quoted by Ellen White is Daniel and his three companions. She writes: "Not only did these young men decline to drink the king's wine, but they refrained from the luxuries of his table. They obeyed the divine law, both natural and moral."<sup>45</sup> The lesson that she draws from their example is that "those who would preserve their powers unimpaired for the service of God must observe strict temperance in the use of all His bounties, as well as total abstinence from every injurious or debasing indulgence."<sup>46</sup>

Summing up, Ellen White deeply believed that total abstinence is a principle clearly taught in the Scripture by warnings and examples. Disregard for this principle represents a violation of the law of God. Obedience to this principle through Christ's enabling power, contributes to the restoration of God's moral image in us. Total abstinence is part of the gospel and more specifically of the third angel's message. This means that abstinence is part of the process of restoration brought about by the power of the gospel—a restoration which is an essential part of the preparation for Christ's return.

## PART 2

### CONSEQUENCES OF USING ALCOHOL

Ellen White discusses at great length the ill effects alcoholic beverages have upon the individual, the home and society at large. In view of the fact that some of these aspects will be discussed in the following chapter, we shall limit ourselves here to a brief summary of her comments.

#### 1. Alcohol and the Individual

**Mental Effects.** Repeatedly and emphatically Ellen White speaks of the ill effects of alcohol upon the mind. Her concern rightly stems from the

fact that whatever impairs the mind also lessens our capacity to act as rational, moral and spiritual beings. Some of the expressions she uses to describe the effect of alcohol upon the mind are as follows: “The brain is clouded; reason no longer holds the reins, but lays them on the neck of lust.”<sup>47</sup> “The wine they have drunk has enfeebled the memory. They are like persons aged in years. The brain is no longer able to produce its rich treasures when required.”<sup>48</sup> “Alcohol robs men of their reasoning powers.”<sup>49</sup> “The nervous system is disordered.”<sup>50</sup> “Free use of wine, beclouds the senses.”<sup>51</sup> “The effect of wine upon the intellect is to confuse.”<sup>52</sup>

The common truth emphasized by this sampling of statements is that alcohol impairs the reflective functions of the brain, thus diminishing the ability of a person to make responsible decisions. Modern research has amply shown that no effects of alcohol are more dangerous than those upon the brain. It is a known fact that alcohol causes a loss of cells in different regions of the brain and disrupts the connection between nerve cells. This impairs the reasoning power, the vision and the hearing.<sup>53</sup>

**Moral Effects.** Closely related to the mental effects of alcohol, and dependent upon them, are its moral effects. By impairing the reflective functions of the brain, alcohol benumbs the moral sensibilities and inhibitions of a person. Ellen White expresses this truth in a variety of ways. Speaking of those who drink liquor, she says, “Their intellect is enfeebled, their moral powers are weakened, their sensibilities are benumbed, and the claims of God and heaven are not realized, eternal things are not appreciated.”<sup>54</sup> Again she says that when the taste for stimulants is cultivated, “Satan keeps the mind in a fever of unrest; and the poor victim, imagining himself perfectly secure, goes on and on, until every barrier is broken down, every principle sacrificed. The strongest resolutions are undermined, and eternal interests are too weak to keep the debased appetite under the control of reason. Some are never really drunk, but are always under the influence of mild intoxicants.”<sup>55</sup>

A most serious moral consequence of the drinking of alcoholic beverages is their capacity to weaken moral inhibition and thus to lessen any existing moral restraint. Ultimately, this can lead a person to commit unplanned illicit acts. Ellen White emphasizes this danger, saying: “Licentiousness, adultery, and vices of almost every type, are committed as the result of indulging the appetite for wine and [alcoholic] cider.”<sup>56</sup> She goes on to say that one “who loves these stimulants, and accustoms himself to their use, *never grows in grace*. He becomes gross and sensual; the animal passions control the higher powers of the mind, and virtue is not cherished.”<sup>57</sup>

**Physical Effects.** Ellen White discusses extensively and accurately the various effects of alcohol on the body, without having had the benefit of modern medical research. She says, among other things, that alcohol “corrupts the blood,”<sup>58</sup> injures “the digestive organs and the brain,”<sup>59</sup> disorders “the nervous system,”<sup>60</sup> weakens the ability of the body “to resist disease,”<sup>61</sup> “ruins the stomach,”<sup>62</sup> causes “mental and physical degeneracy”<sup>63</sup> and “produces diseases of every kind.”<sup>64</sup>

Ellen White stated in simple, non-technical language about a century ago what modern medical research has amply confirmed. In the next chapter we shall report briefly about the effects of alcohol on the liver, brain, stomach, heart, and reproductive system.

## 2. Alcohol and the Home

**Family Deprived of Necessities.** Ellen White emphasizes that alcohol takes its toll not only on the individual but also on his/her family. She writes, “As a result of the use of these poisons [intoxicating liquors], thousands of families are deprived of the comforts and even the necessities of life, acts of violence and crime are multiplied, and disease and death hurry myriads of victims to a drunkard’s grave.”<sup>65</sup> Again she writes: “Look upon the drunkard’s home. Mark the squalid poverty, the wretchedness, the unutterable woe that are reigning there. See the once happy wife fleeing before her maniac husband. . . . Day by day the cries of agony wrenched from the lips of the drunkard’s wife and children go up to heaven.”<sup>66</sup>

**Children Neglected.** Among the innocent victims of alcohol are the children. They suffer neglect and abuse not only from drinking fathers but from mothers as well. Ellen White sadly remarks: “More and more women are forming the liquor habit. In many a household, little children, even in the innocence and helplessness of babyhood, are in daily peril through the neglect, the abuse, the vileness of drunken mothers. Sons and daughters are growing up under the shadow of this terrible evil. What outlook for their future but that they will sink even lower than their parents?”<sup>67</sup>

**Violence in the Home.** A sad effect of alcohol is that it removes those restraints that govern behavior, thus enabling the drinker to manifest more readily his/her violent disposition. Ellen White views this as an expression of Satan’s violence: “Thus he [Satan] works when he entices men to sell the soul for liquor. He takes possession of body, mind, and soul, and it is no longer the man, but Satan, who acts. And the cruelty of Satan is expressed as the drunkard lifts his hand to strike down the wife he has promised to love and cherish as long as life shall last. The deeds of a drunkard are an expression of Satan’s violence.”<sup>68</sup>

### 3. Alcohol and Society

In her writings Ellen White shows special concern over the effects of alcohol on society, in terms of crime, economic cost, accidents, public health and responsible leadership. A sampling of her comments on each of these areas will be given.

