

Two Major Verses On Intoxicating Beverages

By David Lee Burris

FIRST THE LOW HANGING FRUIT: LAST SUPPER/LORD'S SUPPER GRAPE JUICE

Matthew 24:26–27. Having finished the Passover, our Lord “took bread,” unleavened, unfermented bread, and blessed it. This was done always at the Passover, and was by Christ transferred to the Supper. He gave it to his disciples as the symbol of his body. Then he took the cup, and gave thanks. This also was done on giving the third cup at the Passover. This he also transferred, and gave it to his disciples as the symbol of his blood, “shed for the remission of sins.” The bread and the cup were used with no discrimination as to their character. To be in harmony with the bread, the cup should also have been unfermented. It was the Passover bread and wine that Christ used. In Exodus 12:8, 15, 17–20, 34, 39, and other places, all leaven is forbidden at that feast and for seven days. The Prohibition against the presence and use of all fermented articles was under the penalty of being “cut off from Israel.” “The law forbade seor - yeast, ferment, whatever could excite fermentation - and khahmatz, whatever had undergone fermentation, or been subject to the action of seor.” - *Bible Commentary*, p. 280.

Professor Moses Stuart, says: “The Hebrew word khahmatz means anything fermented.” “All leaven, *i.e.* fermentation, was excluded from offerings to God. - Leviticus 2:3–14.”

“The great mass of the Jews have ever understood this prohibition as to be extending to *fermented wine*, or strong drink, as well as to bread. The word is essentially the same which designates the fermentation of bread and that of liquors.”

Dr. S. M. Isaacs, an eminent Jewish rabbi of this city, says: “In the Holy Land they do not commonly use fermented wines. The best wines are preserved sweet and unfermented.” In reference to their customs at their religious festivals, he repeatedly and emphatically said: “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, as in nature and science it is itself decay, rottenness.**”

Gesenius, the eminent Hebraist, says that “leaven applied to the wine as really as to the bread.” - *Thayer*, p. 71.

The Rev. A. P. Peabody, D.D., in his essay on the Lord’s Supper, says: “The writer has satisfied himself, by careful research, that in our Savior’s time the Jews, at least the high ritualists among them, extended the prohibition of leaven to the principle of fermentation in every form; and that it was customary, at the Passover festival, for the master of the household to press the contents of ‘the cup’ from clusters of grapes preserved for this special purpose.” - *Monthly Review*, Jan., 1870, p. 41.

“Fermentation is nothing else but the putrefaction of a substance containing no nitrogen. *Ferment*, or *yeast*, is a substance in a state of putrefaction, the atoms of which are in continual motion (*Turner’s Chemistry*, by Liebig).” - *Kitto*, ii. 236.

It was predicted as a peculiarity of the Messiah, Psalm 16:10, “Neither will thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” – that is, decomposition and/or putrefaction. This prediction for the apostle recognized, Acts 2:31, as fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, “Neither his flesh did see corruption.” Contrasted with David, Acts 13:35–37, who “was laid with his fathers and saw corruption,” it is written, “But he whom God raised saw no corruption.” **All admit that the bread was unleavened - had not passed he putrefaction or fermentation - and was, therefore, the proper emblem of the body of Christ, which “saw no corruption.” For the same reason, there was a necessity that the wine should be unfermented, that it might be the fit emblem of the great Sacrifice which “saw no corruption.”**

Leaven, because it was corruption, was forbidden as an offering to God. Exodus 34:25: “Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven.” But salt, because it prevents corruption and preserves, is required. Leviticus 2:13: “With all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.” **If leaven was not allowed with sacrifices, which were the types of the atoning blood of Christ, how much more would it be a violation of the commandment to allow leaven, or that which was fermented, to be the symbol of the blood of atonement?** We cannot imagine that our Lord, in disregard of so positive a command, would admit leaven into the element which was to perpetuate the memory of the sacrifice of himself, of which all the other sacrifices were but types.

Our Lord blessed the bread, and for the cup he gave thanks. Each element alike was the occasion of devout blessing and thanksgiving. This cup contained that which the Savior, just about to suffer, could bless, and which he, for all time, designated as the symbol of his own atoning blood.

Having finished the Supper, in parting with his disciples he said, “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

The Savior doesn’t use *oinos*, the usual word for wine, but adopts the phrase “*genneematos tees ampelou*,” “this fruit of the vine.” Was it because *oinos* was a generic word, including the juice of the grape in all its stages, that he chose a more specific phrase? Was it because he had previously selected the vine as the illustration of himself as the true vine, and his disciples as the fruit-bearing branches, and the juice as “the pure blood of the grape?” (Deuteronomy 32:14.)

It will not be questioned that unfermented wine is as really “the fruit of the vine” as that fermented. If fermented wine is “the fruit of the vine,” then wine vinegar is also. But neither of them is properly the “fruit of the vine,” as both vinous and acetous fermentations are the result of chemical agencies outside and independent of the vine. In each there is decomposition of the original juice.

By “this fruit of the vine,” did he intimate “in his Father’s kingdom” there was something to be looked for there answering to intoxicating wine? This cannot be tolerated for a moment. By “this fruit of the vine,” did he mean inebriating wine? Dr. Laurie, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, June, 1869, says, “The Bible never requires the use of wine (intoxicating) except at the communion-table, or as a medicine prescribed by another than the party who is to use it.” This is emphatic, and promptly answers the question in the affirmative. It’s very strange, that our Lord should require his disciples perpetually to use, as a religious duty, at his table, the article which Dr. Laurie says “all good men agree is dangerous & not to be used except as medicine prescribed by another.” Does Christ, who has taught us to pray “lead us not into temptation,” thus require his disciples to use habitually, in remembrance of him, an article too dangerous to be used anywhere else?

The fact that the Passover was six months later than the vintage is not an invincible objection, since, as we have seen in the preceding pages, on the authority of Josephus, of travelers Niebuhr and Swinburne, and of Pippini, the wine-merchant of Florence, and others, that **grapes are preserved fresh through the year, and that wine may be made from them at any period.**

Is it probable that Christ took an intoxicating liquor, which in all the ages past had been the cause of misery and ruin, and which in all the ages to come would destroy myriads in temporal and eternal destruction; and he took the wine which his own inspired Word declared was “the poison of asps,” “the poison of serpents,” “the poison of dragons,” whose deadly bite is like a serpent, and whose fatal sting is like an adder, and made that the symbol of his atonement, saying, “This is the New Testament in my blood”? But, in “the fruit of the vine,” unfermented, pure, healthful, and life-sustaining, and which the Scriptures called “the blood of the grape” and “the pure blood of the grape,” there was harmony and force in making it the symbol of atoning blood by which we have spiritual life and eternal blessedness.

The Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 10:15, not only avoids the word oinos (wine), but calls the liquor used “the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? “And in 11:25 he quotes the exact words of Christ, “This cup is the New Testament in my blood.”¹

¹ Patton, W. (2004). [Bible Wines](#) (pp. 69–74). Redding, CA: Pleasant Places.

Passover Wine **Unfermented**: Yeast Would Ceremonially Defile

McClintock & Strong point out that wine could be kept for about a year in an unfermented state (**quoting Cato**, De Re Rustica, c. 120. McC & S, X, 1014).

R. C. Foster in The Final Week, pages 165-166, contends that

"The fact that all leaven had to be removed from the house two days before the Passover began, is positive proof that the wine which they used was unfermented. The bread was unleavened; for precisely the same reasons the fruit of the vine was unleavened."

“This cup is described later in the account as ‘fruit of the vine’ (26: 29). The Mishnah, of the Babylonian Talmud, equates the terms ‘fruit of the vine’ & ‘wine’ (Berachoth, 35a). In biblical usage, we should understand that wine refers to the product of the grape at any stage, from the fresh squeezed grape juice (Isaiah 65: 8; 16: 10) to fermented juice that has turned to vinegar (Numbers 6: 3). ‘Since fermentation was considered a type of leaven, and all leaven was to be removed from the house during the Passover (Exodus 12:15-18), the implication is that this juice was unfermented.’” – Kyle Pope, “This Bread” & “This Cup”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FERMENTATION OF GRAPE JUICE WAS UNAVOIDABLE

We must be careful not to read back into the Scripture our modern knowledge of microbiology. We can make a trip to the grocery store and purchase grape juice, a product of the modern process of pasteurization (unknown before the 1860s). But ancient people did not have the knowledge of microorganisms that we have, and they did not possess the technologies of sterilization and hermetic sealing that are common in our day.

Ancient people would harvest their grapes, place them in the upper section of a wine vat, and stomp them with their bare feet. Wine vats were often hewn into solid rock. They did not use a high-pressure press (as they did with olives) because they did not want to crush the grape seeds and make the wine bitter. Juice flowed from the upper section to a lower collection basin (or series of basins), where it would begin to ferment almost immediately in the open air.[1] This first stage of the fermentation process produced such significant amounts of carbon dioxide gas that the juice appeared to be boiling.

After four to seven days of rapid fermentation, workers would draw the wine out of the vat and pour it into pottery jars or wineskins for the second stage of the fermentation process to proceed to completion. Fermentation continued until one of two conditions terminated the process: (1) the yeast exhausted the supply of sugar in the juice, or (2) the level of ethanol in the wine reached the point of fatal toxicity for the yeast. This second phase of fermentation lasted between two and four months before the wine would be ready for consumption.[2] It was important for the ancient producer to exclude as much air as he could during this second phase because bacteria could utilize the oxygen to produce acetic acid (vinegar) from the ethanol—thus souring the wine.

Today we can keep grape juice from fermenting, and it is delicious and completely non-intoxicating. The fact that people in Scripture drank wine during a time when it was impossible to keep grape juice from fermenting does not give people today license to drink.

MODERN ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES ARE FAR MORE INTOXICATING

The next big idea for our consideration involves the historical reality that modern alcoholic beverages are far more intoxicating than the diluted wine that ancient people typically drank. Because grape juice started fermenting so quickly after the grapes were crushed, **drinking unfermented grape juice was [the general practice] only during grape harvest** (in August and September in Palestine). Of course, **undiluted wine was available for people in the ancient world to drink if they wanted to get drunk, but such a practice did not meet with societal approval**. In drinking undiluted wine, people in Bible times violated the warning of Proverbs 23:31, "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright." [3] Trying to compare modern drinks with the *diluted* wine that people in ancient days commonly consumed is like the proverbial attempt at comparing apples and oranges. **It is illegitimate to justify the consumption of modern wine simply by observing that even godly people drank diluted wine in biblical times.**

Dilution of wine in Jewish culture

The practice of diluting wine with water in the ancient world is so well attested in historical sources that it is *undeniable*. We will begin our historical focus in Old Testament times by considering statements we find in the Talmud. I realize that there are very few Christians who have spent much time reading this interesting source of information on Jewish life and interpretation, so a brief description is in order. The Talmud was written between AD 100 and 500. It contains two main divisions, the Hebrew Mishnah and the Aramaic Gemara. The Mishnah "contained a digest of all the oral laws (supposedly communicated by word of mouth from Moses to the seventy elders), traditions, and explanations of Scripture." [4] The Mishnah presents these traditions in six orders: agriculture, feasts, women, civil and criminal law, sacrifices, and unclean things. These orders are further divided into sixty-three tractates.

Michal Dayagi-Mendels, Frieder Burda Curator of Israelite and Persian Archaeology at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, notes that the technique of mixing wine was a discipline of its own. The Talmud relates that the sage Rava excelled at this task, and his mixed wines were renowned far and wide (BT Bava Metzia 60a).

In general, the wine was mixed in a ratio of two-thirds wine to one-third water, or two-thirds water to one-third wine (Mishnah Niddah 2:7). There were also other ratios, but the rule of thumb was to observe the local custom. [5]

During the Hellenistic through the Roman-Byzantine period, “it is known that the Jews, like the ancient Greeks and Romans, avoided strong, concentrated wine, which the Talmud calls *yăyĭn hai* [“living wine”]; instead, they drank only wine that had been mixed with water. This was not only to avoid becoming intoxicated, but also because diluted wine was healthier than plain water, which was known to be contaminated.”[6] Clearly Dayagi-Mendels is describing a significant historical difference between the diluted beverages that ancient Israelites drank for health reasons and the alcoholic drinks people consume today. Robert H. Stein asserts, “In ancient times there were not many beverages that were safe to drink. . . . **The safest and easiest method of making the water safe to drink, however, was to mix it with wine.**”[7] People in biblical times wanted to drink water that would not make them sick; they generally wanted to avoid intoxication (of course, there were exceptions); they liked the taste of diluted wine because ancient wine was often strongly flavored; and they wanted to make their expensive wine go further by diluting it.

Stein cites the Talmudic tractate *Shabbath 77a*, which specified a dilution ratio of two parts water to one part wine.[8] Tractate *Pesahim 108b* directed the one who drank his four cups of wine for the Passover celebration to dilute the wine in a 3:1 ratio. Various rabbis argued with one other about what the optimal dilution ratio ought to be.[9] **Although the ratio of water to wine was variable, the virtually universal practice of dilution is undeniable.** See Table 1 for selected quotations from the Talmud concerning dilution of wine with water.

