

The Christian & Alcohol

By Aaron Battey & Trever Calvert

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Introduction

Whether or not a Christian can drink alcohol without sinning is the central focus of this brief publication. The denominational world has championed the case for Christians drinking alcohol socially, as long as it doesn't lead to drunkenness. This is the accepted position by most Bible commentators, and there are many in the Lord's church who say "Amen." There are several things that have contributed to this mixing of oil and water or the Christian and alcohol: the evolution of vocabulary, poor Bible hermeneutics, itching ears, flattering lips, and an underrepresentation of the biblical truth on the subject. Within the Churches of Christ, there have been some good books on the subject published over the years, but they are few and far between. Jim McGuiggan, a preacher of the Churches of Christ that use multiple cups in communion, wrote *The Bible, The Saint & the Liquor Industry* in 1977. W. D. Jeffcoat, another preacher of the Churches of Christ that use multiple cups, published *The Bible and Social Drinking* in 1987, a book you will see cited frequently in this book. Here are a list of other books written on this subject by Church of Christ authors: *Beverage Alcohol* by Louis Rushmore (1998); *Wine - The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence* by Robert P. Teachout (1983); *Wine* by Jarod M. Jacobs (2019); *Rum and Ruin* by D. R. Dungan (1879). Besides these books, only two of which were written in the last 30 years, there are little to no written publications on the subject by Church of Christ authors. There have been several written articles, online blogs posts, recorded sermons, preacher study presentations, and social media arguments on the subject over the last 30 years, but in my estimation, there has been nothing formally published during

this time span to address the subject altogether comprehensively, compellingly, and in a way that average audiences can understand. Both McGuiggan and Jeffcoat's book mentioned above are great books, but even they do not appeal to the average Christian reader. They are quite heavy and technical. Perhaps this book will be no different, but it won't be for lack of effort.

The goal of this book is to be brief yet comprehensive, credible yet easy to read, biblical yet relatable. These are not all easy goals to accomplish simultaneously. For all the reasons just stated, don't expect this book to read like a scientific journal on the effects of alcohol. Don't expect this book to read like a Bible commentary. Also, don't expect this book to address every imaginable angle on the subject of the Christian and alcohol. If that's what you are looking for, *The Bible and Social Drinking* might be the book for you; that is a great book, but general audiences will not make it far. This brief book will hopefully address the meatier, more technical points of this subject in an easily digestible manner. Hopefully the regular anecdotes and humorous illustrations will keep your attention and make the truth of God's word on this subject that much more understandable and compelling.

In this writing, Trever Calvert and I set forth to prove from the Bible that God does not approve of Christians consuming alcohol for recreational purposes. The only time that God approves of a Christian consuming any alcohol is for medicinal purposes (see the chapter *Paul the Pharmacist*). Many Christians act as if the Bible is grey on this issue. Many are too afraid to say the Bible condemns mild to moderate amounts of alcoholic consumption. We do not believe such Christians are

standing behind every corner with ill motives, seeking whom they may devour. There may be some false teachers in our midst trying to sell this position, but as a rule, I firmly believe that most Christians do not understand a few key issues, two important issues being 1) the biblical usage of the word “wine” and 2) the scientific and biblical definition of drunkenness. These two points are often mishandled worse than a USPS package out for delivery. Besides these issues, there are famous Bible passages on the subject that have been botched so badly for so long (i.e., John 2), that honest hearted Christians have unwittingly followed the blind man into the ditch and continue to take others with them. The Bible is clear on this subject! Leave your pre-conceived ideas and human wisdom at the door. In this book we are going to let the Bible speak, and if it leads us to unpopular conclusions, so be it.

Chapter 1

Wine is Wine, Unless It's...Wine? Understanding Wine and Alcohol in the Bible

By Trever Calvert

Introduction:

There are various viewpoints in the religious world when it comes to the topic of alcohol. Some will affirm the Bible does not explicitly say drinking is a sin, while others will go so far as to say that Jesus turned water into wine; therefore, drinking alcohol must be acceptable. When confronted with the topic of drinking alcohol, the Christian may find himself ill-equipped to counter these and other similar arguments. Disciples eagerly desire to defend the gospel, but when it comes to this subject, they may realize they lack a firm understanding of what the Bible reveals about alcohol.

I'll admit, I've been asked a number of times why I don't consume alcohol, and I've often conceded to using the *safe* argument. In other words, if it's a controversial action that is poorly understood, then I will just refrain from doing it, and

then I can be confident that I am on *safe* spiritual ground. However, I wanted to study this topic to see if it's possible to give a biblical defense against consuming alcoholic beverages. The goal of this chapter, and of this entire book, is to shed light on what God's word says about wine, alcohol, and how the Christian should respond to this important issue.

Defining Wine in the Bible:

Many people may find it unnecessary to define the biblical term "wine." After all, we all know what wine is, right? An alcoholic beverage! However, this is only partially true. What if I told you that when the Bible uses the word "wine," it is not always referring to wine that contains alcohol? In fact, in most instances where we see the term employed in God's word, wine is alluding to unfermented grape juice.

In his book, *The Bible and Social Drinking*, W.D. Jeffcoat very thoroughly identifies and defines the various terms associated with wine in scripture. He states, "There are twenty-four or more distinct terms in the Bible, characterized by twenty-eight renderings, which either directly or indirectly have reference to wine," (Jeffcoat 17). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore all of these terms, we will take the time to inspect three of them: *yayin*, *oinos*, and *sobe*.