**Incentive to Crime.** Crime is causally connected to drinking because, Ellen White says, by drinking “reason is paralyzed, the intellect is benumbed, the animal passions are excited, and then follow crimes of the most debasing character.”<sup>69</sup> In describing the results of drinking, she says: “The result of liquor drinking is demonstrated by the awful murders that take place. How often it is found that theft, incendiarism, murder, were committed under the influence of liquor. Yet the liquor curse is legalized, and works untold ruin in the hands of those who love to tamper with that which ruins not only the poor victim, but his whole family.”<sup>70</sup>

**An Economic Problem.** The economic cost of alcohol to society is measured not only in dollars but also in terms of its trail of misery, disease and degradation. To these Ellen White especially refers, saying: “Every year millions upon millions of gallons of intoxicating liquors are consumed. Millions upon millions of dollars are spent in buying wretchedness, poverty, disease, degradation, lust, crime, and death. For the sake of gain, the liquor dealer deals out to his victims that which corrupts and destroys mind and body. He entails on the drunkard’s family poverty and wretchedness.”<sup>71</sup>

A radical change would take place in our society if the money spent on intoxicating beverages were used to establish schools, feed the hungry, and support missions. She writes: “The cries of the starving millions in our world would soon be hushed if the money put into the tills of the liquor sellers were spent in alleviating the suffering of humanity.”<sup>72</sup> “Think of the thousands and millions of dollars that are invested in drink that will make a man like a brute, and destroy his reason. . . . All this money could accomplish untold good if it were used in the support of missions in the dark places of our world. God is being robbed of that which is rightfully His.”<sup>73</sup>

**A Cause of Accidents.** Automobiles were unknown during most of the life of Ellen White. The “traffic accidents” of her days involved mostly boats, trains and ocean steamers. Referring to these, she writes: “How many frightful accidents occur through the influence of drink. . . . What is the portion of this terrible intoxicant that any man can take, and be safe with the lives of human beings? He can be safe only as he abstains from drink. He should not have his mind confused with drink.”<sup>74</sup>

God holds a drinker responsible for accidents he causes, notes Ellen White: "Are the men who command the great ocean steamers, who have the control of railways, strict temperance men? Are their brains free from the influence of intoxicants? If not, the accidents occurring under their management will be charged to them by the God of heaven, whose property men and women are."<sup>75</sup>

**A Public-Health Problem and Responsibility.** Ellen White addresses also the effect of alcohol on public health, as people of different social classes and professions are affected by it. She writes: "Among the victims of intemperance are men of all classes and all professions. Men of high station, of eminent talents, of great attainments, have yielded to the indulgence of appetite, until they are helpless to resist temptation. Some of them who were once in the possession of wealth are without home, without friends, in suffering, misery, disease, and degradation. They have lost their self-control. Unless a helping hand is held out to them, they will sink lower and lower. With these self-indulgence is not only a moral sin, but a physical disease."<sup>76</sup>

In no ambiguous terms Ellen White holds lawmakers and liquor dealers responsible for the suffering and misery caused by the liquor traffic. Of the former she says: "Are not the rulers of the land largely responsible for the aggravated crimes, the current of deadly evil, that is the result of the liquor traffic? Is it not their duty and in their power to remove this deadly evil? . . . By legalizing the liquor traffic, the law gives its sanction to the downfall of the soul, and refuses to stop the traffic that floods the world with evil. Let lawmakers consider whether or not all this imperiling of human life, of physical power and mental vision, is unavoidable. Is all this destruction of human life necessary?"<sup>77</sup>

The responsibility for the public problems caused by alcohol falls also upon the liquor dealers, because, Ellen White says, "no matter whether or not he has been permitted by the law of the land to sell poisonous drinks to his neighbor, he will be held accountable in the sight of heaven for degrading the soul that has been redeemed by Christ. . . . Rum sellers will be held accountable for the wretchedness that has been brought into the homes of those who were weak in moral power, and who fall through temptation to drink. They will be charged with the misery, the suffering, the hopelessness, brought into the world through the liquor traffic. They will have to answer for the woe and want of the mothers and children who have suffered for food and clothing and shelter, who have buried all hope and joy."<sup>78</sup>

**Responsible Public Officials.** Religious and civil leaders are in a special way called to live temperately, abstaining from intoxicating substances, on account of the responsibility placed upon them. Regarding ministers Ellen White writes: “Anything in eating or drinking which disqualifies the mental powers for healthful and active exercise is an aggravating sin in the sight of God. Especially is this the case with those who minister in holy things, who should at all times be examples to the people, and be in a condition to properly instruct them.”<sup>79</sup>

The same standard of strict temperance applies to civil officials. The reason is clearly stated by Ellen White: “Men who make laws to control the people should above all others be obedient to the higher laws which are the foundation of all rule in nations and in families. How important that men who have a controlling power should themselves feel they are under a higher control. They will never feel thus while their minds are weakened by indulgence in narcotics, and strong drink. Those to whom it is entrusted to make and execute laws should have all their powers in vigorous action. They may, by practicing temperance in all things, preserve the clear discrimination between the sacred and common, and have wisdom to deal with that justice and integrity which God enjoined upon ancient Israel.”<sup>80</sup> Again she says: “Only men of strict temperance and integrity should be admitted to our legislative halls and chosen to preside in our courts of justice.”<sup>81</sup>

#### 4. Helping the Addicted

In her writings Ellen White expresses genuine concern and compassion toward those who have become addicted to intoxicating beverages or tobacco. In fact, she offers various recommendations on how to help such persons. Though her recommendations are not structured in a logical sequence like the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, they are sensible and timely. The order of the five recommendations described below may not necessarily represent the order she would have chosen.

**Present the Claims of God’s Law.** “In our work for the fallen,” writes Ellen White, “the claims of the law of God and the need of loyalty to Him are to be impressed on mind and heart. Never fail to show that there is a marked difference between the one who serves God and the one who serves Him not. God is love, but He cannot excuse willful disregard for His commands.”<sup>82</sup> We noted earlier that Ellen White clearly defines the drinking of alcoholic beverages as “a violation of God’s law.” Moreover she believed that “the foundation of all enduring reform is the law of God. We are to present in clear, distinct lines the need of obeying this law.”<sup>83</sup>

This means that the first step in helping persons addicted to alcohol is to show them in Christian love that their addiction is not merely a bad habit or sickness, but sin—a sin which God is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse (1 John 1:9). The recognition of this fact is the first step on the road to recovery, because the acceptance of divine truth has a convicting and reforming power upon the human heart. Ellen White emphasizes this point, saying: “When men who have indulged in wrong habits and sinful practices yield to the power of divine truth, the application of that truth to the heart revives the moral powers, which had seemed to be paralyzed.”<sup>84</sup>

**Determination to Abstain.** After helping an addicted person to recognize the claims of God’s law, it is necessary to challenge him/her to determine by God’s grace to abstain from alcoholic beverages. “The victims of evil habit,” Ellen White writes, “must be aroused to the necessity of making an effort for themselves. Others may put forth the most earnest endeavor to uplift them, the grace of God may be freely offered, Christ may entreat, His angels may minister; but all will be in vain unless they themselves are roused to fight the battle in their own behalf.”<sup>85</sup>

Repeatedly Ellen White emphasizes the vital role of the will. “The tempted one needs to understand the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man,—the power of decision, of choice. Everything depends upon the right action of the will. . . . Many will go down to ruin while hoping and desiring to overcome their evil propensities. They do not yield the will to God. They do not *choose* to serve Him.”<sup>86</sup>

It is significant to note that recent research is challenging the popular view of alcoholism as a disease which incapacitates the drinker’s will, showing instead that “a drinker can and must assume some responsibility for change, even while admitting that this commitment alone will not turn the tide.”<sup>87</sup> This research fully supports the counsel given by Ellen White to the addicted.