TABLE 1. SELECTED QUOTATIONS ABOUT THE DILUTION OF WINE IN JEWISH CULTURE

Source	Quotation
Michael L. Rodkinson, trans., “Tract Sabbath,” <i>New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud</i> , 2nd ed. (Boston: New Talmud Publishing Company, 1903), 1:143–44.	“The prescribed quantities (of victuals and beverages) prohibited to be carried about on the Sabbath (are as follows): Sufficient wine in a goblet, which with the addition of a certain quantity of water would make a full goblet of wine (fit to drink). . . . Wine which is not strong enough to be mixed with three parts of water is not considered wine at all.”

Michael L. Rodkinson, trans., "Tract Pesachim," *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud* (Boston: New Talmud Publishing Company, 1899), 5:210, 226.

"On the eve of any Passover it is not lawful for a person to eat anything from the time of Min'hah (afternoon prayer) until after dusk . . . Nor shall a person have less than four cups of wine. . . . R. Jehudah said in the name of Samuel: 'Each cup must contain wine which, when mixed with three parts of water, will be good wine.'"

In addition to these Talmudic statements, the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees indicates that the Jews diluted their wine with water during the intertestamental period of Israel's history. "For as it is hurtful to drink wine, or water alone; and as wine mingled with water is pleasant, and delighteth the taste: even so speech finely framed, delighteth the ears of them that read the story" (2 Macc. 15:39).[10]

Dilution of wine in Greco-Roman culture

The Greeks and Romans, like the Jews, sought to reduce the likelihood of drunkenness by diluting their wine. Maynard Amerine notes another reason for cutting wine with water: "The wine of classical antiquity, however, was very different from modern wine. Both Greeks and Romans lined storage vessels with resin [to keep them from leaking], which imbued the wine with its taste. They often flavored their wine heavily with spices, herbs, flowers, and perfume, and always diluted it with water before consumption, probably to dilute the strong flavoring. ***Only barbarians drank undiluted wine.***"[11] Dayagi-Mendels maintains that **"the Greeks did not drink wine at mealtimes, but mainly at banquets (symposia) held after the meal. They used to mix their wine with water in different ratios, such as 3:2 or 3:1, which enabled them to drink large quantities at a time. *The drinking of undiluted wine was considered barbaric; it was, as the Greeks put it, 'to drink like a Scythian.'* Herodotus writes that King Cleomenes of Sparta, under Scythian influence, adopted the custom of drinking undiluted wine and went mad as a result."**[12] At the Greek symposium, **"the host decided on the ratio of water to wine to be employed and on the pace of the drinking for that evening. The ratio was generally determined on the basis of the type of wine being served and on its strength.** The traditional proportions were 3:1, 5:2, or 5:3; in certain instances, the wine was so strong that it had to be mixed at a ratio of 20:1. **The resulting alcohol content of the drink was less than what is common for modern-day beer."**[13]

TABLE 2. QUOTATIONS ABOUT THE DILUTION OF WINE IN GRECO-ROMAN CULTURE

Source	Quotation
<i>Plutarch's Moralia in Sixteen Volumes</i> , Frank Cole Babbitt, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 2:265–67, 403.	<p>“For wine is the most beneficial of beverages, the pleasantest of medicines, and the least cloying of appetizing things, provided that there is a happy combination of it with the occasion as well as with water. Water, not only the water that is mixed with the wine, but that which is drunk by itself in the interim between the draughts of the mixture, makes the mixture more innocent.”</p> <p>“Achilles told Patroclus to strengthen the mixture because he knew that older men like Phoenix and Odysseus prefer their wine strong rather than watery.”</p>
<i>Plutarch's Moralia in Sixteen Volumes</i> , Paul A. Clement and Herbert B. Hoffleit, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 8:267–69.	<p>“‘Five,’ indeed, is in the ratio 3:2, three parts of water being mixed with two parts of wine; ‘three’ is in the ratio 2:1, two parts of water being mixed with one of wine; and four,— three parts of water being poured into one of wine. . . . The mixture with ratio 2:1 brings on that disturbing and half-drunk pitch of intoxication.”</p>
<i>Pliny: Natural History in Ten Volumes</i> , H. Rackham, trans., in <i>The Loeb Classical Library</i> , ed. E. H. Warmington (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 4:221–23, Book 14.6.54.	<p>“Homer has recorded the mixing of Maronean wine with water in the proportion of 20 parts of water to one of wine. This class of wine in the same district still retains its strength and its insuperable vigour, inasmuch as one of the most recent authors, Mucianus, who was three times consul, ascertained when actually visiting that region that it is the custom to mix with one pint of this wine eight pints of water.”</p>
<i>Athanaeus, The Deipnosophists</i> , Charles Burton Gulick, trans., in <i>Loeb Classical Library</i> , ed. T. E. Page (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 4:431, Book 10.426c.	<p>“Then Democritus said: ‘Hesiod, my comrades, advises us to pour forth thrice of the water, and to put in the fourth part of wine’. . . . For they say one should drink two parts wine to five of water, or one part wine to three of water.”</p>

Ancient people had to be very careful about the water they drank because some sources might be contaminated by surface run-off and airborne pathogens. Drinking water from the typical well (the Hebrew word is *be'er*) might make people ill. There were artesian springs (the Hebrew word is *'ayin*)[14] that produced safe drinking water, and population centers grew up around these precious sources of potable water. When Abraham's servant arrived at the city of Nahor, for example, Rebekah gave him a drink from the spring (*'ayin*, Gen. 24:16) and asserted that she would water his thirsty camels. The camels, however, were given water from the well (*be'er*, 24:20). Just as in many places in the world today, people in biblical times sought safe alternatives to tainted water. The modern situation in countries like ours with water treatment systems is far different. **We have numerous sources of safe hydration, so the underlying motivation for the consumption of alcoholic beverages in our day is at odds with the reasons for drinking diluted wine during the biblical period.**²

² Jaeggli, R. (2014). [*Christians and alcohol: a scriptural case for abstinence*](#). Greenville, SC: JourneyForth.

We know from ancient sources that preserving unfermented grape juice was common practice. The ancient Roman statesman, Cato, said:

If you wish to have must [grape juice] all year, put grape juice in an amphora and seal the cork with pitch; sink it in a fishpond. After thirty days take it out. It will be grape juice for a whole year (*De Agri Cultura* CXX).

It should be noted in passing, however, that the common wine of the first century was lightly fermented. It did not have nearly the potency of modern wines. Note the following quote from Professor R. Laird Harris:

All the wine [of Bible times] was light wine, i.e., not fortified with extra alcohol. Concentrated alcohol was only known in the Middle Ages when the Arabs invented distillation (“alcohol” is an Arabic word) so what is now called liquor or strong drink (i.e., whiskey, gin, etc.) and the twenty per cent fortified wines were unknown in Bible times. Beer was brewed by various methods, but its alcoholic content was light. The strength of natural wines is limited by two factors. The percentage of alcohol will be half of the percentage of the sugar in the juice. And if the alcoholic content is much above 10 or 11 percent, the yeast cells are killed and fermentation ceases. **Probably ancient wines were 7-10 per cent To avoid the sin of drunkenness, mingling of wine with water was practiced. (1980, 376).**

WINES IN BIBLICAL DEFINITION:

YĀYĪN

The most common word in the Old Testament for a beverage with alcoholic content is *yāyĪn* (!lyly: pronounced *yah'·yin*), translated by the English word *wine*. This Hebrew word occurs 141 times, so a careful study of each usage in its context is a time-consuming task. In any word study, the most important thing to keep in mind is that the actual usage of the word in the Old Testament determines its meaning. After a thorough analysis of the uses of the Hebrew word, the interpreter can begin to sort these uses into groups that convey similar ideas. Sometimes *yāyĪn* appears in favorable contexts with other agricultural items that sustain people's lives. Other uses indicate a substance that people can easily abuse, and drunkenness is the result. Since drunkenness is such a deplorable state, *yāyĪn* is an appropriate metaphor for picturing the horrible effects of God's judgment. As a substance with such potential for producing disaster, sometimes *yāyĪn* occurs in contexts that completely prohibit its use.

The strong warning of Proverbs 20:1

Consuming alcohol also destroys wisdom. Proverbs 20:1 says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." The *mocker* (sometimes translated *scorner* by the KJV) is the most hopeless category of fools in the book of Proverbs. If a person tries to correct a mocker, all he will get is dishonor and hatred (Prov. 9:7–8). The mocker is very proud (21:24), and the only thing to do with him is to apply corporal discipline (19:25; 21:11) or banish him (22:10). Waltke correctly notes that **Solomon personifies wine in 20:1 in order to warn people that this intoxicant has the potential to produce in them the very characteristics of the mocker** that he delineates throughout the book of Proverbs. "The drunkard lacks consciousness and self-control, and in dissolute madness breaks the bounds of sanctity, morality, and propriety." [26] The phrase "whosoever is deceived thereby" is literally "everyone who is staggering in it." [27] Intoxicated people throw caution away, behaving immorally and recklessly.

Wine as a Metaphor of God's Judgment

Because consumption of wine can have such harmful personal consequences, it is an appropriate metaphor of God's judgment on sin. Psalm 75:8 (Hebrew, v. 9) says, "For a cup is in the hand of the Lord, and the wine foams; it is well mixed, and He pours out of this; surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs" (NASB). Just as physical drunkenness produces disorientation, nausea, vomiting, and loss of the ability to protect oneself, so God's judgment produces horrific effects on those who are the recipients of it. The universality of this verse ("all the wicked of the earth") reminds the reader of the bowls of God's wrath poured out on the inhabitants of earth in the days of the Great Tribulation.[37] Revelation 16:19 announces, "The great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath." There is a certain irony in the picture of God judging people by forcing them to drink wine right to the bottom of the vessel. People have used wine in excess as part of their rebellion against Him. Now God will give them more "wine" than they care for, as they are full of His outpoured wrath.

The Old Testament prophets spoke often against drunkenness in their culture. It is no wonder, therefore, that the consequences of excessive consumption of wine should picture God's judgment on sin. For instance, God demonstrates through the object lesson of Jeremiah's linen waistband that God had rejected His completely ruined nation. As a metaphor of the judgment that was fast approaching, the Lord told Jeremiah to proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine" (Jer. 13:12).[38] The thought of these storage jars[39] being full to capacity with wine was to remind the people that God was about to fill them with drunkenness and destruction (13:13). The Lord promised that He would "dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together" (13:14). Instead of picturing God's blessing and provision for His people, abundant wine signaled the approaching disaster of the Babylonian onslaught. Just as drunkenness produces disorientation, insensibility, and inability to recognize danger, so God's people were unaware of impending destruction.

Tîrôš

Yăyîn is not the only word the Old Testament uses in referring to alcoholic beverages. The word *tîrôš* (vwryti pronounced *tee ·rōsh'*) occurs much less frequently—only thirty-eight times. The KJV translates *tîrôš* using three different concepts in English: *wine*, *new wine*, or *sweet wine*. *Tîrôš* is the juice from the grape that flows into the wine vat and soon begins the fermentation process (see Prov. 3:10). ***Tîrôš* ultimately becomes *yăyîn* when fermentation progresses to completion.** *Tîrôš* appears in most of its uses along with other agricultural products, such as grain and olive oil, and these items are blessings that Yahweh pours out on those who are obedient to His covenant. The book of Deuteronomy alone contains seven such **references to *tîrôš* as a blessing**, one of which threatens the loss of agricultural provision if God's people persist in disobedience to His Word (Deut. 28:51). Because the book of Deuteronomy was Moses' last address to Israel before the nation entered Canaan to take the land God had promised to His people, Moses was careful to fortify God's people against the idolatrous viewpoint of the Canaanites. These wicked idolaters thought their worship of Baal, the god of fertility, ensured agricultural abundance for them. The Lord wanted to make sure the Israelites understood that Yahweh alone controls crop productivity. Consequently, the **Mosaic law specified that *tîrôš* was an essential component of the tithe of the firstfruits of the harvest** in thanks for what Yahweh had given to His people (Deut. 12:17–18).

Although *tîrôš* did not contain as much alcohol as fully fermented wine, it did have a sufficient amount to cause drunkenness if a person consumed enough of it. **Because grape juice starts fermenting quickly after it flows into the vat, even *tîrôš* could be abused.**[47] The prophet Hosea warned God's people that "whoredom and wine and new wine [*tîrôš*] take away the heart" (Hosea 4:11). The phrase "take away the heart" is a literal translation of an idiom meaning "to cause a loss of understanding."

One usage of *tîrôš* requires special examination. Isaiah 65:8 says that "new wine is found in the cluster." How it is that *tîrôš* can be found in a grape that has not even been crushed yet by treading? Oswalt goes in the right interpretive direction when he states that some of the grapes in the cluster "are obviously bursting with the *juice that will become new wine.*"[49] In the next verse **God furthers our understanding of the doctrine of the remnant that He will save some day. By figuratively picturing the *tîrôš* as still in the grape, the Lord draws attention to the hidden, but nonetheless existent, righteous remnant in Judah.**[50]

‘Āsîs

Another word for recently squeezed juice is ‘*āsîs* (sysi[’ pronounced *ngah-sees*’). This word occurs only five times in the Old Testament and is translated *juice*, *new wine*, or *sweet wine* by the KJV. Just as in the case of *tîrôš*, ‘*āsîs* carried the potential for producing drunkenness if a person consumed large enough quantities.[51] The prophet Isaiah declared that the time is coming when Yahweh will rescue His people from their oppressors. At that time “they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine [‘*āsîs*]: and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob” (Isa. 49:26).