**Reassurance of Divine Forgiveness and Power.** It is not sufficient to encourage a drinker to determine to abstain; we must also reassure him/her of divine forgiveness and assistance. “The very first and most important thing,” writes Ellen White, “is to melt and subdue the soul by presenting our Lord Jesus Christ as the sin-bearer, the sin-pardoning Saviour, making the gospel as clear as possible. When the Holy Spirit works among us, . . . souls who are unready for Christ’s appearing are convicted. . . . The tobacco devotees sacrifice their idol and the liquor drinker his liquor. They could not do this if they did not grasp by faith the promises of God for the forgiveness of their sins.”<sup>88</sup>



Ellen White emphasizes also the need to “talk courage to the people; lift them up to God in prayer. Many who have been overcome by temptation are humiliated by their failures, and they feel that it is in vain for them to approach unto God; but this thought is of the enemy’s suggestion. When they have sinned, and feel that they can not pray, tell them that it is then the time to pray. Ashamed they may be, and deeply humbled; but as they confess their sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive their sins, and cleanse them from all unrighteousness.”<sup>89</sup>

**Personal Interest.** Alcoholics’ recovery programs stress the importance of providing personal or group support to the addicted. Ellen White emphasizes the same point by relating a personal experience: “I recall the case of a man in a congregation that I was once addressing. He was almost wrecked in body and mind by the use of liquor and tobacco. He was bowed down from the effects of dissipation; and his dress was in keeping with his shattered condition. To all appearance he had gone too far to be reclaimed. But as I appealed to him to resist temptation in the strength of a risen Saviour, he rose tremblingly, and said, ‘You have an interest for me, and I will have an interest for myself.’ Six months afterward he came to my house. I did not recognize him. With a countenance beaming with joy, and eyes overflowing with tears, he grasped my hand, and said, ‘You do not know me, but you remember the man in an old blue coat who rose in your congregation, and said that he would try to reform?’ I was astonished. He stood erect, and looked ten years younger. He had gone home from that meeting, and passed the long hours in prayer and struggle till the sun arose. It was a night of conflict, but, thank God, he came off a victor.”<sup>90</sup>

**Instruction on Healthful Living.** The drinking problem is often related to unhealthy dietary habits. Thus, Ellen White counsels that “those who are struggling against the power of appetite should be instructed in the principles of healthful living. They should be shown that the violation of the laws of health, by creating diseased conditions and unnatural cravings, lays the foundation of the liquor habit. Only by living in obedience to the principles of health can they hope to be freed from the craving for unnatural stimulants. While they depend upon divine strength to break the bonds of appetite, they are to co-operate with God by obedience to His laws, both moral and physical.”<sup>91</sup>

The recommendations mentioned above are representative rather than exhaustive of Ellen White’s counsels on how to help those addicted to intoxicating substances. Any interested reader is encouraged to read especially the chapter “Working for the Intemperate” in *The Ministry of Healing*.

---

## CONCLUSION

Our study has shown that for Ellen White the message of temperance was a fundamental part of the gospel and of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Such a message entails teaching people moderation in the use of healthful things and abstinence from the use of harmful things such as alcoholic beverages. The reason for the importance of abstinence and health reform is that these were seen by Ellen White as Biblical principles given by God to restore His moral image in human beings and to prepare a holy people for Christ's second Advent.

The use of alcoholic beverages can have serious ill effects upon the individual, the home and society at large. Upon the drinker, the ill effects mentioned by Ellen White are mental, moral and physical. Mentally, the reflective functions of the brain are impaired, thus diminishing its ability to make responsible decisions. Morally, alcohol benumbs the moral sensibilities and weakens moral restraints to do evil. Physically, the consumption of alcoholic beverages has ill effects upon the brain, the nervous system, the digestive organs, the blood and the resistance to disease.

As for the home, Ellen White notes that the use of alcoholic beverages often deprives families of their basic necessities, and fosters violence and the abuse of children. With reference to society, Ellen White finds that alcohol consumption is an incentive to crime, a major cause of accidents and of public-health problems.

Ellen White emphasizes our responsibility as Christians to help people addicted to intoxicating substances. We can best do this by presenting to them in a loving way the claims of God's law, the need for them to determine to abstain, the reassurance of divine forgiveness and assistance, and the principles of healthful living, in addition to showing them our personal interest and love.

Ellen White's theological convictions and practical counsels on the use of alcoholic beverages stand out, in my view, for their Biblical consistency and their practical relevance to our time.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Ellen G. White, Letter 78, 1911.
2. Ellen G. White, *Temperance, as Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, California, Pacific Press, 1949), p. 260. Henceforth cited as *Temperance*. In view of the fact that this chapter deals exclusively with the teaching of Ellen White on alcoholic beverages, we shall omit mentioning her name in the notes, listing only the title of her publications.
3. *Temperance*, p. 259.
4. M. E. Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C., 1925), p. 283.
5. The sermon is published in Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 354-376. Arthur L. White confirmed to Horace John Shaw that the Battle Creek sermon on “Christian Temperance” is the first fully reported address. See Horace John Shaw, “A Rhetorical Analysis of the Speaking of Mrs. Ellen G. White, a Pioneer Leader and a Spokeswoman of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1959), p. 201.
6. For a survey of Ellen G. White’s temperance speaking engagements, see Horace John Shaw (n. 5), pp. 200-210.
7. Ellen G. White and James White, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, p. 27, cited in *Temperance*, p. 101.
8. *Temperance*, p. 196.
9. *Temperance*, p. 186; see also pp. 203, 251.
10. *Temperance*, p. 137.
11. *Temperance*, p. 289.
12. *Temperance*, p. 42. The same phrase occurs with minor variations on pp. 94, 103, 163, 289.
13. Ellen G. White, “Temperance and License Law,” *Review and Herald* (November 8, 1881): 290
14. *Temperance*, p. 237.
15. *Temperance*, p. 239.
16. *Temperance*, p. 197. See similar statements on pages 198-203

17. *Temperance*, p. 198.
18. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 58.
19. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald* (November 8, 1881).
20. *Temperance*, p. 222-223.
21. J. H. Waggoner, "Present Truth," *Review and Herald* (August 7, 1866): 77, emphasis supplied.
22. *Temperance*, p. 238.
23. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 110.
24. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 75.
25. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 129.
26. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 161-162
27. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 101, emphasis supplied.
28. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 111.
29. *Temperance*, p. 201, emphasis supplied.
30. *Temperance*, p. 93.
31. James White, "Health Reform," *Health Reformer* 4, February 1871, p. 152.
32. *Temperance*, p. 239, emphasis supplied.
33. *Temperance*, p. 264-265.
34. The seven points summarize what has already been mentioned and what is contained in Appendix B, "Typical Temperance Addresses by Ellen G. White," found in the book *Temperance*, pp. 267-292.
35. *Temperance*, p. 103.
36. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 129.
37. *Temperance*, p. 42.
38. James Coffin, "Does the Bible Condemn 'Moderate' Drinking?" *Adventist Review* (February 25, 1982): 4, emphasis supplied.
39. *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.

40. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 333. She makes a similar statement in *Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1878: “The Bible nowhere teaches the use of intoxicating wine, either as a beverage or as a symbol of the blood of Christ.”

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Temperance*, p. 44. Emphasis supplied. In *Signs of the Times*, July 8, 1880, she gives a similar comment on Leviticus 10:9: “Therefore God explicitly forbids the use of wine and strong drink.”

43. *Drunkennes and Crime*, p. 4, quoted in *Temperance*, p. 52.

44. *Temperance*, pp. 53-54.

45. *True Temperance, An Indictment of the Liquor Traffic* (Nashville, n.d.), p. 14.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

47. *Temperance*, p. 92. See also *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 356-357; *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 433.

48. *Temperance*, p. 36.

49. *Temperance*, p. 187.

50. *Temperance*, p. 93.

51. *Temperance*, p. 50; see also *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 454.

52. *Temperance*, p. 92; see also *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4, part 1, p. 125.

53. For a discussion of these effects, see, for example, Edith L. Gomberg, Helene R. White and John A. Carpenter, eds., *Alcohol, Science and Society Revisited* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1985), pp. 17-62.

54. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 30.

55. *Temperance*, p. 93.

56. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 433.

57. *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.

58. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 30.

59. *Counsels on Health*, p. 463.

60. *Temperance*, pp. 93, 278.

61. *Medical Ministry*, p. 11.
62. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 411.
63. *Temperance*, p. 174.
64. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 30.
65. *Gospel Workers*, p. 386.
66. *Temperance*, p. 31.
67. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 339.
68. *Medical Ministry*, p. 114.
69. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 561.
70. *Temperance*, p. 24.
71. *Temperance*, p. 28.
72. *Temperance*, p. 29.
73. *Temperance*, p. 29.
74. *Temperance*, p. 36.
75. *Temperance*, p. 35.
76. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 172.
77. *Temperance*, pp. 38-39.
78. *Temperance*, pp. 40-41.
79. *Temperance*, p. 45.
80. *Temperance*, pp. 46, 47.
81. *Temperance*, p. 47.
82. *Temperance*, p. 106.
83. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 129.
84. *Temperance*, p. 108.
85. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 174.
86. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 176.

---

87. Herbert Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988), p. 79. Fingarette provides a penetrating and convincing refutation of the myth that alcoholism is a disease. A “must” reading for anyone interested in this subject.

88. *Evangelism*, p. 264.

89. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 181-182.

90. *Temperance*, p. 109.

91. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 176-177.

## **Chapter 9**

# **ALCOHOL IN AMERICA**

On the day of his death Lincoln declared: “Slavery is abolished. After reconstruction, the next great question will be the abolition of the liquor traffic. My head and heart and my hand and purse will go into that work. Less than a quarter of a century ago I predicted that the time would come when there would be neither a slave nor a drunkard in the land. I have lived to see, thank God, one of these prophecies fulfilled. I hope to see the other realized.”<sup>1</sup>

Were Lincoln to rise from his grave, what a shock it would be for him to discover that his prophecy that America would eventually become a land free not only from slavery, but also from drunkenness, has proved to be an illusion! Lincoln would shake his head in disbelief upon learning that nearly 18 million adult Americans today, which is more than half the population of his time (31 million in 1860), are problem drinkers, and of these more than 10 million are alcoholics.<sup>2</sup>

Why have Americans succeeded in abolishing slavery but not the enslavement of by alcohol of nearly 18 million of its citizens? Part of the answer lies in different moral perceptions of the two problems. Most Americans gradually came to view slavery, as well as racial discrimination, as a moral and social evil to be fought and abolished. With regard to alcoholic beverages, however, with the exception of the brief interlude of the years of Prohibition (1919-1933), most Americans have come to accept them as their beloved enemy, to be restrained but not eliminated. This view, as we have seen, has been encouraged by the belief that the Bible sanctions a moderate use of alcoholic beverages.



Lacking a clear moral conviction that alcoholic beverages are evil because of their capacity to intoxicate the body, irrespective of the quantity used, most Christians in America and in the rest of the world believe that the responsibility of churches, schools, media and their government is to teach moderation in the use of alcohol, rather than abstention from it. Paradoxically, there is considerable opposition on the part of different interest groups, even on how to design and implement policies to prevent alcohol abuse. A major reason, as Steve Olson and Dean R. Gerstein point out in their book *Alcohol in America* (sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences), is “a conflict of values” among the American people. The conflict is caused by the fact, as they explain it, that while “many people see drinking as fundamentally immoral or at least, morally weak, others view drinking as a sign of liberal values or as a traditional means of sociability. The clash between these two outlooks can stymie political decision making, leaving prevention initiatives paralyzed.”<sup>3</sup>

The outcome of this position is self-evident: nearly 18 million Americans who began as moderate drinkers have become problem drinkers, costing society over \$117 billion per year and the yearly loss of at least 100,000 lives.<sup>4</sup> The reason for these tragic results is simple: alcohol is a drug which is not only intoxicating but also addictive. For some people it takes only a couple of drinks a day to become addicted to alcohol permanently. “We must also remember,” writes Sidney Cohen, a consultant in substance abuse for the National Institute on Drug Abuse, “that even two drinks a day are too much for some. There are those who are hypersensitive to very small amounts of ethanol [alcohol].”<sup>5</sup> No wonder the Bible warns: “Do not look at wine“ (Prov 23:31).

**Objective of this Chapter.** The aim of this chapter is twofold: (1) to report briefly on the consequences of drinking in the American society; (2) to synthesize and sometimes “translate” into simpler language, the information from medical studies on the effect of alcohol on health. The content of this chapter is not original. It simply attempts to summarize in an organized way the basic information found in many scientific studies discussing the effect of alcohol on the human body.

The reason for including this chapter on the medical aspect of alcohol is to help the reader see from a social and medical perspective why the Bible condemns the use of alcoholic beverages. It is hoped that this review of the medical facts regarding the effects of alcohol will aid the reader to appreciate the validity of the conclusion of this study.

## PART 1

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF DRINKING

Given the fact that over two-thirds of adult Americans drink (68%), it is not surprising that alcohol is America's number one public enemy, claiming "at least 100,000 lives per year, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined."<sup>6</sup> To obtain a picture of the cost of drinking to the American society we shall briefly consider the following: (1) Personal Costs, (2) Economic Costs, (3) Crime and Alcohol, (4) Health Care and Alcohol.

**Personal Costs.** The personal cost of alcohol is tremendous. The 1986 report of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism indicates that "alcohol is a factor in nearly half of America's murders, suicides and accidental deaths," claiming at least 100,000 lives per year.<sup>7</sup>

Approximately 30,000 Americans die each year of a fatal liver disease known as cirrhosis. Most of the victims of cirrhosis would not have contracted the disease if they had not drunk. It is worth noting that studies show that "only half the people who die of cirrhosis would meet the main diagnostic criteria for alcoholism,"<sup>8</sup> suggesting that even many moderate drinkers die of cirrhosis.