Šēkār

The final word we will examine in the class of alcoholic beverages is *šēkār* (rk've pronounced *shay'·car*), translated by the KJV as *strong drink* in all but one of its twenty-three occurrences, with Numbers 28:7 being the exception. The Hebrew verb to which it is related means “to be drunk.” Because of this semantic connection, P. P. Jenson postulates that originally *šēkār* was a general word for the entire semantic range of alcoholic beverages. Then as wine made from grapes became popular in Palestine, *šēkār* became a term that referred to any alcoholic drink made from something other than grapes.[52] Marvin A. Powell notes that beer made from the fermentation of grains is well attested in the Ancient Near East as far back as early Sumerian culture. He also questions whether the term *beer* is completely accurate. It is possible that the favorite Babylonian beverage was more like *kvass*, a brew that is only about 0.5% ethanol (about one-tenth the alcohol content of modern beer) and has long been popular in Eastern Europe and Russia.[53] Our modern notions about certain beverages do not accurately describe what ancient people drank. When a modern reader thinks of beer, he imagines a drink that is approximately 5% alcohol. Powell corrects this errant thinking and commends the idea that ancient *šēkār* would have produced intoxication only if people consumed it in large quantities.

The term *šēkār* appears in the majority of its uses paired with the word *wine* (*yăyîn*). The Lord asserted that the people of Israel drank no *šēkār* or wine all their years spent wandering in the wilderness (Deut. 29:6). So what is true of wine is also true of *šēkār*. When Eli accused Hannah of being drunk, she asserted that she had consumed neither *šēkār* nor wine (1 Sam. 1:15). **We can safely conclude, therefore, that the two words together describe the spectrum of alcoholic beverages available to people in Old Testament times.**

At a time in history when potable water was not always readily available, beverages with minimal alcohol content provided an alternative means of hydration. We have seen from Proverbs 9:2 that ancient Israelites likely did exactly what later Jews most certainly did: they mixed their wine with water just before drinking it.

The term the KJV renders *strong drink* probably had a much lower alcoholic content than modern beer. It is a serious mistake for today's believer to assume that modern alcoholic beverages are equivalent to ancient drinks. *Proverbs 23:29–32 actually prohibits the consumption of both undiluted wine and the fortified wines of today.*

Even though ancient beverages had lower alcoholic content, the possibility of drunkenness was a real danger if a person imbibed heavily enough over a short enough time. The Old Testament contains serious warnings against intemperance. Drunkenness can suspend moral judgment, leading to sin that can affect even future generations. Consumption of alcohol today can quickly destroy a person's awareness of danger and so cloud mental reasoning that obedience to God's Word becomes impossible.

The vocabulary of alcoholic beverages in the New Testament is much less varied and developed than in the Old Testament. **The main word for wine in the New Testament is *oinos*, corresponding to the Old Testament word *yăyîn*.** There is also one occurrence of the Greek word *gleukos*, wine that has not completely fermented (comparable to *tîrôš* in Hebrew).³

³ Jaeggli, R. (2014). [Christians and alcohol: a scriptural case for abstinence](#). Greenville, SC: JourneyForth.

OINOS: THE KEY TERM IN NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

The Greek word *oinos* (oi=noj) occurs thirty-four times in the New Testament. Its potential for producing intoxication is apparent in Paul's command, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The verb *methuskō* ("to be drunk") is always passive in form in the New Testament but connotes a condition that one has brought on himself.[1] Considering the usual practice of diluting wine with water before consuming it, a person would have had to consume either a large volume of diluted wine in a short period of time or undiluted *oinos* in order to become drunk.[2] In addition to prohibiting drunkenness, Paul states the positive command, "Be filled with the Spirit."

The key to being filled with the Spirit appears in a verse that is entirely parallel to the wider context of Ephesians 5:18. In Colossians 3:16, Paul commands believers, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." [3] The two verses considered together indicate that our capacity for being filled with the Spirit is limited by how much of His Word we can internalize. Ephesians 5:18 clearly forbids drunkenness, but the second half of the verse, in combination with Colossians 3:16, commends taking in as much of the Scripture as we can hold.

***Oinos* as a Cause of Drunkenness**

The New Testament authors (1) mandate temperance in the consumption of wine and (2) allow the use of diluted wine as an alternative source of hydration.[4] Paul told Timothy, "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" (1 Tim. 5:23, NASB). Ralph Earle is right on target when he comments, "It is generally agreed that the wine of Jesus' day was usually weak and, especially among the Jews, often diluted with water. Moreover, safe drinking water was not always readily available in those eastern countries."

It was particularly important for leaders in the church to set a good example in avoiding drunkenness. Paul instructed Timothy that deacons must "be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine" (1 Tim. 3:8). The verb translated *given* is a present participle from the Greek verb *prosechō*. The general meaning of this verb is "turn one's mind to" something. It is used here to describe the action of paying too much attention to [diluted] wine.[6] The term is reminiscent of Solomon's injunction against gazing at wine when it is red and sparkles in the cup (Prov. 23:31). The deacon must not have an inordinate affection for something the devil could use to enslave him. In the case of the overseer, Paul states the qualification for the office using slightly different terminology. First Timothy 3:3 says that the overseer must not be "given to wine." This phrase translates the Greek adjective *paroinos*, literally "alongside wine." The word describes a person who does not put his cup down until he has had too much to drink. It was possible to keep drinking even diluted wine until one reached the point of excess.[7]

In applying 1 Timothy 3:8 to our day, it is appropriate to require complete abstinence from alcohol for anyone in the office of deacon. The comparatively high alcohol content of modern wine makes abstinence the only proper course of action for those in church leadership.

***Oinos* as a Picture of Positive Spiritual Realities**

The New Testament contains not only warnings against drunkenness but also positive uses of wine as a symbol for certain spiritual realities. At times Jesus used wine and the daily experience of drinking it to illustrate a particular truth. Today it seems strange to us that our Savior would use wine as a picture of anything good. We live in a day when many people drink alcohol for the express purpose of becoming inebriated. The untold misery that alcoholic beverages cause in our day is simply staggering. We must remember, however, that in biblical times people drank diluted wine because they lacked the variety of beverages we enjoy today. This diluted wine in Bible days was associated with water as a means for sustaining life. Neither the beverage consumed nor the reason for drinking it has much equivalence with modern wine or drinking practices, so we must not have modern alcoholic beverages in mind when we read about the way Christ used wine to picture positive spiritual realities.

The consensus of most writers in the history of the interpretation of John 2 is that Christ made a weakly alcoholic wine at Cana. In a sermon preached on September 5, 1880, C. H. Spurgeon, for example, notes that English wines of his day were fortified with ethanol from the distillation process, making them outrageously intoxicating. He asserts that the wine Christ made was far different, requiring the consumption of large amounts before it could cause intoxication:

It was wine, and I am quite sure it was very good wine, for he [Christ] would produce nothing but the best. Was it wine such as men understand by that word now? It was wine; but there are very few people in this country who ever see, much less drink, any of that beverage. That which goes under the name of wine is not true wine, but a fiery, brandied concoction of which I feel sure that Jesus would not have tasted a drop. The fire-waters and blazing spirits of modern wine manufacturers are very different articles from the juice of the grape, mildly exhilarating, which was the usual wine of more sober centuries. As to the wine such as is commonly used in the East, a person must drink inordinately before he would become intoxicated with it.[25] So, the wine of the biblical period was harmless compared with modern fortified wines. Ancient wine “was the common drink of the people, and did not tend to produce intoxication. *Our* wines are a *mixture* of the juice of the grape and of brandy.”

Homer Kent Jr. mentions the custom of diluting wine with water as an important consideration in interpreting the miracle Jesus performed at the wedding in Cana:

Some are troubled by our Lord’s providing wine. Efforts to treat this wine as unfermented seem contrived and usually unconvincing. It must be remembered that wine was the common beverage at meals in that culture. Drinking water was often impure. Furthermore, wine partaken of as a beverage was often diluted, especially in Roman times. The social evils of drinking in modern America should not be read back into the culture of Biblical times. There was nothing inherently wrong with the everyday wine Christ made, just as there is nothing intrinsically wrong with anything Christ created.

***Oinos* as a Picture of Sin and God’s Judgment**

Wine as a metaphor in the New Testament does not have an unchanging significance; it can picture God’s judgment as well as aspects of His salvation. Wine in the book of Revelation stands for sin and the judgment God brings to bear on mankind. In Revelation 14:8, an angel announces, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the *oinos* of the wrath of her fornication.” This announcement is a combination of two Old Testament prophecies. Isaiah declared, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” (Isa. 21:9), a repetition that emphasizes the certainty and completeness of the city’s destruction. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, “Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine [*yăyîn*]; therefore the nations are mad” (Jeremiah 51:7). All the nations that have participated in worshiping the beast “shall drink of the *oinos* of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation” (Rev. 14:10). Unlike the diluted everyday wine that people normally consumed, sinners will consume God’s wrath undiluted.

***Gleukos*: A SINGLE USE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The other Greek term the New Testament uses for wine is the noun *gleukos* (*gleu/koj*), but it appears only in Acts 2:13. The setting involves the events of the day of Pentecost. Jews had come from all over the world to worship in Jerusalem, and they spoke many different languages. The disciples, who were together in one place, were suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in the different languages of the people who had come to Jerusalem. These foreigners were completely mystified that uneducated Galileans had the ability to communicate in so many languages. But not everyone was amazed. Some observers took this opportunity to impugn the disciples by claiming, “These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:13). *New wine* (KJV) and *sweet wine* (NASB) are translations of the Greek word *gleukos*. There are two possible meanings for this word: (1) wine that had undergone the initial phase of fermentation but still had a fairly high sugar content or (2) regular *oinos* that had been sweetened with honey.[29] It was obviously intoxicating if consumed in large enough quantities since the mocking crowd sought to explain the disciples’ miraculous speech by asserting that they were simply drunk. Peter dispelled their mistaken idea by noting that it was only nine in the morning, far too early in the day for anyone to be drunk (2:15).

The New Testament words *oinos* and *gleukos* refer to fermented grape juice with at least a small percentage of alcoholic content. At a time when people lacked the variety of harmless beverages we enjoy today, drinking wine was an option for safe hydration. This option came with clear warnings against overconsumption. Violation of the principle of temperance disqualified a person from holding a position of leadership in the church. If the New Testament warns against the dangers of diluted wine, then that warning is far more compelling against the undiluted wine of today.⁴

⁴ Jaeggli, R. (2014). [*Christians and alcohol: a scriptural case for abstinence*](#). Greenville, SC: JourneyForth.

JOHN 2:1-11 JESUS @THE WEDDING FEAST

FIRST MIRACLE EARLY INDICATOR Water to Wine or Reserved to Common

"Jesus must have looked around to see what resources could be utilized, not just to please mom as well as the bridal party, host family and all the guests, but also to convey the message he had come to share.

He spotted, tucked away in a protective place, six stone water jars that were explicitly reserved for the Jewish rites of purification. These jars were, that is, sacred equipment. But Jesus tells the waiters from the reception to fill these holy vessels with plain old water from the tap- not blessed or baptized water, mind you.

We can imagine that the waiters could have been reluctant to do what Jesus had instructed. After all, to follow the orders would in some way be an act of profaning what was sacred. But they had heard Mother Mary tell them quite clearly, "Do whatever he tells you."

So the waiters did it. Following Jesus' orders, they filled each of those sacred jars "each holding 20 or 30 gallons"- to the brim with plain-ol' profane water."



New Wine & Old Bottles: New Bottles Were Selected

The first occasion, following the order of the Gospels, on which Christ speaks of wine, he says (Matthew 9:17): “Neither do men put new wine into old bottles,” etc. A similar statement is also made by Mark 2:22 and Luke 5:7. Our Lord here refers to a well-known custom in his day, in relation to the keeping of wine. Notice the facts. They did not put (oinos neos) new wine - the juice fresh from the press - into old bottles, then made of the skins of goats, and the reason is given, “Else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish.” But it was the custom to put the new wine into new bottles, and the reason is given, “That both the wine and the bottles are thus preserved.”

The explanation which the advocates of but one kind of wine give is that new bags were used in order to resist the expansive force of the carbonic acid gas generated by fermentation. This explanation necessarily admits that the **new wine had not yet fermented**; for, if it had been fermented, the old bottles would suit just as well as the new; but the new, it is pleaded, were required to resist the force of fermentation. They thus concede that the new wine had not yet fermented.

Chambers, in his *Cyclopaedia*, early edition, says: “The force of fermenting wine is very great, being able, if closely stopped up, to burst through the strongest cask.” What chance would a goat-skin have?

I have said, if the “new wine” had already fermented, the old bottles would suit just as well as the new; but, if not fermented, the old would not suit, not because they were weak, but because they would have portions of the albuminous matter or yeast adhering to the sides. This, having absorbed oxygen from the air, would become active fermenting matter, and would communicate it to the entire mass.