Another important type of alcohol-related death occurs in traffic accidents. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, each year about 15 million people are involved in motor-vehicle crashes. In 1987 these crashes caused about 50,000 fatalities and over three million injuries. Approximately half of these deaths and injuries are the result of people driving under the influence of alcohol.

Almost as many people die each year from other forms of accidents, such as falls, fires and drowning. Since people who die in these accidents are not routinely tested for the presence of alcohol in their blood, it is more difficult to ascertain what percentage of these accidents are caused by drinking. "But researchers have estimated that alcohol may be involved in as many as 40 percent of these accidents—the equivalent of over 20,000 deaths."<sup>9</sup>

Another major source of mortality is alcohol-related overdoses. According to Olson and Gerstein, "about 10,000 people die each year from this cause, half from alcohol alone, half from the combination of alcohol and other drugs. In the latter cases, death certificates list suicide as the cause of death about 40 percent of the time. Alcohol has an appallingly strong connection with suicide. One third of the nearly 30,000 suicides in the United States each year have alcohol in their blood at death. Among the 200,000 to 400,000 attempted suicides each year, alcohol problems are five times more common than in a comparable nonsuicidal group."<sup>10</sup>

To these can be added about 10,000 murders which occur every year in situations involving alcohol. There is also a statistically uncertain contribution of alcohol to deaths and disabilities caused by fetal alcohol syndrome, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and organic brain syndromes. The total of the alcohol-related fatalities, according to Dean Gerstein of the National Research Council, may be approximately 150,000 per year. This figure is based on a study done in 1975 by the Social Research Group of the University of California.<sup>11</sup>

In 1986, when basketball star Len Bias died from a cocaine overdose, Americans were swept up in an antidrug fervor. Yet, “in the same year,” as *U.S. News & World Report* points out, “alcohol took more than 100,000 lives—25 times as many as claimed by cocaine, heroin and other illegal drugs combined. That’s the government’s estimate, based largely on death certificates. One recent study indicates that many death certificates cover up links to alcohol.”<sup>12</sup> This may explain why Dean Gerstein gives a higher estimate than does the government.

**Inestimable Human Cost.** The real human cost of alcohol transcends any statistical estimate of deaths and disabilities. Who can count the cost of infant and child care needed when one or both parents drink, or the cost of violence against children, spouses or others caused by alcohol? Who can count the cost of school children who underachieve, get into trouble or become problem drinkers because of their parents’ drinking habits? Who can count the cost of the disproportionate number of hospital beds and health resources used by people who drink? Who can count the cost that drinkers cause to themselves and to others when they operate motor vehicles, airplanes, or other complex machinery while intoxicated? Who can count the cost of alcohol in terms of lost productivity, wasted training, and absenteeism?

Statistics of fatalities give only the most tragic results of the use of alcohol. The real number of people affected directly or indirectly by alcohol-related problems is much greater. A 1987 Gallup Poll indicates that 1 in 4 families are troubled by alcohol—“the highest incidence of problem drinking in 37 years.”<sup>13</sup> Applying this percentage to today’s population of more than 246 million (December 1988), it means that more than 61 million Americans have had their family lives adversely affected by alcohol-related problems.

Today the idea that alcohol use affects the whole family is gaining ground. “At present,” reports *U.S. News & World Report*, “7 million children below the age of 18 live in alcoholic homes. Specialists who work with COA’s [children of alcoholics] say most suffer feelings of guilt and self-hate and usually live by three rules: ‘Don’t talk. Don’t trust. Don’t feel.’”<sup>14</sup>

The report continues saying that “an additional 21 million Americans are known as ACOA’s, ‘adult children of alcoholics.’ Some do well. Many don’t.” These “are people with adult bodies and intellect and the wounded feelings of a child.” A special therapy program can help some of them recapture some of the feeling they lost in childhood.

**Alcohol and the Family.** Alcohol has a major adverse effect upon the American family. The *Fifth Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health*, from the Secretary of Health and Human Services, states: “Evidence suggests that the rate of separation and divorce among alcoholics and their spouses is seven times that of the general population (Paolino and McCrady, 1977). Forty percent of family court problems involve alcoholism in some way (Jacob and Seilhamer, 1982).”<sup>15</sup>

The report continues, indicating that alcohol plays a major role in both child and spouse abuse. Of the latter it says: “Most studies cite alcoholism or excessive drinking in 45 to 60 percent of spouse abuse.”

Summing up, the human cost of drinking is beyond estimation. It touches the lives of over 61 million Americans today, leaving many of them with permanent emotional and physical scars.

**Economic Costs.** The economic costs to American society for the use of alcohol in America are staggering. According to the 1986 report of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the economic costs to society of alcohol abuse are estimated at \$117 billion a year. This includes \$18 billion in premature deaths, \$66 billion lost in reduced work effort and \$13 billion spent for treatments.<sup>16</sup> To this figure must be added the over \$66 billion which the American people paid (in 1984) for the purchase of alcoholic beverages.<sup>17</sup> Adding the costs related to the use of alcohol to the cost of purchasing it, the grand total is the staggering sum of \$184 billion. This sum could have been used to improve the quality of life of millions of Americans through better housing, new schools, better education, food for the hungry and homes for the homeless.

The other side of the cost coin is the economic revenues received by federal, state and local governments from the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States trumpets the fact that their industry paid in 1984 over \$12 billion in tax revenue to the various levels of governments.<sup>18</sup> The value of this revenue must be measured over against the cost of \$184 billion to society with all the disease, misery, violence, and death caused by alcohol.

**Crime and Alcohol.** The involvement of alcohol in crime is clearly established by several reports. The 1986 report of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism indicates that alcohol is a factor in nearly half of America's murders, suicides and accidental deaths.<sup>19</sup> The Third Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health from the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare offers a most revealing picture of the involvement of in various forms of crime. The following quote is taken directly from the report: "The relationship of alcohol to criminal behavior varies by type of crime and by the roles of participants in criminal events. Most alcohol-involved violent crime includes both a drinking victim and a drinking offender.

*"Robbery.* Estimated alcohol involvement ranges as high as 72 percent in robbery offenders. Although the vulnerability of skid-row alcoholics to robbery is common knowledge, alcohol used by other robbery victims is relatively unexplored.

*"Rape.* Estimated alcohol involvement ranges as high as 50 percent in sex offenders and 31 percent in rape victims. The most extensive American study on the subject found that in 63 percent of rapes where alcohol was involved at all, both victim and offender had been drinking. Another important finding was that the type and extent of alcohol involvement in rapes was related to the interpersonal relationship of the victim and the offender.

*"Assaults.* Estimates of alcohol involvement in reported assaults vary widely, ranging up to 72 percent of the offenders and 79 percent of the victims.

*"Homicide.* Research based on coroners' reports and detailed case studies suggest that large percentages of offenders and victims had been drinking at the time of the crime. Most studies show that 40 to 60 percent of homicide victims and up to 86 percent of offenders had been drinking when the murder was committed. The presence of alcohol appears to be most likely in homicides where (1) the victim is stabbed, (2) the situation was already violent, and (3) the victim seemed to have precipitated the murder."<sup>20</sup>

A significant aspect of this report, which is often ignored, is that a large percentage of victims of rape, assault and murders had also been drinking at the time of the crime. This implies that some of the crimes would not have been committed had the victim not been drinking. The report also states that as many as eighty-three percent of offenders in jail reported alcohol involvement in their crimes not only against persons but also against property.

**The Beloved Enemy.** What awful destruction alcohol brings to America! If the use of alcohol could be eliminated, the rate of thefts, rapes,

assaults and murders would be reduced overnight by more than fifty percent. How much human pain, grief, misery, violence and death would be spared to our society! In spite of this stark reality, experience tells us that politicians, sociologists, and scientists will go on combatting alcohol-related crimes by devising new studies, building new prisons, hiring new police officers, and installing more judges, instead of eliminating the real culprit, alcohol itself.

Why is it that our political, civil, and religious leaders are not determined to work together to eliminate the real enemy number one of the American society? The answer is simple. Because too many of them, as Jack Van Impe puts it, “share the love affair with alcohol and are unwilling to touch their beloved.”<sup>21</sup> Van Impe goes on saying: “To try to fight crime without facing the alcohol issue is to work blindfolded. Even if we had the most ideal system of corrections, we could not stop crime’s onslaught because of alcohol’s devastating effects. If we had the most stringent sentencing coupled with perfect police work and flawless penology, the best we could do would be to deal with a fraction of the total crime problem, if the issue of alcohol remained unchecked. Most crime would keep surging on year after year.”<sup>22</sup>

**Health Care and Alcohol.** Alcohol has also a significant impact on the American health care system. Some studies estimate that up to 30 percent of the persons hospitalized have a significant alcohol-related problem.<sup>23</sup> “The Veteran Administration estimates that fifty percent of all the VA hospital beds are filled by veterans with alcohol problems.”<sup>24</sup>

In terms of health-care costs, alcohol figures prominently among our nation’s annual medical expenditures. Medical costs of \$13 billion annually for alcohol-related problems represent 12 percent of all adults’ health expenditures.<sup>25</sup>

Jean Kinney and Gwen Leaton report that “one large-scale study of patients’ hospital costs found that a small proportion of patients, only 13 percent, had hospital bills equal to the remaining 87 percent. The only distinguishing characteristic of the high-cost group was not age, or sex, or economic status, or ethnicity. It was that those persons were heavy drinkers and/or heavy smokers.”<sup>26</sup>

**Problems Among Moderate Drinkers.** The reference to “heavy drinkers” may suggest that alcohol-related problems are experienced primarily by this group. This view is untrue. Studies have shown that alcohol-related problems occur *throughout* the drinking population. Michael Polich and Bruce Orvis conducted a survey of 3,078 U.S. Air Force personnel, dividing them into different categories of drinkers. Their survey indicates that the heavy drinkers account for only one quarter of the total people with two or more alcohol-related problems.<sup>27</sup>

These findings were confirmed by a national household survey conducted by Walter Clark and Lorrain Midanik. They found that 11 percent of heavy drinkers (defined as people consuming an average of more than two drinks per day) suffered less than half of the total number of health and social problems related to alcohol.<sup>28</sup>

These studies indicate that alcohol-related problems are spread *throughout* the drinking population. This means, as Olson and Gerstein point out, that “even if America’s 15 million heaviest drinkers were to stop drinking tomorrow, a substantial fraction of the country’s alcohol problems would remain.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly Mark Moore of Harvard University states: “A large portion of the alcohol problem is created by people who would never think of themselves as problem drinkers.”<sup>30</sup>

The results of these studies have important implications. If America wants to deal effectively with alcohol-related problems, it must aggressively promote abstinence from alcoholic beverages through political, social, educational and ecclesiastical policies and programs. The hope that this might happen is slim, because far too many love alcohol too much to be willing to accept the Biblical admonition to stay away from it.

## PART 2

### ALCOHOL AND HEALTH

The staggering costs of alcohol-related problems, affecting millions of individuals, homes and society at large, raise a fundamental question: How can alcoholic beverages, which to most drinkers appear so harmless, cause so much misery, devastation and death in our society? The answer is to be found in the various ill-effects alcohol has on the human body. These we shall now endeavor to describe as clearly and concisely as possible.

#### 1. How the Body Uses Alcohol

**Definition of Alcohol.** Alcohol is a harmful drug present as an ingredient in beer, wine and stronger beverages such as whiskey. Alcohol is without innate flavor and mixes immediately with water or other liquids. It is defined by some as food, but is a “bad food” because it does not provide minerals, vitamins or proteins, but only what some describe as “empty calories.”<sup>31</sup>

Contrary to popular opinion, alcohol is *not* a stimulant but a sedative, an anesthetic, and a narcotic. When ingested, it interferes in progressive and predictable stages with the normal functions of the brain of any person, whether alcoholic or nonalcoholic.

**Absorption.** Unlike most foods, alcohol requires no digestion. Surprisingly, the absorption of alcohol begins almost immediately, with a very small amount being absorbed through the tiny capillaries in the mouth and in the walls of the alimentary tract. About 20 percent of the alcohol consumed is absorbed directly from the stomach. The remainder passes into the small intestine where the major absorption takes place. Thus, the stomach and the intestine are the major holding areas of alcohol. Alcohol does not stay in the gastrointestinal tract for long, because the absorption rate of alcohol is very high.<sup>32</sup>

The absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream is influenced by several factors. The greater the concentration of alcohol in a beverage, the more quickly it is absorbed. This explains why distilled spirits have more apparent “kick” than wine or beer. The amount of food in the stomach is also a big factor in determining the speed with which alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream. Champagne and other sparkling or carbonated wines, though no higher in alcoholic content than regular wines, intoxicate faster because they contain carbon dioxide, which increases the rate of absorption. Another factor determining the rate of absorption is the speed of drinking. Gulping rather than sipping alcoholic beverages sends alcohol into the body faster.

Having been absorbed into the bloodstream through the capillary walls of the small blood vessels in the stomach and intestines, alcohol now circulates freely to all the parts of the body. The blood-alcohol level is the ratio of alcohol present in the blood in relation to the total volume of blood. For example, a blood-alcohol level of 0.15 percent equals 1.5 parts of ethyl alcohol to 1,000 parts of blood.

**Breakdown and Removal.** The removal of alcohol from the body begins as soon as alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream. A small amount of alcohol, about 5 percent, leaves the body unmetabolized through sweat, urine or the breath. The rest has to be changed chemically, metabolized. This process is called oxidation and it occurs in three phases. The first takes place entirely in the liver, where an enzyme (alcohol dehydrogenase) converts alcohol into acetaldehyde, a substance even more toxic than alcohol. In the second phase the acetaldehyde is acted on by yet another enzyme and broken down to form acetic acid. In the final phase, acetic acid leaves the liver and is dispersed throughout the body where it is changed into water and carbon dioxide, a process yielding about seven calories of energy per gram of alcohol.