Liebig informs us that “fermentation depends upon the access of air to the grape-juice, the gluten of which absorbs oxygen and becomes ferment, communicating its own decomposition to the saccharine matter of the grapes.” - *Kitto*, ii. 955.

The new bottles, being clean and perfectly free from all ferment, were essential for preserving the fresh unfermented juice, not that their strength might resist the force of fermentation, but, being clean and free from fermenting matter, and closely tied and sealed, so as to exclude the air, the wine would be preserved in the same state in which it was when put into those skins.

Columella, who lived in the days of the Apostles, in his recipe for keeping the wine “always sweet,” expressly directs that the newest must, be put in a “new amphora,” or jar.

Smith, in his *Greek and Roman Antiquities*, says: “When it was desired to preserve a quantity in the sweet state, an amphora was taken and coated with pitch *within and without*; it was filled with the mustum lixivium, and corked, so as to be perfectly air-tight.”

The facts stated by Christ are in perfect keeping with the practice prevailing in his day to prevent the pure juice of the grape from fermenting. The *new amphora* - the amphora coated with pitch *within and without* - and the *new bottles*, all have reference to the same custom.

The people of Palestine must have been familiar with this custom, or Christ would not have used it as an illustration. This passage, properly viewed in connection with the usages of the day, goes a great way toward establishing the fact that Christ and the people of Palestine recognized the existence of two kinds of wine—the fermented and the unfermented.

This passage also helps us to understand the character of the wine Christ used, which he made for the wedding at Cana, and which he selected as the symbol of his atoning blood.⁵

⁵ Patton, W. (2004). [Bible Wines](#) (pp. 66–67). Redding, CA: Pleasant Places.

Wedding-Wine at Cana

John 2:1–11: The distinguishing fact is that Christ turned the water into wine. The Greek word is *oinos*; and it is claimed that therefore the wine was alcoholic and intoxicating. But as *oinos* is a generic word, and, as such, includes all kinds of wine and all stages of the juice of the grape, and sometimes the clusters and even the vine, it is begging the whole question to assert that it was intoxicating. As the narrative is silent on this point, the character of the wine can only be determined by the attendant circumstances - by the occasion, the material used, the person making the wine, and the moral influence of the miracle.

The *occasion* was a wedding convocation. The *material* was water - the same element which the clouds pour down, which the vine draws up from the earth by its roots, and in its passage to the clusters changes into juice. The *operator* was Jesus Christ, the same who, in the beginning, fixed that law by which the vine takes up water and converts it into pure, unfermented juice.

The wine provided by the family was used up, and the mother of Jesus informed him of that fact. He directed that the six water-pots be filled with water. This being done, he commanded to draw and hand it to the master of the feast. He pronounced it wine - good wine.

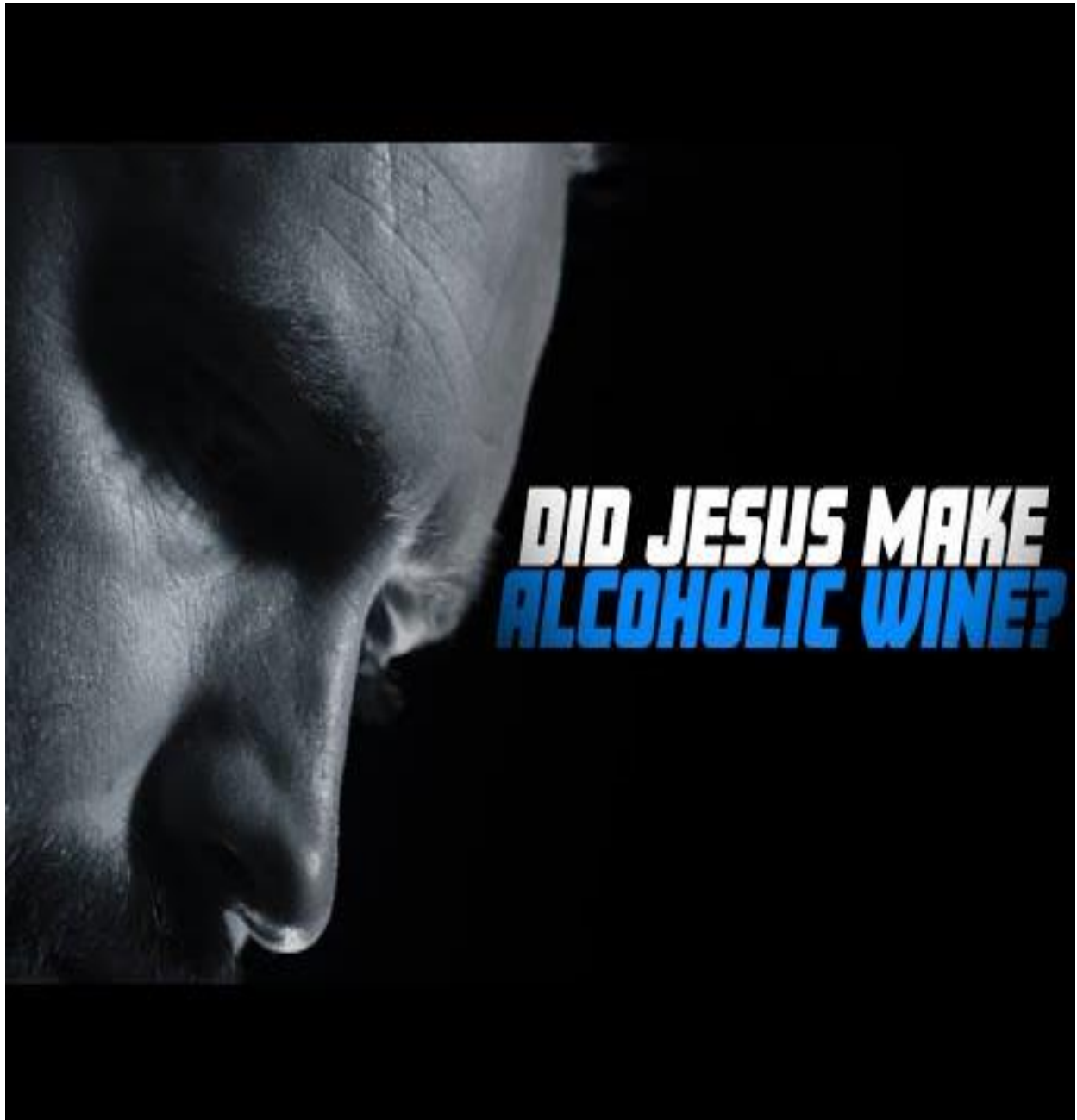
The moral influence of the miracle will be determined by the character of the wine. It is pertinent to ask, Is it not derogatory to the character of Christ and the teachings of the Bible to suppose that he exerted his miraculous power to produce, according to Alvord and to Smith, at least 60 gallons of intoxicating wine? - wine which inspiration had denounced as "a mocker," as "biting like a serpent," and "stinging like an adder," as "the poison of dragons," "the cruel venom of asps," and which the Holy Ghost had selected as the emblem of the wrath of God Almighty? Is it probable that he gave *that* to the guests after they had used the wine provided by the host, and which, it is claimed, was intoxicating?

But wherein was the miracle? We read in Matthew 15:34 that Christ fed four thousand persons, and in Mark 4:38 that he fed five thousand persons, in each case upon a few loaves and fishes, taking up seven and twelve baskets of fragments. In these cases, Christ did *instantly* what, by the laws of nature which he had ordained, it would have taken months to grow and ripen into wheat. So, in the case of the wine, Christ, by supernatural and superhuman rapidity, produced that marvelous conversion of water into the "pure blood of the grape" which, by his own established law of nature, takes place annually through a series of months, as the vine draws up the water from the earth, and transmutes it into the pure and unfermented juice found in the rich, ripe clusters on the vine.

In Psalm 104:14–15, we read: "That he may bring forth food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man." Here the juice of the grape which is produced out of the earth is called wine. This wine was made by the direct law of God - that law by which the vine draws water from the earth and transmutes it into pure juice in the clusters.

We have the highest authority that alcohol is not found in any living thing, and is not a process of life. Sir Humphry Davy says of alcohol: "It has never been found ready formed in plants."⁶

⁶ Patton, W. (2004). [Bible Wines](#) (pp. 74–80). Redding, CA: Pleasant Places.



Good Wine.

From this terrible but very imperfect setting forth of the testimonies of the Bible in regard to the wine whose character is bad, I turn, to another class of texts which speaks with approbation of a wine whose character is good and which is commended as a blessing.

1. *This wine is to be presented at the altar as an offering to God.*

Numbers 18:12: "All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the first-fruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee." In this passage, all the best of the wine (tirosh) is associated with the best of the oil and of the wheat, denoting the most valuable **natural productions** - the direct gift of God.

That these terms denote **the fruit of the soil in their natural state**, seems probable from the next verse: "And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine." This was a first fruit-offering. It is associated with oil, and flour, and the first-fruits; it is an "offering of wine for a sweet savor - an offering made by fire, for a sweet savor unto the Lord." Nehemiah 10:37: "Bring the first-fruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of (tirosh) wine, and of oil," etc. Again, verse 39: "Bring the offering of the corn, of the (tirosh) new wine, and the oil," etc. From these passages, it is held by some that the solid produce of the vineyard was here presented. Chapter 13:5: "The tithes of the corn, and (tirosh) new wine, and the oil," etc.; and (Nehemiah 13:12): "The tithe of the corn, and the (tirosh) new wine, and the oil," etc. **It is hardly to be credited, when in the law (Leviticus 2:11) all leaven was forbidden as an offering, that God should require a fermented liquor which, of all others, is the most direct cause of wretchedness and woe in this life, and of eternal ruin in the future, as a religious offering.** Leaven was forbidden with all sacrifices, whether they were meat or peace offerings, Exodus 23:18; 34:25; Leviticus 6:17; 7:12; 10:12.

As all the other articles offered in worship were in their nature pure and harmless - were essential to the comfort and well-being of man, it is passing strange that the wine should be the one exception.

2. *This wine is classed among the blessings, the comforts, the necessities of life.* When the patriarch Isaac blessed his son Jacob (Genesis 27:28), he said: "Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn, and (tirosh) wine." The blessing was on the actual growth of the field - that which "the dew and the fatness of the earth produced;" these were the direct gifts of God.

Of this blessing, Isaac afterwards said to Esau (Genesis 27:37): "With corn and (tirosh) wine I have sustained him;" that is, I have pledged the divine blessing to secure to him and his posterity in plenty the things necessary for their best comfort and happiness. Therefore, we read, Deuteronomy 7:13: "And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee; he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land; thy corn, and thy (tirosh) wine, and thine oil; the increase of thy cattle and the flocks of thy sheep in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee." The grouping is very significant: the blessing was to rest upon "the fruit of the womb, upon the fruit of the land, which is specified; thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil; also, the increase of thy cattle and flocks of sheep." It is the direct and immediate product of the land. To secure this, God (Deuteronomy 11:14) promised: "I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy (tirosh) wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass into thy fields, that thou mayest eat and be full." Proverbs 3:10: **"So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with (tirosh) new wine."**

Albert Barnes, on Isaiah 24:7, says: **"New wine (tirosh) denotes properly must, or the wine that was newly expressed from the grape and that was not fermented, usually translated new wine or sweet wine."**

Isaiah 65:8: “As **the new wine is found in the cluster**, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it.” Albert Barnes says’. “The Hebrew word (tirosh) here used means properly must, or new wine.” On the words “for a blessing is in it,” he says: “That which is regarded as a blessing, that is, wine.” He cites Judges 9:13 in proof: “Wine which cheereth God and man (tirosh).”

Joel 3:18: “The mountains shall drop down new wine (tirosh), and the hills shall flow with milk,” *i.e.*, an abundance of blessings. These blessed things are **the pure, and harmless, and direct products of the land**, necessary for the comfort and happiness of man. Is intoxicating wine, which is the emblem of God’s wrath and of eternal ruin among the things blessed?

Obviously, God can only be cheered or pleased with the fruit of the vine as the product of his own power and the gift of his goodness, and man is cheered with it when he sees the ripening clusters, and when he partakes thereof.

3. *This wine is the emblem of spiritual blessings.* Isaiah 55:1: “He, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine (yayin) and milk without money & without price.” Can it be God makes the intoxicating wine the emblem of those spiritual blessings which ensure peace and prosperity in this life, and prepares the recipient for blessedness hereafter? There is harmony between milk and unfermented wine as harmless and nutritious, and they properly stand as the symbols of spiritual mercies. With this view agree the other scriptures cited: Psalm 104:15: “Wine (yayin) that maketh glad the heart of man;” Judges 9:13: “Wine (tirosh) which cheereth God and man;” Song 7:9: “Best wine for my beloved;” Proverbs 9:2, 5: “Wisdom hath mingled her wine (yayin). Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine (yayin) I have mingled;” Song 5:1: “I have drunk my wine (yayin) with milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”

4. *This wine is the emblem of the blood of the atonement, by which is the forgiveness of sins and eternal blessedness.* In the institution of the Lord's Supper, as recorded by Matthew 26:26–28 and Mark 14:22–24, Christ “took the cup, and gave thanks,” saying, “This is my blood of the New Testament,” “shed for the remission of sins.” The bread and the wine are here united, as in other scriptures, as blessings, but in this case as emblems of the most wonderful manifestation of the divine love to man. Paul, 1st Corinthians 10:16: “The cup of blessings which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? “At the close, Christ said, “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.” Thus, the cup is associated with the eternal blessedness of the heavenly world. See further comments on Matthew 26:26.

In all the passages where good wine is named, there is no lisp of warning, no intimations of danger, no hint of disapprobation, but always of decided approval.

How bold and strongly marked is the contrast:

The *one* the cause of intoxication, of violence, and of woes.

The *other* the occasion of comfort and of peace.

The *one* the cause of irreligion and of self-destruction.

The *other* the devout offering of piety on the altar of God.

The *one* the symbol of the divine wrath.

The *other* the symbol of spiritual blessings.

The *one* the emblem of eternal damnation.

The *other* the emblem of eternal salvation.

“The distinction in *quality* between the good and the bad wine is as clear as that between good and bad men, or good and bad wives, or good and bad spirits; for one is the constant subject of warning, designated poison literally, analogically, and figuratively, while the other is commended as refreshing and innocent, which no alcoholic wine is.” - *Lees’ Appendix*, p. 232.

Can it be that these blessings and curses refer to the same beverage, and that an intoxicating liquor? Does the trumpet give a certain or an uncertain sound? Says Rev. Dr. Nott: “Can the same thing, in the same state, be good and bad; a symbol of wrath, and a symbol of mercy; a thing to be sought after, and a thing to be avoided? Certainly not. And is the Bible inconsistent within itself? No, certainly.” - *Nott*, London Ed. p. 48.

Professor M. Stuart, p. 49, says: “My final conclusion is this, viz., that whenever the Scriptures speak of wine as a comfort, a blessing, or a libation to God, and rank it with such articles as corn and oil, they mean, they can mean *only such wine as contained no alcohol that could have a mischievous tendency; that wherever they denounce it, and connect it with drunkenness and reveling, they can mean only alcoholic or intoxicating wine.*”⁷

⁷ Patton, W. (2004). [Bible Wines](#) (pp. 55–64). Redding, CA: Pleasant Places.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible

Every man - It is customary, or it is generally done.

When men have well drunk - This word does not of necessity mean that they were intoxicated, though it is usually employed in that sense. It may mean when they have drunk sufficient, or to satiety; or have drunk so much as to produce hilarity, and to destroy the keenness of their taste, so that they could not readily distinguish the good from that which was worse. But this cannot be adduced in favor of drunkenness, even if it means to be intoxicated; for,

1. It is not said of those who were present "at that feast," but of what generally occurred. For anything that appears, at that feast all were perfectly temperate and sober.
2. It is not the saying of Jesus that is here recorded, but of the governor of the feast, who is declaring what usually occurred as a fact.
3. There is not any expression of opinion in regard to its "propriety," or in approval of it, even by that governor.
4. It does not appear that our Savior even heard the observation.
5. Still less is there any evidence that he approved such a state of things, or that he designed that it should take place here. Further, the word translated "well drunk" cannot be shown to mean intoxication; but it may mean when they had drunk as much as they judged proper or as they desired. then the other was presented. It is clear that neither our Savior, nor the sacred writer, nor the speaker here expresses any approval of intemperance, nor is there the least evidence that anything of the kind occurred here. It is not proof that we approve of intemperance when we mention, as this man did, what occurs usually among men at feasts.

Is worse - Is of an inferior quality.

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

The wine referred to here was doubtless such as was commonly drunk in Palestine. That was the pure juice of the grape. It was not brandied wine, nor drugged wine, nor wine compounded of various substances, such as we drink in this land. The common wine drunk in Palestine was that which was the simple juice of the grape. we use the word "wine" now to denote the kind of liquid which passes under that name in this country - always containing a considerable portion of alcohol not only the alcohol produced by fermentation, but alcohol "added" to keep it or make it stronger. But we have no right to take that sense of the word, and go with it to the interpretation of the Scriptures. We should endeavor to place ourselves in the exact circumstances of those times, ascertain precisely what idea the word would convey to those who used it then, and apply that sense to the word in the interpretation of the Bible; and there is not the slightest evidence that the word so used would have conveyed any idea but that of the pure grape juice.

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

This beginning of miracles - This his first public miracle. This is declared by the sacred writer to be a "miracle" - that is, an exertion of divine power, producing a change of the substance of water into wine, which no human power could do.

Manifested forth - Showed; exhibited.

His glory - His power, and proper character as the Messiah; showed that he had divine power, and that God had certainly commissioned him. This is shown to be a real miracle by the following considerations:

1. Real water was placed in the vessels. This the servants believed, and there was no possibility of deception.
2. The water was placed where it was not customary to keep wine. It could not be pretended that it was merely a mixture of water and wine.
3. It was judged to be wine without knowing whence it came. There was no agreement between Jesus and the governor of the feast to impose on the guests.
4. It was a change which nothing but divine power could effect. He that can change water into a substance like the juice of the grape must be clothed with divine power.

Believed on him - This does not mean that they did not believe on him beforehand, but that their faith was confirmed or strengthened. They saw a miracle, and it satisfied them that he was the Messiah. "Before this" they "believed" on the testimony of John, and from conversation with Jesus [John 1:35-51](#); now they saw that he was invested with almighty power, and their faith was established.

From this narrative we may learn:

1. That marriage is honorable, and that Jesus, if sought, will not refuse his presence and blessing on such an occasion.
2. On such an occasion the presence and approbation of Christ should be sought. No compact formed on earth is more important; none enters so deeply into our comfort in this world; perhaps none will so much affect our destiny in the world to come. It should be entered into, then, in the fear of God.
3. On all such occasions, our conduct should be such that the presence of Jesus would be no interruption or any disturbance. He is holy. He is always present in every place & on all festival occasions our deportment should be such as that we should welcome the presence of the Lord.

4. Jesus delighted to do good. In the very beginning of his ministry he worked a miracle to show his benevolence. This was the appropriate commencement of a life in which he was to go about doing good. He seized every opportunity of doing it; and at a marriage feast, as well as among the sick and poor, he showed the character which he always sustained - that of a benefactor of mankind.

5. An argument cannot be drawn from this instance in favor of intemperate drinking. There is no evidence that any who were present on that occasion drank too freely.

6. Nor can an argument be drawn from this case in favor even of drinking wine such as we have. The common wine of Judea was the pure juice of the grape, without mixture of alcohol, and was harmless. It was the common drink of the people, and didn't tend to produce intoxication. "Our" wines are a "mixture" of the juice of the grape and of brandy, and infusions of various substances to give it color and taste, and the appearance of wine. Those wines are little less injurious than brandy & the habit of drinking them should be classed with the drinking of all other liquid fires.

The following table will show the danger of drinking the "wines" that are in common use:

Wine	Alcohol Content
Brandy has fifty-three parts and 39 hundredths in a hundred of alcohol, or	53·39 percent
Rum	53·68 percent
Whisky Scotch..	54·32 percent
Holland Gin.	51·60 percent
Port Wine, highest kind	5·83 percent
Port Wine, lowest kind	1·40 percent
Madeira, highest kind	29·42 percent
Madeira, lowest kind	9·34 percent
Lisbon	8·94 percent
Malaga	7·26 percent
Red Champagne	1·30 percent
White	2·80 percent
Currant Wine	20·25 percent

It follows that a man who drinks two glasses of most of the wines used has taken as much alcohol as if he had taken one glass of brandy or whisky & why should he as well drink the alcohol in the brandy as in the wine?

What difference can it make in morals?

What difference in its effects on his system?

John 2:1ff – The Wine that Jesus Made

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

When the Lord was in attendance at the wedding feast of Cana, the host's supply of "wine" failed (John 2:1ff). Christ commanded that six stone waterpots, each with a twenty-to-thirty-gallon capacity, be filled. The servants filled them "to the brim."

Underline this last phrase, for it shows that there was no possibility of anyone adding some foreign substance so as to feign the appearance of wine. Moreover, the "taste" test clearly identified the newly manufactured liquid as wine indeed (9-10).

Many folks, upon reading this context, automatically assume that the wine mentioned here was an intoxicating spirit. Doubtless, this assumption is made due to the fact that when we hear the term "wine" in our modern culture, that is what we ordinarily think of. **In the Bible, however, "wine" is a generic term and it can denote either fresh juice or a fermented beverage; the context must determine which.**

Underline the word "wine" in John 2:9 and in your margin write: *See Isaiah 16:10; Joel 2:24.* Isaiah speaks of the "wine in the presses" and Joel writes about the presses that overflow with wine. Obviously, the wine is what we would call grape juice. **In biblical language, therefore, wine need not be an intoxicant.**

The claim is sometimes made, though, that in Bible times there was no method for preserving grape juice in an unfermented state. Therefore, "wine" must have had some alcoholic content. That is not necessarily true. The *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* cites ancient skills known for the preservation of grape juice all year long. In your margin you may wish to write this note: See ZPBD, p. 895.

This question is quite appropriate: "Would Jesus Christ have provided some 120 to 180 gallons of alcoholic beverage for a wedding feast?" No one with any degree of respect for New Testament morality would suggest such (see 1st Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:21).

1ST TIMOTHY 5:23 – MEDICINAL & HYGIENIC

1st Timothy 5:23 - Wine for the Stomach?

In the context of a society in which the abuse of alcohol is such a serious problem, this piece of personal advice from Paul to Timothy raises for many the question of the legitimacy of the use of alcohol. Since alcohol is so easily abused, and since its abuse leads to the enslavement of people to addiction, should not Christians be encouraged to abstain from any use of it? This latter, prohibitionist view is expressed in a somewhat humorous anecdote from a discussion of this issue among a group of deacons. To the factual affirmation by one deacon that Jesus had turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana (Jn 2), another deacon replied, “Yes, he did, but he shouldn’t have!” When the basic premise is the conviction that any use of alcohol is wrong, then Jesus’ action and Paul’s admonition become problematic.

Paul’s word must be understood in the context of other advice in the correspondence with Timothy and Titus. It also must be seen as a sound piece of advice in the cultural context and as an expression of a central biblical principle for Christian living.

Earlier in 1 Timothy, Paul had listed among the characteristics of those who would be leaders in the church that they be “not given to drunkenness” (1 Timothy 3:3) or “not indulging in much wine” (1 Timothy 3:8). In advice to Titus, elders need to be examples who are “not given to drunkenness” (Titus 1:7), and the elder women in the church are to be taught not to be “addicted to much wine” (literally, “slaves to wine,” Titus 2:3). In all these injunctions, the emphasis is clearly on moderation; namely, a **responsible use** of alcohol that does not lead to its **control of one’s life**. This is in keeping with a central principle of Christian life stated by Paul in Ephesians 5:18: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

In light of these prohibitions against the excessive use of alcohol, Paul’s advice to Timothy, “Stop drinking only water and use a *little* wine” (emphasis mine), implies that Timothy may have concluded, from the warnings against excessive use, that total abstinence was called for. It may even be that the false teachers, in their prohibition against certain foods (1 Timothy 4:3), had argued for total abstinence.

In any case, Timothy’s total rejection of alcohol seems to have had harmful consequences for his health. So, Paul, in keeping with his warnings against abusive use, counsels for the use of “a little wine.” In this, **he is simply reflecting the common use of wine, especially for medicinal purposes, in the ancient world. Its beneficial effects “against dyspeptic complaints, as a tonic, and as counteracting the effects of impure water, were widely recognized in antiquity” and are confirmed by modern medicine. Paul’s view on this matter may have been backed by the advice of his fellow worker Luke, the beloved physician.**⁸

⁸ Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). [*Hard sayings of the Bible*](#) (pp. 673–674). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

Wine With Water.

There is abundance of evidence that the ancients mixed their wines with water; not because they were strong, with alcohol, as to require dilution, but because, being rich syrups, they needed water to prepare them for drinking. The quantity of water was regulated by richness of the wine and the time of year.

“Those ancient authors who treat upon domestic manners abound with allusions to this usage. Hot water, tepid water, or coldwater was used for dilution of wine according to the season.” “Hesiod prescribed during the summer months, three parts of water to one of wine.” Yet, “Nicochares considers two parts of wine to five of water as the proper proportion.” “According to Homer, Pramnian/Meronian wines require twenty parts of water to one of wine. Hippocrates considered twenty parts of water to one of Thracian wine to be the proper beverage.”

“Theophrastus says the wine at Thasos is wonderfully delicious.” Athenaeus states that the Taeniotic has such a degree of richness or fatness that when mixed with water it seemed gradually to be diluted, much in the same way as Attic honey well mixed. - *Bible Commentary*, p. 17.

Captain Treat says, “The unfermented wine is esteemed the most in the south of Italy(also Spain & Syria), and wine is drunk mixed with water.” - *Lees' Works*. “In Italy the habit (mixing wine with water) was so universal that there was an establishment at Rome for the public use. It was called THERMOPOLIUM, and, from the accounts left of it, was upon a large scale. The remains of several have been discovered among the Pompeii ruins. Cold, warm & tepid water was procurable at these establishments, as well as wine, and the inhabitants resorted there for the purpose of drinking, and also sent their servants for hot water.” - *Nott*, London Ed. p. 83.