The liver occupies a key position in this process, because it is the only organ that can handle the first phase. The presence of large amounts of alcohol does not prompt the liver to work faster. The average rate of alcohol



metabolized in the liver is about 0.5 ounce of pure alcohol per hour, roughly the equivalent of one 12-ounce can of beer. The unmetabolized alcohol remains “waiting in line,” while circulating in the bloodstream. The process continues until all the alcohol has been disposed of. The concentration of alcohol in the blood, and consequently in the brain, is responsible for the intoxicating effects of alcohol. The following section will give some specific information on how alcohol affects the function of various organs.

## 2. The Effects of Alcohol on the Body

**Brain.** The brain is the organ most sensitive to the presence of alcohol. The most immediate and dramatic consequence of the ingestion of any amount of alcohol is the impaired efficiency of the brain with its related central nervous system. Such an impairment takes the form of “decreased inhibitions, less efficient vision and hearing, slurring of speech, difficulty in the performance of gross motor skills, deterioration of judgment, increased reaction time, and a general feeling of euphoria.”<sup>33</sup>

The degree and extent of mental impairment is related to the blood-alcohol level. Studies indicate that definite impairments begin at about 0.03 percent, which is achieved simply by drinking a 12-ounce can of beer or 5 1/2 ounces of ordinary wine by an average 150 pound person.<sup>34</sup> “At 0.05 percent alcohol [about two drinks of 12 ounces of beer] . . . the peripheral (side) vision drops 18 degrees and depth perception 74 percent.”<sup>35</sup>

A person usually gets “high” at 0.05 blood-alcohol level, that is, by drinking approximately two drinks in one hour. By one drink is meant the ingestion of the following amounts of the respective beverages which supply an equal percentage of alcohol to a person’s body:

1 1/2 ounces of whiskey	} "one drink"
3 1/2 ounces of fortified wine	
5 1/2 ounces of ordinary wine	
12 ounces of beer <sup>36</sup>	

**Is Moderate Drinking Safe?** One drink generally causes 0.03 percent alcohol in the blood of an average 150-pound person. Two drinks double the percentage. Kenney and Leaton report that at a 0.05 blood-alcohol level, “the ‘newer’ parts of the brain, those controlling judgment, have been affected.” This becomes apparent, since a person “may be loud, boisterous, making passes; saying and doing things he might usually censor. These are the effects that mistakenly cause people to think of alcohol as a stimulant.”<sup>37</sup>

The authors explain that it is not the system which has been hyped up but the inhibitions which have been suspended.

Medical authorities recognize that even one drink can impair the judgment of some persons. In her book *Teaching About Alcohol*, Frances Todd writes: "The finer grades of judgment, concentration, and understanding are the first to be affected. After as little as one drink such effects may occur, and they increase rapidly as the alcohol concentration in the blood is raised by subsequent drinks."<sup>38</sup>

Giorgio Lolli refers to studies indicating that while most individuals do not appear to be mentally impaired by one drink, "a *sizeable minority*, however, can be affected unfavorably by blood alcohol concentrations even below 0.02-0.03 percent and show signs of impaired attention, judgment, and emotional equilibrium."<sup>39</sup> Further on Lolli states: "The functions of judgment and self-control, among the highest with which the human mind is endowed, may be affected unfavorably at alcohol concentrations far below those affecting vision, hearing, and muscular co-ordination."<sup>40</sup>

**The Effect of One Drink.** It is important to know that even one drink can adversely affect our brain. William Terhune makes this point very clear: "Every time you take a drink you are putting some of your brain cells temporarily out of commission. Indeed, if alcohol did not have that effect, you would never drink it."<sup>41</sup> Even one drink is sufficient to weaken a person's inhibitions, which function as "moral brake," and to impair the capacity to think critically.

William Terhune reports an experiment done to demonstrate the impact of one drink on mental performance: "In demonstrating to future physicians the effect of alcohol on the intelligence, many medical schools follow this procedure. They give two written examinations on subsequent days, with similar questions. The first examination is written under the usual circumstances without alcohol. Preceding the second one, each man is given one bottle [12 oz.] of beer to drink. The results of these two examinations are graded by people unfamiliar with the undertaking. At the end of the second examination the students are asked these questions:

1. Is this examination easier, harder, or about the same as the one yesterday?
2. Have you done better, worse, or as well as yesterday?

Most of the students reply that the second test is easier and that their marks are better. However, the grades on the second examination are approximately seventeen percent lower. *This shows that even one drink hampers intelligence and decreases efficiency.*"<sup>42</sup>

It is noteworthy that even within the liquor industry, there are some who caution against the danger of even one drink, if driving. In an eight-page public-service advertisement in the August 1985 *Reader's Digest*, Seagrams emphasized the well-known rule that drinking and driving do not mix at all: "The safe rule for yourself and others is: NONE—for the road!" If alcohol impairs the mental reflexes of people driving on cement roadways, does it not also impair the mental responses of Christians journeying on the way to the Kingdom? To impair our moral judgment by the use of alcohol means to destroy the very discriminatory sense of right and wrong God has implanted within us.

**Liver.** The liver is very sensitive to the ill-effects of alcohol. Some studies have shown that "intake of even relatively small amounts of alcohol (1-2 ounces) by nonalcoholics can lead to the accumulation of fat in liver cells."<sup>43</sup> A vital function of the liver is to maintain a proper level of blood sugar (*glucose*), which is the main source of energy used by the brain cells. When alcohol is present in the bloodstream, the liver devotes all of its efforts to metabolizing it. To do so, the liver sometimes is unable to supply the brain cells with adequate glucose. When this occurs, hypoglycemia can result. This is a condition in which the sugar level in the blood is below normal and consequently the brain is deprived of its proper nourishment. Symptoms include sweating, headache, tremors, hunger, and nervousness.

The most serious liver disease caused by alcohol consumption is *cirrhosis*. This is a disease in which liver cells are destroyed and thus the organ is no longer able to process the nutrients in the food. "About half of those who develop cirrhosis will die in five years."<sup>44</sup> Approximately 30,000 Americans die of cirrhosis every year.

In the past cirrhosis has been generally associated with heavy drinking. However, "a recent French study suggests that men who have as little as three drinks a day, and women who take 1 1/2 drinks a day, may be at increased risk of developing cirrhosis."<sup>45</sup>

**Stomach.** The ingestion of alcoholic beverages stimulates the flow of gastric juices. Alcohol can irritate the lining of the stomach, giving rise to a long-lasting inflammatory condition, known as gastritis. Gastric ulcers are frequently reported among alcohol drinkers. Too much gastric acid in the stomach irritates the ulcers, thus causing pain and retarding the healing process.