“The annexed engraving of the THERMOPOLIUM is copied from the scarce work of Andreas Baccius (*De Nat. Vinorum Hist.*, Rome, 1597, lib. iv. p. 178). The plan was obtained by himself, assisted by two antiquaries, from the ruins of the Diocletian Baths (Rome). Nothing can more clearly exhibit the contrast between the ancient wines and those of modern Europe than the widely different mode of treating them. The hot water was often necessary, says Sir Edward Barry, to dissolve their more inspissated and old wines.” - *Kitto*, ii. p. 956.

“Nor was it that peculiar to pagans to mingle water with wine for beverage and at feasts; nor to profane writers to record the fact. It is written of Wisdom, she mingled her wine - Proverbs 9:2 - so written by an inspired penman.” - *Nott*, London Ed. p. 84.

This mixed wine must be different from that named in Psalm 75:8. “full of mixture,” which we’ve seen is symbol of the divine vengeance, the cup prepared for his enemies. But in Proverbs 9:2, it is a blessing to which friends are invited. If in this passage the mix is of aromatic spices, in addition to the water necessary to dilute the syrup, it was not to fire the blood with alcohol, but gratify the taste with delicate flavors.

“The Rev. R. M. Pattison, of Philadelphia, showed, from authorities of the highest repute as exegists or personal observation, some of them adverse to the main question, by their unanimous concurrence, that the sweet wine, or unfermented juice of the grape, was of old a popular beverage in Palestine.” - *New York Evangelist*.

The Passover was celebrated with this new wine mixed with water. According to Lightfoot, each person - man, woman, and child - drank four cups. Christ and his disciples have celebrated the Passover, he took of the bread and the wine that remained, and instituted the Lord’s Supper. The wine was, as we believe, the rich syrup diluted with water. This kind of wine met all the requirement of the law concerning leaven - the true rendering of Matsah, according to Dr. F. R. Lees, being *unfermented things*.

The conclusion to which these sources of proof bring us is thus:

1. That unfermented beverages existed, and were a common drink, among the ancients.

2. That to preserve their sweet juices, in their hot climate, they resorted to boiling and other methods which destroyed the power and activity of the gluten, or effectually separated it from the juice of the grape.

3. That these were called wines, were used, and highly esteemed.

Prof. M. Stuart says, "Facts show that the ancients not only preserved their wine unfermented, but regarded it as of a higher flavor and finer quality than fermented wine." - Letter to Dr. Nott.

That they also had drinks that would intoxicate cannot be denied. All that we have aimed to show is that intoxicating wines were *not the only wines in use*.

With the teachings of chemical science, and with the knowledge of the tastes and usages of the ancients, we are the better prepared to examine and understand the Bible, which was written when these tastes and usages were in operation. Common honesty demands that we interpret the Scriptures with the eye, the taste, and the usages of the ancients, and not with the eye, the taste, and the usages of the moderns. We should interpret each text so as to be in harmony not only with the drift and scope of the whole teachings of the Bible, but also with the well-ascertained established laws of nature. It certainly is as important to harmonize the interpretations of the Bible with the teachings of chemistry and the laws of our physical, intellectual, and moral nature, violated by alcoholic drinks, as it is to harmonize the interpretations of the same word of God with the ascertained facts of geology and astronomy.⁹

⁹ Patton, W. (2004). [Bible Wines](#) (pp. 42–45). Redding, CA: Pleasant Places.

Did Paul Sanction Social Drinking?

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

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“Would you explain 1 Timothy 5:23 about Paul’s advice to Timothy to drink wine?”

This verse has long been a source of controversy. It is the “wino’s” golden text, though abused mightily in the effort. Paul encourages his friend:

“Be no longer a drinker of water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.”

Perhaps the most convenient way to deal with this text is to segment it by its significant points.

(1) Timothy was afflicted with a stomach ailment, the nature of which is not precisely known. It was a sickness that came and went, but apparently more often “came” than otherwise. The apostle obviously suspects bad “water” as the source of the young man’s problem. Since back in the days of Hippocrates it was recognized that contaminated water could produce illnesses. Moreover, Ephesus was an ancient and decaying city. Its harbor was silting up which, in turn, created sewage problems that poisoned some of the underground water supplies. Such might well have been the cause of Timothy’s medical ailment (Williams, p. 101).

(2) The sentence is elliptical, i.e., certain words must be mentally supplied in order to complete the thought. The sense thus should be: “Be no longer a drinker of water **only**, but **also** take a little wine?” (Jn 6:27; 1 Corinthians 4:20 with 1 Thessalonians 1:5). The apostle is not instructing Timothy to abstain from water entirely; rather, **for medicinal purposes the youth was enjoined to mix with his water a “little wine.”**

(3) The use of wine was a widely recognized remedy for some illnesses among both Jews and Greeks, as reflected in the Hebrew Talmud, the writings of Hippocrates, Plutarch, and Pliny (Fee, p. 135).

“Wine was often helpful in settling stomachs & preventing dysentery (it disinfected water)” (Keener, p. 619).

(4) Something of Timothy’s character is revealed. **He had refrained even from the medicinal use of wine, a perfectly legitimate remedy, for the sake of his influence. Such was going too far, however.** His service to Christ was more valuable than the possible damage that might be done by some misguided critic. Incidentally, this negates the speculation of some that “wine” here possibly was grape juice. **The young man would hardly have needed exhortation to use a little grape juice with his water.**

(5) To suggest, as some have done, that Paul sees in Timothy a “false asceticism” due to the influence of the false teachers at Ephesus, is an example of drawing a conclusion without sufficient evidence.

(6) This passage can hardly provide any comfort for those who desire to engage in the pleasurable consumption of beverage alcohol. Imbibers rarely drink just a “little,” nor do they dilute their wine with water. They are looking for the “glow,” the “buzz.” Furthermore, ancient wines were not nearly as potent as today’s fortified wines.

(7) Finally, to contend that this passage is much too personal to warrant any importance, and therefore such constitutes an argument negating the Bible’s claim of verbal inspiration (as liberal critics charge), is absurd in the extreme. In fact, as Spence has argued, this passage provides evidence of the genuine Pauline authorship of this document. No forger of the 2nd or 3rd century would ever have dreamed of weaving something of this nature into the text (p. 207). It does, however, reveal the great love and concern of Paul for his young companion in the gospel.

Wine and the Bible



Truth In Genesis

CLOSING ARGUMENTS

SCRIPTURE WARNS ABOUT THE DANGER OF ALCOHOL

Our third crucial consideration involves the strong warnings the Bible contains about the use of alcoholic beverages. Someone might object to the use of verses that warn of alcohol *abuse* as a reason for staying away from alcohol entirely. But we must emphasize that even the moderate use of alcohol can lead to addiction and abuse. I find Daniel Akin's perspective on this point very helpful: **"Moderation is not the cure for the liquor problem. Moderation is the cause of the liquor problem. Becoming an alcoholic does not begin with the last drink, it always begins with the first. Just leave it alone."**[22] Norman L. Geisler likewise asserts that "total abstinence is the safer policy. A person cannot abuse drinking if he does not drink." [23] In light of the very real possibility of addiction to alcohol through the pathway of even moderate consumption, here is an important observation: **if the Bible warns us about the dangers of even the diluted alcoholic beverages of the ancient period, these warnings are much stronger for us today in relation to the more intoxicating beverages available.** The impact of the following verses should cause us to stay away from any alcoholic beverage consumption. I quote them without any interpretive comments.

Proverbs 20:1

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

Proverbs 23:29–35

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not; when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

Isaiah 5:22

“Woe to them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink.”

Isaiah 28:7–8

“But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.”

1 Corinthians 6:9–10

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

- **Christians should avoid anything that is inherently prone to enslave them.**

Those who are determining their position on whether or not they will drink alcoholic beverages must take into account certain physiological and genetic issues. Most sin does not physically alter a person’s brain and is unrelated to his genetic makeup. Consider, for instance, the sin of lying. There is no known permanent alteration of brain function occurring through a pathway of biochemical mechanisms when a person says something that he knows to be untrue. There is no genetic propensity for lying. We must never excuse drunkenness as due simply to genetic propensity or biochemical alteration of brain function as if people bear no responsibility for their drinking. Alcoholism is a sin. The alcoholic made wrong choices that led to his enslavement to alcohol. He chose to drink excessively and to rebel against the warnings of Scripture. But this slavery was facilitated by alcohol’s effect on the brain in creating long-lasting, intense memories of the euphoric experience. There is also a genetic propensity to alcoholism, especially in families where alcohol abuse has already surfaced as a problem.[25] These two considerations make drinking the highly alcoholic beverages of our day a potentially addictive activity. Even secular sources admit that alcohol is the most widely abused modern drug, far surpassing the devastating effects of illicit drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamines. The United States Center for Disease Control, the most respected source on the devastating effects of alcohol, informs us that “alcohol is used by more young people in the United States than tobacco or illicit drugs.

Excessive alcohol consumption is associated with approximately 75,000 deaths per year. Alcohol is a factor in approximately 41% of all deaths from motor vehicle crashes.”[26] Enslavement to alcohol truly produces massively destructive consequences. It is a vicious, cruel taskmaster.

Today’s believer must follow Paul’s example: “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

The translators of some modern versions put quotation marks in 6:12 around the phrase, “Everything is permissible for me,” in order to imply that this was an assertion the Corinthians were making, but that Paul is arguing against. Thiselton asserts that “there can be no question that the initial clause of v. 12 represents a quotation used as a maxim by some or by many at Corinth.”[27] These Corinthian believers had developed an unbalanced view of Pauline teaching concerning the believer’s freedom from the demands of the Mosaic law. They supposed that Christian liberty gave them the right to do whatever they wanted rather than the liberty to manifest a lifestyle commensurate with their union with Christ. The context following 6:12 shows the nearly incredible extent to which the Corinthians were applying their errant view of liberty. They had become so enslaved to their appetite for sexual relations that they were willing to go outside the parameters of God’s will in order to fulfill their lust.

The next phrase in 6:12, “be brought under the power,” translates the Greek verb *exousiasthēsomai* (evxousiasqh, somai), “to be mastered.”[28] Paul was wary of anything that might enslave him. First Corinthians 6:12 follows an extensive list that describes the sinful lifestyles of those who are headed for perdition. The drunkard, included in this list of sinners, has no ground for assurance of salvation (6:10). Surely no one who claims to know Christ as Savior would willingly want to place himself in a position of potential enslavement to alcohol.

The timeless general principle of avoiding anything with the potential for enslavement rings down through the ages of church history with a clarion tone. Certainly, it is possible to abuse just about anything. I really enjoy good food, for instance. As I eat a meal, I am aware that when I reach the point of satiety, I should stop eating. I am willing to risk possible addiction to food because I have to eat in order to survive. My continued survival does not depend, however, on my consumption of alcoholic beverages. There is, therefore, no legitimate comparison in modern America between avoiding the sin of gluttony and avoiding drunkenness.

When I become thirsty all I have to do is place a glass under the kitchen faucet, turn on the tap, and slake my thirst with pure, safe water. If I tire of the monotony of drinking only water, [there are] other options. I have absolutely no reason to drink an alcoholic beverage and put myself at risk for becoming enslaved. There is a sure-fire method for never becoming an alcoholic: do not drink any alcoholic beverages even in moderation. This simple action of abstinence is in full accord with the Pauline principle of avoiding enslavement. Akin astutely observes, “True spiritual freedom is not the right to do what you want; it is the supernatural enablement of Christ to do what you ought and enjoy doing so!”[29]

We ought to take Paul’s instruction in Romans 14 to heart. It is uncertain what exact problem Paul was facing with these believers at Rome. Perhaps the person who was “weak in the faith” (Romans 14:1) was a believer with a Jewish background. Although he was not trusting in his adherence to the Mosaic law as the ground of his salvation (as the Judaizers in the book of Galatians were), he still considered dietary restrictions and holy day observances as vitally important aspects of his Christian life. It is also possible that those who were weak in faith were Gentiles who believed that a lifestyle of self-denial was incumbent on a Christian. Whatever the case, Paul commands the other Christians at Rome to treat the weak person with sanctified deference. They should be careful in their conduct “not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block” in his way (14:13, NASB) because that would be a completely unloving thing to do (14:14–15). Here Paul adds to the word *obstacle* (*proskomma*) an even stronger Greek word for something that is a trap or an enticement to sin (*skandalon*). Believers ought to be willing to forego eating or drinking anything that would produce ruin in the life of another because “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (14:17). In fact, “it is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak” (14:21). I do not know anyone who would suffer shipwreck of his faith if he saw me eating meat, but I can surely envision the deleterious effects that might result if I were to take a permissive stand on drinking alcohol—even in moderation. Someday I am going to give account of myself to God (14:12). I must, therefore, live in such a way that no one experiences spiritual disaster or physical ruin as a result of my example.¹⁰

¹⁰ Jaeggli, R. (2014). [Christians and alcohol: a scriptural case for abstinence](#). Greenville, SC: JourneyForth.

Expediency

Romans 14:14–21, “Neither eat flesh nor drink wine,” etc. Expediency necessarily admits the lawfulness and propriety of the use of alcoholic drinks, but that, by reason of the evils which come from *excessive* use, men should totally abstain. This does not include the idea of personal danger. It rather assumes it as a certainty that the abstainer can use them as never to exceed the boundaries of prudence. But because of others, not so firm of nerve, or resolute of purpose or power of self-government, we should abstain in order to strengthen, encourage & save them. In this view, they feel fortified by the noble decision of the Apostle Paul, “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” In the Epistle to the Romans, he speaks of those converted from Judaism, but who still felt bound to observe ceremonial law. Other converts, satisfied that this law was abolished, consequently made no distinction in meats. The former were offended by the practice of the latter. To meet this case, the apostle says, “It is good neither to eat flesh nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.”

To the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 8:4–13, he speaks of those who recently converted from idolatry, and who were troubled about the lawfulness of eating meats which had been offered to idols and then sold in the markets. While he argues that the meat cannot be thus polluted, still, as “there is not in every man that knowledge,” and as their weak consciences would be defiled, he admonishes those who were enlightened “to take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling-block to them that are weak.” He presents the subject in the most solemn and impressive manner, saying, “When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ” The practical and benevolent conclusion to which he comes is, “if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”

Thus, in two applications, the doctrine of expediency is fully stated. It is necessarily based upon the lawfulness of the usage, and the rightfulness of our liberty in the premises. 1 Corinthians 10:23, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”

With Paul, expediency wasn't the balancing of evils, nor the selfish defense of a doubtful usage; but the law of benevolence, so controlling & circumscribing his liberty as to prevent any injury to the conscience of another... "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." - 1 Corinthians 10:33.

The abstinence to which Paul alludes was lest the weak conscience of a brother should be wounded. This is not the precise use of the principle in its application to temperance; for those who drink do not plead conscience, and those who abstain do not abstain because for them to drink would wound the consciences of the drinkers. So far from this, our drinking quiets and encourages their consciences. No one can study this argument of the apostle, and his further statement in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, and fail to feel its benevolent & constraining power. It evolves a principle of action which we are bound to recognize and apply to the necessities of our fellow-men. It demands that we should deny ourselves for the purpose of doing good to others who are exposed to evil. It is the giving up of the use of alcoholic drinks to recover others from minimum usage, and to save more from taking the first step on the road to drunkenness.

While I fully admit the doctrine of expediency, as laid down by the apostle, I am not quite sure that the use which is generally made of it for the cause of temperance may not be turned against us. I am not certain that, as generally expounded, it does not reflect most fearfully, though undesignedly, upon the benevolence of the patriarchs, prophets, the apostles, and even of the blessed Lord our Savior.

I do not for a moment imagine, much less believe, that the advocates of only alcoholic wines intend to damage the benevolence of the divine Savior. Yet, when they strenuously claim that he not only personally drank intoxicating wine, but made a large quantity of it for the wedding guests, they throw shadows over his benevolence; for he, better than all others, knew the seductive and destructive influence of alcoholic drinks, as he could not only look back through all the ages past, but also down through all the ages to come, and tell the myriads upon myriads who by them would be made drunkards and fail of heaven; as he, better than all others, **understood the law of benevolence, and knew how to practice self-denial for the good of others.** But we hear not one word from him about expediency.

What possible claim, then, can this doctrine have upon his followers, if he, with all his wonderfully accurate knowledge, not only did not practice it, but did the reverse, and gave the full force of his personal example for the beverage use of inebriating wines - nay, more, actually employed his divine power in making, for a festive occasion, a large quantity of intoxicating wine? Such is the fearful position in which these alcoholic advocates logically, though unwittingly, place their blessed Lord and ours. But there is no necessity for this dilemma, or for the encouragement it gives to the enemies of temperance. The view we have taken, and, as we trust, proved, satisfactorily explains why neither the patriarchs nor the prophets, why neither Christ nor his apostles, had any occasion to adopt the doctrine of expediency in its application to alcoholic drinks.

We all are aware that there are many thousands of intelligent Christians who have never yet felt themselves bound by the argument for expediency. They find in it no authority, and it does not bind their conscience. **They seize upon the inevitable fact that expediency implies the lawfulness and propriety of the beverage use of alcoholic drinks, and ask, "Why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?"**

The apostle properly warns the Ephesian converts against the Bacchus feasts, where the votaries were made mad by wine & debauching songs; but, in contrast, exhorts them to be filled with the Spirit; and, instead of the noisy, silly talk and songs of the bacchanalians, to manifest their joy and happiness in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, thus making melody in their hearts unto the Lord.

Olshausen, referring to Luke 1:15, thus comments: "Man feels the want of a 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 drinks. 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."

The soul filled with the Holy Spirit will not crave an intoxicating beverage to cheer and enliven.

Philippians 4:5, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." **There is not the slightest evidence, either from the original word or the context, that this text has the remotest reference to moderate drinking.** The Greek word *epieikees* occurs five times: thrice it is rendered gentle, once patient, and once moderation. In each case, reference is made to the state of the mind, and it might be properly translated, "Let your *moderation of mind* be known to all men." Robinson renders it *meet*, suitable, proper. The reason given for this moderation is, "The Lord is at hand." How strange to say to the drinkers, Drink moderately, for the Lord is at hand! But to the Christians at Philippi, suffering persecutions, the exhortation had point: Let your moderation - that is, your patience, gentleness, mildness, propriety - be known to all men, as a testimony in favor of Christianity. **"The Lord is at hand" is a motive of encouragement.**

Colossians 2:16, "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat or drink," etc.

This has no reference to a distinction of drinks as fermented or unfermented, dangerous or safe, but to those regarded as clean or unclean. That is, proper according to the Jewish law, for the context names holy days, new moon, and Sabbath-days. The point is here - since this law has fulfilled its mission and ceased, therefore use your Christian liberty, and no man must be allowed to condemn you for not now conforming to requirements of that abrogated law.

I Thessalonians 5:7, "They that be drunken are drunken in the night." This simply states a fact in that age, but implies no approbation of intoxicating drinks. The ancient heathen regarded being drunk in the daytime as indecent. In contrast with the stupidity, sensuality, and the darkness in which the heathen lived, the exhortation to the Christians who are of the day is to be sober. The Greek word is *nee-phomen*, from *nephoo*, which occurs six times, and is four times rendered sober, and twice watch. **The idea of vigilant circumspection and abstinence is impressed by all the context.** The classical lexicon defines *nepho* by - "*sobrius sum, vigilo, non bib,*" - to be sober, vigilant, not to drink. Donnegan, "To five abstemiously, to abstain from wine;" metaphorically, "to be sober, discreet, wise, circumspect, or provident, to act with prudence." Robinson's *New Testament Lexicon*, "To be sober, temperate, abstinent, especially in respect of wine." The late Dean Alford admits that the original word means "abstinence from wine." This sobriety is associated with putting on the Christian armor, and it is the call for vigilant wakefulness, having all the powers of mind and body in proper condition.

1 Timothy 3:2–3, “Not given to wine.” The Apostle Paul, in this first letter to Timothy, whom he calls his “own son in the faith,” names thirteen qualifications for a bishop or pastor. “A bishop, then, must be blameless, husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; patient, not a brawler, not covetous.” The language is imperative, “*Must be;*” thus designating that these qualifications are indispensable. He spoke with authority, being inspired of God.

It is not my purpose to examine each of these, but to call attention to three of them, as bearing particularly on the duty of abstinence. In the Authorized Version, we read, “*Vigilant, sober, not given to wine.*” That we may then more perfectly understand the meaning of these, we must look at the original Greek words used by the apostle.

Vigilant. - The Greek is neephalion, which Donnegan’s *Lexicon* renders “abstemious; that abstains, *especially from wine.*” Hence, “sober, discreet, circumspect, cautious.” Robinson’s *New Testament Lexicon* defines the word, “Sober, temperate, *especially in respect to wine.*” In N. T., trop., “sober-minded, watchful, circumspect.” In the adjective form, the word occurs only in 1 Timothy 3:2, 11, and Titus 2:2, from the verb neepho, which Donnegan defines, “To live abstemiously, to abstain from wine.” Green’s *New Testament Lexicon*, “To be sober, not intoxicated; metaphorically, to be vigilant, circumspect.”

Sober. - The Greek is sophrona. Donnegan, “That is, of sound mind and good understanding; sound in intellect, not deranged; intelligent, discreet, prudent, or wise.” Green, “Sound; of a sound mind, sane, staid, temperate, discreet, 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; 2:3. Modest, chaste. Titus 2:5.” Macknight, “Sound mind; one who governs his passions, prudent.” Bloomfield, “Sober-minded, orderly.”

Not given to wine. - The Greek is mee-paromon: mee, a negative particle, *not*; paroinon, compounded of para, a preposition governing the genitive (of, from, on the part of), the dative (at, by, near, with), the accusative (together, with, to, towards, by, near, at, next to); and oinos, wine. Literally, not at, by, near, or with wine. **This looks considerably like total abstinence. It applies equally to private habits and public conduct.** Notice the careful steps of the progress. He must be neephalion, abstinent, sober in body, that he may be sophrona, sound in mind, and that his influence may be unimpaired, meeparion, not with or near wine. We find in this passage no countenance for the moderate use of intoxicating wine, but the reverse, the obligation to abstain totally.

“Not given to wine” is certainly a very liberal translation, and shows how the usages of the day unconsciously influenced the translators. “The ancient paroinos was a man accustomed to attend drinking-parties.” Thus, the Christian minister is required not only to be personally sober, but also to withhold his presence and sanction from those assemblies where alcoholic drinks are used, endangering the sobriety of himself and others.

In this same letter, v. 23, Paul advises Timothy, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.” The fact is plain that Timothy, in strict accordance with the direction, “not given to wine,” that is, not with or near wine, was a total abstainer. The recommendation to “use a little wine” is exceptional, and strictly medicinal. As there existed in the Roman Empire, in which Timothy traveled, a variety of wines, differing from each other in character, we cannot decide, *ex cathedra*, that it was alcoholic wine that Paul recommended. Pliny, Columella, Philo & others state that many of the wines of their day produced “headaches, dropsy, madness, and *stomach complaints*.” - *Nott* Lond. Ed. p. 96. We can hardly believe that Paul recommended these. Yet these strikingly designate the effects of alcoholic wines. The same writers tell us that wines destitute of ail strength were exceedingly wholesome and useful to the body, *salubre corporis*. Pliny mentions a wine in good repute, *aduminon* - that is, without power, without strength. He particularly states the wines most adapted to the sick are “*Utilissimum vinum omnibus sacco viribus fractis*,” which the type alcoholic wine men translate, “For all the sick, wine is most useful when its forces have been broken by the strainer.” We do not object to this rendering, since the wine must be harmless when its forces, which is alcohol, are broken. The Latin word *fractis* is from *frango*, to break in pieces, to dash in pieces, which indicates the thoroughness of the work done by the “sacco,” strainer or filter. That the force which the filter breaks is fermentation, is evident from the next sentence of Pliny. (See item “Filtration,” on page 33.) The *Delphin Notes* to Horace say, “The ancients filtered their wines repeatedly before they 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, sweeter, and more pleasant to drink.” Again, Horace tells his friend Maecenas to drink a hundred glasses, without fear of intoxication.

Why not treat Paul with common politeness, not to say honesty, and, as he so emphatically required that a bishop shouldn't "**be with or near wine,**" believe that when he recommended Timothy to "use a little wine" medicinally, he had reference to such wine as Pliny says was "most useful for the sick," whose "forces have been broken by the strainer," or filter? As the recommendation was not for gratification, but for medicine, to Timothy personally, a sick man, and only a little at that, it gives no more countenance for the beverage use of wine for any one, and especially for those in health, than does the prescription of castor-oil by the physician for the beverage use of that article.

1 Timothy 3:8, Deacons - "not given to much wine."

This is held as evidence not only that they might use some wine, but also that the wine was intoxicating. The Greek word *proseko* occurs twenty-four times, and is eight times rendered beware; six times, take heed; four, gave heed; one, giving heed; two gave attendance; one, attended; one, had regard; one, given to wine. Robinson's rendering is, "to give or devote one's self to anything;" and other lexicons, "be addicted to, engage in, be occupied with," as in 1 Timothy 1:4; 3:8.

Such devotion to any kind of wine showed a voluptuousness unseemly in one holding office in the church of Christ. "To argue that, forbidding much wine, Paul approves of the use of some wine, and of any and every sort, is to adopt a mode of interpretation dangerous and wholly inconsistent with common usage." When applied to the clause, "not greedy of filthy lucre," it would sanction all avarice and trade craftiness short of that greed which is mean and reckless." But Paul, and other inspired writers, make all covetousness to be idolatry, and not to be once named, much less practiced by the saints, even moderately.

The testimony of Dr. J. W. Beaumont, Lecturer on *Materia Medica* in Sheffield Medical School, England, is, "**Alcoholic liquors are not nutritious, they are not a tonic, they are not beneficial in any sense of the word.**"

Who imagines, when the work of creation was finished, that alcohol could then be found in any living thing fresh from the hand of the Creator? God, by his direct act, does not make alcohol. **The laws of nature, if left to themselves, do not produce it. By these laws, the grapes ripen; if not eaten, they rot and are decomposed. The manufacture of alcohol is wholly man's device. The assertion that alcohol is in sugar, and in all unfermented saccharine substances which are nutritious, is contradicted by chemical science.**

The saccharine matter is nutritious, but fermentation changes the sugar into alcohol, by which process all the sugar is destroyed, and, as the alcohol contains no nitrogen, it cannot make blood or help to repair bodily waste. The testimony of eminent chemists is very decided. Humphry Davy, in his *Agricultural Chemistry*, says of alcohol, "It has never been found ready formed in plants." Count Chaptal, the great French chemist, says, "Nature never forms spirituous liquors; she rots the grape upon the branches, but it is art which converts the juice into (alcoholic) wine."