The excessive supply of gastric acids caused by the presence of alcohol in the stomach can cause a virtual stoppage of digestion. The passage of the food from the stomach to the small intestine is delayed and the rate of absorption of various nutrients in the intestinal tract is diminished. "Such

actions, combined with the nutrient-poor calories of alcohol itself, the depression of appetite, and the disturbance of normal digestive function common in heavy drinkers, combine to produce the severe *malnutrition* so often observed in alcoholic persons.”<sup>46</sup>

**Heart.** The use of alcohol affects the heart also, by possibly causing high blood pressure, and increasing the risk of strokes and heart attacks. “Experimental evidence reveals,” writes Charles R. Carroll, “that intoxicating amounts of alcohol increase the oxygen consumption of heart muscle and result in decreased mechanical efficiency of the heart.”<sup>47</sup> Carroll continues: “Although not widely accepted by alcohol authorities, some research indicates that the red blood cells in the capillaries of drinkers tend to clump, thereby interfering with the adequate transport of oxygen to body cells.”

The precise mechanism of how alcohol injures the heart is unknown, yet the various heart disorders related to drinking have been known for a long time. Some of the disorders are: “Congestive heart failure, irregular heartbeat, enlarged heart, distended neck veins, pulse and blood pressure abnormalities, and swelling of the arms and legs.”<sup>48</sup> “In addition, alcohol inhibits the manufacture of red and white blood cells, which may result in anemia and weakened resistance to infection.”<sup>49</sup>

**Cancer and Alcohol.** Alcohol appears to increase the risk of certain kinds of cancer. Sidney Cohen, a nationally recognized authority on alcohol use, says: “Drinking alcoholic beverages leads to an increased risk of cancer at various sites of the body.”<sup>50</sup> Some of the sites mentioned are “the tongue, mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, and liver.”<sup>51</sup>

The above survey briefly mentioned only some of the effects of alcohol on the human body. Numerous other medical consequences of alcohol could be presented, such as its effects on the reproductive system, the esophagus, the pancreas, the kidneys, the muscles, the lungs, the thyroid, etc. The examples given should suffice to show that alcohol does take a very heavy toll on the human body.

## CONCLUSION

The price of alcohol use to the American people is appallingly high. And that price is paid by all of us, not only in terms of \$117 billion per year to our economy, but also in terms of human pain, misery, violence, child and spouse abuse, divorces, crimes, sickness and death. “It is inconceivable,” writes Sidney Cohen, “that an advanced society would put up with the tragedy

of alcohol.”<sup>52</sup> What is needed, to use Cohen’s words again, “is an entirely new cultural attitude toward alcohol in which it is recognized for what it is—a dangerous drug.”<sup>53</sup> We believe that such an entirely new cultural attitude toward alcohol can best be developed by recovering the Biblical imperative for abstinence. It is only when Christians come to recognize and accept that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically harmful, but also morally wrong, that they will feel compelled to abstain from intoxicating substances.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. As quoted in Walter B. Knight, *Knight’s Master Book of New Illustrations* (Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 671.

2. These figures are provided by the *National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism*, which are quoted in “Coming to Grips With Alcoholism,” *U.S. News & World Report* (November 30, 1987): 56-56.

3. Steve Olson and Dean R. Gerstein, *Alcohol in America. Taking Action to Prevent Abuse* (Washington, D.C., National Academy Press, 1985), p. 29. The book is sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences and is foreworded by Elizabeth Hanford Dole who was Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation in 1985, at the time the book was published. We shall refer to this study several times because of its credibility and clarity.

4. “Coming to Grips With Alcoholism” (n. 2), p. 56.

5. Sidney Cohen, M.D., *The Alcoholism Problems. Selected Issues* (New York, 1983), p. 125.

6. The figure is from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1986 report, as quoted in “Coming to Grips With Alcoholism” (n. 2), p. 56.

7. Ibid.

8. Steve Olson and Dean R. Gerstein (n. 3), p. 14.

9. Ibid., p. 15.

10. Ibid.

11. As quoted in Steve Olson and Dean R. Gerstein (n. 3), pp. 16-17.

12. “Coming to Grips With Alcoholism” (n. 2), p. 57.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 61.

15. *Fifth Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health* from the Secretary of Health and Human Services (Rockville, Maryland, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, December 1983), p. 89.

16. "Coming to Grips With Alcoholism" (n. 2), p. 57.

17. *Annual Statistical Review, 1984-1985 Distilled Spirits Industry*, September 1985, Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, Inc., 1250 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

18. Ibid.

19. As quoted in "Coming to Grips With Alcoholism" (n. 2), p. 56.

20. "Third Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health," from the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (Rockville, Maryland: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, June, 1978), p. 64.

21. Jack Van Impe, *Alcohol: The Beloved Enemy* (Royal Oak, Michigan, 1980), p. 61.

22. Ibid.

23. Steve Olson and Dean R. Gerstein (n. 3), p. 17.

24. Jean Kinney and Gwen Leaton, *Loosening the Grip. A Handbook of Alcohol Information* (St. Louis, Missouri, 1983), p. 28.

25. Ibid. See also note 12, p. 57.

26. Jean Kinney and Gwen Leaton (n. 24), p. 28.

27. J. M. Polich and B. R. Orvis, *Alcohol Problems: Patterns and Prevalence in the U.S. Air Force* (Santa Monica, 1979).

28. W. B. Clark and L. Midanik, "Results of the 1979 National Survey" (mimeograph), Social Research Group (Berkeley, University of California, 1980).

29. Steve Olson and Dean R. Gerstein (n. 3), p. 23-24.

30. As quoted in Olson and Gerstein (n. 3), pp. 24.

31. Jean Kinney and Gwen Leaton (n. 24), p. 32.

32. For a more exhaustive presentation of the process of the absorption of alcohol, see Kinney and Leaton (n. 24), pp. 32-33; Peter Finn and Patricia A. O'Gorman, *Teaching About Alcohol* (Boston, 1981), pp. 17-20;

---

Charles R. Carroll, *Alcohol: Use, Nonuse and Abuse* (Dubuque, Iowa, 1975), pp. 37-41; Frances Todd, *Teaching About Alcohol* (New York, 1964), pp. 55-61. The information of this section is drawn mostly from these sources.

33. Charles R. Carroll (n. 32), p. 42.

34. Rolla N. Harger, "The Response of the Body to Different Concentrations of Alcohol: Chemical Tests for Intoxication," *Alcohol Education for Classroom and Community*, ed. Raymond G. McCarthy (New York, 1964), p. 98.

35. Loma G. Davies, "The Christian and Social Drinking," *The Baptist Bulletin* (March 1977): 9.

36. This table is from Georgio Lolli, *Social Drinking* (New York, 1960), p. 278.

37. Jean Kinney and Gwen Leaton (n. 24), p. 39.

38. Frances Todd (n. 32), p. 68.

39. Georgio Lolli (n. 36), p. 39.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

41. William B. Terhune, *The Safe Way to Drink: How to Prevent Alcohol Problems Before They Start* (New York, 1968), p. 24.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

43. Jean Kinney and Gwen Leaton (n. 24), p. 37.

44. "Coming to Grips With Alcoholism" (n. 2), p. 60.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Charles R. Carroll (n. 32), p. 49.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. "Coming to Grips With Alcoholism" (n. 2), p. 60.

50. Sidney Cohen, *The Substance Abuse Problems. New Issues for the 1980s* (New York, 1983), vol. 2, p. 119.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Sidney Cohen (n. 5), p. 12.

53. *Ibid.*