Professor Turner, in his *Chemistry*, affirms the non-natural character of alcohol, "It does *not* exist *ready formed in plants*, but is a product of the vinous fermentation - a process which must be initiated, superintended, and, at a certain state, arrested by art." - *Bib. Com.* p. 370.

Dr. Henry Monroe, of England, Lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence, says, "Alcohol is nowhere to be found in any product of nature, was never created by God, but is essentially an artificial thing prepared by man through the destructive process of fermentation."

"Lo, this have I found," saith the wise man (Ecclesiastes 7:29), "that God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." The things created for food, and which are to be received with thanksgiving, are those which are in their natural and wholesome condition, and which nourish and strengthen the body, and not those which are in the process of decomposition. Rotten fruits of all kinds are rejected as innutritious and unwholesome. So also, are decaying meats. It is a strange perversion of all science, as well as of common sense, to rank among the good creatures of God alcohol, which is found in no living plant, but which is to be found only after the death of the fruit, and is the product of decomposition.

I Timothy 5:23, "No longer water." See 1 Timothy 3:2-3. Titus 1:7-8, "Not given to wine," "temperate." Here Paul mentions the same qualifications for a pastor as those stated in 1 Timothy 3:3, "Not given to wine." He uses the same Greek word, *meeparoinon*, compounded of *mee*, a negative particle, *para*, a preposition, with or near, and *onion*, wine, meaning not near wine, which is a happy apostolic definition of total abstinence. He adds temperate, which, it is pleaded, sanctions moderate drinking.

The Greek word here used is *enkratees*. Donnegan, "Holding firm, mastering one's appetite or passions." - *New Testament Lexicon*. "Strong, stout, possessed of mastery, master of self." - Titus 1:8.

It is clear that Paul does not contradict himself in this verse: fast, by saying the bishop must be a total abstainer - mee, not; pam, near; oinon, wine – and then, in the second place, by saying he must be a moderate drinker. What he here means by temperance applies to the mind and not to the bodily habits. Or if it is contended that it does refer to the body, then it means what he says in 1 Corinthians 9:25, where he uses the same word in reference to contending for the mastery in the games. Such abstain totally from wine and all excitements, or as Horace expresses it, “He abstains from Venue and Bacchus.” See Note, 1 Corinthians 9:25, and Acts 24:25.

Titus 2:2–3. The aged men are exhorted to be sober, “temperate.” The Greek is neephalion, “sober, temperate, abstinent in respect to wine.” In New Testament metaphorically, “vigilant, circumspect” - 1 Timothy 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2. For temperate the Greek is sophronos, “sound of mind, sober-minded, sedate, staid.” Temperate, see note on Titus 1:8.

1 Peter 4:1–5, “Excess of wine, excess of riot.” In this passage three facts are significant & instructive. The first is, that in their unconverted state these converts whom Peter addresses lived in the lusts of men, wrought the will of the Gentiles, and walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries. The second fact is, that their former companions thought it strange that, being Christians, they would not “run with them to the same excess of riot.” The third fact is, their former companions spoke evil of them because of their abstinence.


It is clear that the Christians named in this passage were abstainers from their former usages, and that on this account they were spoken evil of, very much as are the total abstainers of the present day.

Oinophlugia occurs only in this text, and is a compound of oinos, wine, and phluo, to overflow - a debauch with wine. Probably intoxicating, though the wine broken by the filter was preferred by the voluptuous and dissipated.

The Greek word asotia, in Ephesians 5:18, is rendered excess and is connected with wine; means, literally, unsavableness, utter depravity, and dissoluteness. In Titus 1:6, it is connected with riot, which means overflow, outpouring of dissoluteness, thus denoting the same moral character. As the two phrases occur in the text, it teaches that excess of wine & excess of riot are related to each other as cause and effect; but excess of wine no more justifies moderate drinking than excess of riot justifies moderate rioting. The design of Peter was to encourage those to whom he wrote to continue in their abstinence.

I do not say that there are no difficulties connected with the wine question. All I ask is that the students of the Bible will treat these with the same candor and desire to harmonize them that they do the difficulties connected with astronomy, geology, and conflicting historical statements. If the language of the Bible can be honestly so interpreted as to harmonize with the undisputed facts in relation to the effects of alcoholic drinks, along with the testimony of the most intelligent physicians and eminent chemists, that alcohol contains no nourishment, will neither make blood nor repair the waste of the body, but it is an intruder and a poison.¹¹

¹¹ Patton, W. (2004). [*Bible Wines*](#) (pp. 82–103). Redding, CA: Pleasant Places.

A blue decorative graphic consisting of a solid blue rectangle on the left that tapers into a light blue gradient shape extending to the right.

Expediency might be the prevailing factor in any such case posed. If both grape juice and wine are available, grape juice, one would think, would be the wiser choice. It would avoid the appearance of evil, perhaps be less offensive (an occasion of stumbling), and not be an avenue to temptation in some (who might have a weakness for strong drink).

It might be mentioned also that in some regions where grape juice is not readily accessible, wine could be used, but boiled first, so as to destroy any alcoholic content. Alcohol evaporates at 173° Fahrenheit (78.3° Celsius).

In the final analysis, this issue of interpretation is not one that should be pressed as a matter of doctrine and fellowship.

EXCERPT HIGHLIGHTS

“Nor can an argument be drawn from this case in favor even of drinking wine such as we have. The common wine of Judea was the pure juice of the grape, without mixture of alcohol, and was harmless. It was the common drink of the people, and didn’t tend to produce intoxication. “Our” wines are a “mixture” of the juice of the grape and of brandy, and infusions of various substances to give it color and taste, and the appearance of wine. Those wines are little less injurious than brandy & the habit of drinking them should be classed with the drinking of all other liquid fires.”

“I do not know anyone who would suffer shipwreck of his faith if he saw me eating meat, but I can surely envision the deleterious effects that might result if I were to take a permissive stand on drinking alcohol—even in moderation. Someday I am going to give account of myself to God (14:12). I must, therefore, live in such a way that no one experiences spiritual disaster or physical ruin as a result of my example.”

“Romans 14:14–21, ‘Neither eat flesh nor drink wine,’ etc. Expediency necessarily admits the lawfulness and propriety of the use of alcoholic drinks, but that, by reason of the evils which come from *excessive* use, men should totally abstain. This does not include the idea of personal danger. It rather assumes it as a certainty the abstainer can use them as never to exceed the boundaries of prudence. But because of others, not so firm of nerve, or resolute of purpose or power of self-government, we should abstain in order to strengthen, encourage & save them. In this view, they feel fortified by the noble decision of the Apostle Paul, ‘Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.’ In the Roman Epistle, he speaks of those converted from Judaism, but who still felt bound to observe ceremonial law. Other converts, satisfied this law was abolished, consequently made no distinction in meats. The former were offended by the practice of the latter. To meet this case, the apostle says, ‘It is good neither to eat flesh nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or he is offended, or is made weak.’”

“With Paul, expediency wasn’t the balancing of evils, nor the selfish defense of a doubtful usage; but the law of benevolence, so controlling & circumscribing his liberty as to prevent any injury to the conscience of another... ‘Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.’ - 1 Corinthians 10:33.”

“In this same letter, v. 23, Paul advises Timothy, ‘Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.’ The fact is plain that Timothy, in strict accordance with the direction, ‘not given to wine,’ that is, not with or near wine, was a total abstainer. The recommendation to ‘use a little wine’ is exceptional, and strictly medicinal.”

“The Greek word *asotia*, in Ephesians 5:18, is rendered excess and is connected with wine; means, literally, unsavableness, utter depravity, and dissoluteness. In Titus 1:6, it is connected with riot, which means overflow, outpouring of dissoluteness, thus denoting the same moral character. As the two phrases occur in the text, it teaches that excess of wine & excess of riot are related to each other as cause and effect; but excess of wine no more justifies moderate drinking than excess of riot justifies moderate rioting. The design of Peter was to encourage those to whom he wrote to continue in their abstinence.”

STONEGATE'S TITUS EDWARDS:

Many people try to justify social or moderate drinking as being acceptable unto God. Some churches even make and sell alcoholic beverages. One argument they make is that wine is referred to in the Bible and many times it is either being drunken or offered unto God, acceptable in his sight.

We must understand that the word wine, as used in the Bible, is not the same as is used today. There are 13 different words translated wine. In the Hebrew Old Testament, the most often used word is “yayin.” In the New Testament Greek, the word is “oinos.” Both of these simply refer to the juice of the grape. It could either refer to a fermented, intoxicating beverage, or it could just as easily refer to a nonfermented, nonintoxicating drink, or grape juice.

In Genesis 9:21, it is said about Noah, “And he drank of the wine and was drunken...” Obviously, this is an intoxicating wine. But notice, in Isaiah 16:10, we read, “...tread out no wine in their presses...” Here the wine is the juice being pressed out of grapes, therefore referring to a nonintoxicating grape juice. (See also Isaiah 65:8, Matthew 9:17).

You can catalog the different passages where wine is used into two groups: bad wine and good wine. The bad wine is the cause of intoxication (Genesis 9:21); causes violence and woe (Proverbs 4:17); causes self-security and irreligion (Isaiah 61:12); is poisonous and destructive (Proverbs 23:31); condemns those who partake thereof (1st Corinthians 6:10); is an emblem of punishment (Revelation 16:19).

The good wine is to be presented at the alter unto God (Numbers 18:12); is classed among the fruitful blessings (Genesis 27:28); is an emblem of spiritual blessings (Isaiah 53:1). This is just grape juice. Alcoholic beverages are condemned! Don't drink them! – *Port Arthur News 1984*

PERSONAL REMARKS

We can sum up our study with the following statements:

- 1. Although the Fruit of the Vine on the Last Supper was more than likely prepared special for the annual occasion just like the lamb – squeezed from grapes on the cluster kept fresh in a cold spring – it is highly **unlikely** that the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper was done similar throughout the Gentile world - especially in the many areas without the regional grape harvest of such abundance as in Palestine.*
- 2. Moreover, the Passover observance would preclude any leaven products of fermentation. Similarly, fermentation is a process of decomposition which presents an additional set of problems. If the Last Supper is setting the stage for a weekly memorial where wine is an element representing the shed blood of the Savior it is **highly doubtful** he would have passed a cup of fermented wine as symbolic of his blood – shed from his body that wasn't to experience decomposition. See – Psalm 16:10.*
- 3. The "wine" of the weekly Lord's Supper was most likely a water dilution made from a thicker boiled down sweet "new wine" of minimal natural fermentation. This non-intoxicating diluted wine of varied ratio to water was the drink of choice throughout the Roman world during the life of Christ.*

- 4. The "Good Wine" created by Christ for the Wedding Feast was appropriate for the occasion – non-intoxicating conforming to the social mores of the region and the special occasion. The transformation from new rather than old dedicated jars suggest non-fermentation and the amazement of the guests as to its taste to the standard of recently squeezed from the grape cluster quality opens to the very strong probability of fresh grape juice rather than the norm of sweet wine dilution.**
- 5. The Nature Of the Miracle also suggest fresh from the cluster quality grape juice created for the wedding guests. The Transformation from water to wine bypassed the ground soil – it reproduced in an instant the natural cycle – not a man-made process. The type of wine referred to in scripture as blessing is that specified for sacrifice as first fruits from the earth – freshly squeezed from the grape cluster – not a boiled down thicker concentrate.**
- 6. Our investigation of the apostolic advice of 1st Timothy 5:23 referenced a special situation and a special person – reliance on a non-artesian water resource by a man with digestive issues. To comment on this set of circumstances necessitates examination of both the principles of expediency and of benevolence. The Apostle asserts benevolence the higher.**
- 7. Furthermore, to claim similar circumstance to Timothy would in today's world be most difficult to prove for two reasons –**

- the alcohol content of modern wine is reinforced in a much higher percentage as to make even dilution impractical and the medicinal and/or hygienic exemption has been overcome by contemporary medical science and sanitary services. However, should a Christian find themselves third world isolated as would a missionary the issue of influence and "the appearance of evil" become a part of the discussion.

ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM REGARDING INFLUENCE

In the lifetime of the average Christian there may be rare occasion when there is not ready access to conventional medicines or they cannot be afforded and home remedies seem to be the obvious solution. I would suggest under these "Timothy type situations" that necessary ingredients be obtained in the same careful manner as would wine for cooking - labelled for that purpose – without entering the wrong specialty establishment in order to avoid the mere "appearance of evil" and having to explain to those that may misunderstand both one's motives and circumstances. Christians must be "of good report" and take precaution to guard their personal reputation and Godly Influence!

IN CONCLUSION, BEST PRACTICE FOR FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS IS NOT TO EITHER PURCHASE OR CONSUME ANY INTOXICATING BEVERAGES! BASICALLY, IF YOU DON'T DRINK YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ANY ABOUT DRUNKENNESS!!