1. Yayin

Yayin (Hebrew) is a general term for wine that can mean new or old wine, and either fermented or unfermented grape juice. It can also refer directly to grapes, or to products created from grapes such as syrups and jams. Here is an example:

“As for me, I will indeed dwell at Mizpah and serve the Chaldeans who come to us. But you, gather wine (*yayin*) and summer fruit and oil, put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken” (Jeremiah 40:10).

In Jeremiah 40:10, the practice of gathering *grapes* is referred to as gathering *wine (yayin)*. Consider one more example of *yayin* used without reference to fermented wine.

“He (the Nazarite) shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine (*yayin*), from seed to skin” (Numbers 6:3-4).

Here *yayin* is translated “grapevine” and is listed right along with other unfermented grape products (i.e., grape juice, fresh grapes, and raisins).

2. Oinos

Oinos is the Greek equivalent of *yayin*, and it is also an ambiguous term, indicating either fermented wine or freshly squeezed fruit of the vine. Here is an example:

“But new wine (*oinos*) must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved,” (Luke 5:38).

Whenever the word “new” is associated with “wine,” it typically refers to unfermented, freshly squeezed grape juice (Isaiah 65:8). This verse most likely describes the practice of placing freshly squeezed grape juice in a new, air-tight skin to prevent the fermentation process. Again, *oinos* is a non-specific term that does not necessarily denote fermented wine.

3. Sobe

Sobe (Hebrew) is another word that is translated as “wine” that is found only three times in scripture (Isaiah 1:22; Hosea 4:18; Nahum 1:10). It holds a certain uniqueness—it is the only word in the Bible that must indicate an intoxicating drink (Ibid. 180-181).

As for the other 21 words that are translated “wine” in scripture, four have no connection whatsoever to grape juice and eight specifically refer to unfermented juice. Most of the remaining terms are, along with *yayin* and *oinos*, some of the most frequently used words for “wine” in the Bible. Also, they are, like *yayin* and *oinos*, nonspecific terms that can each refer to either an alcoholic beverage or an unfermented juice.

What’s with all the “wine?”

It seems astounding that twenty-four different words can all be translated as the same word: “wine.” What’s the reason for this? Although numerous explanations may exist, the most plausible may be found in how the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible was translated in 1611.

To elaborate on this last point, let’s look at a modern-day example. People in the southern United States will often use

the term “Coke;” however, they are not always referring to Coca-Cola. They might also be speaking of Pepsi, Dr. Pepper, Mountain Dew, etc. As a southerner myself, I can attest that we will pretty much call any carbonated beverage “Coke.” It is possible that a similar classification occurred in the 17th century. The individuals tasked with translating for the KJV lumped grape juice together with all products associated with it (e.g., fermented wine, syrups, jellies, raisin cakes, etc.). It appears that it was their custom in the early 1600s to refer to all these articles simply as “wine.”

In many modern Bible translations such as the New King James Version (NKJV), we can see a shift in how many of these terms are rendered. Consider the following comparison between the KJV and the NKJV of Hosea 3:1.

“...who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.”
(KJV)

“...who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.” (NKJV)

The Hebrew word being translated in this passage is *ashishah*. It is defined as, “raisins,” “cake of raisins,” or “cakes of raisins, (Ibid. 182). Of course, in the 21st century, we do not consider raisins and wine to be the same thing, but we would not realize this difference even exists without at least a brief study of the words being used.

Conclusion:

So, what's the key takeaway from all this study of ancient Hebrew and Greek terminology? Simply that, the majority of the time we see the word "wine" in the Bible, we cannot automatically assume that it is speaking of an intoxicating beverage. You may be thinking, "Well, if most of these terms can be interpreted as either alcoholic wine or nonalcoholic grape juice, how can we accurately determine their meaning?" The answer to that question is—we must analyze the term itself, as well as the context in which it is found. As good students of the Bible, we should carefully consider the facts and circumstances surrounding these terms. It will be only then that we can properly understand them and thereby give an adequate defense of God's word.

Chapter 2

How Drunk is Drunk? Defining Drunkenness

By Aaron Battey

Introduction

Imagine you walk into a bar and sit down across from the bartender. You order a large, crafted beer which the bartender promptly pours to your liking. You begin gulping down this cold beverage. About ten minutes later you don't consciously realize it, but your body temperature has slightly increased, so has your blood pressure, and you experience a mild flushing of the skin. You ask for another beer and drink away. While drinking your second beer you begin having difficulty concentrating on the conversation of the people behind you that had captured your undivided attention for the last 25 minutes. You have to put a little more effort into reading the small words on your smartphone. Even reaching for a toothpick on the bar is more difficult, not terribly difficult, but enough that you have to be deliberate about picking up the slender instrument. With the third beer you become a little lightheaded, and with the fourth and fifth beer you start slurring your speech and telling your most personal secrets to the stranger sitting next to you at

the bar. With the sixth and seventh beers you start getting easily irritable to the point of anger when someone tells you to quiet down. After the eighth beer you feel the sudden urge to vomit all over the bathroom floor. Eventually you pass out and wake up not remembering how you ended up on your apartment couch. What was just described is the process of drunkenness. See the chart on the next page for a visual aid of this process (*Source: Biggers & Monico*).

What is Drunkenness?

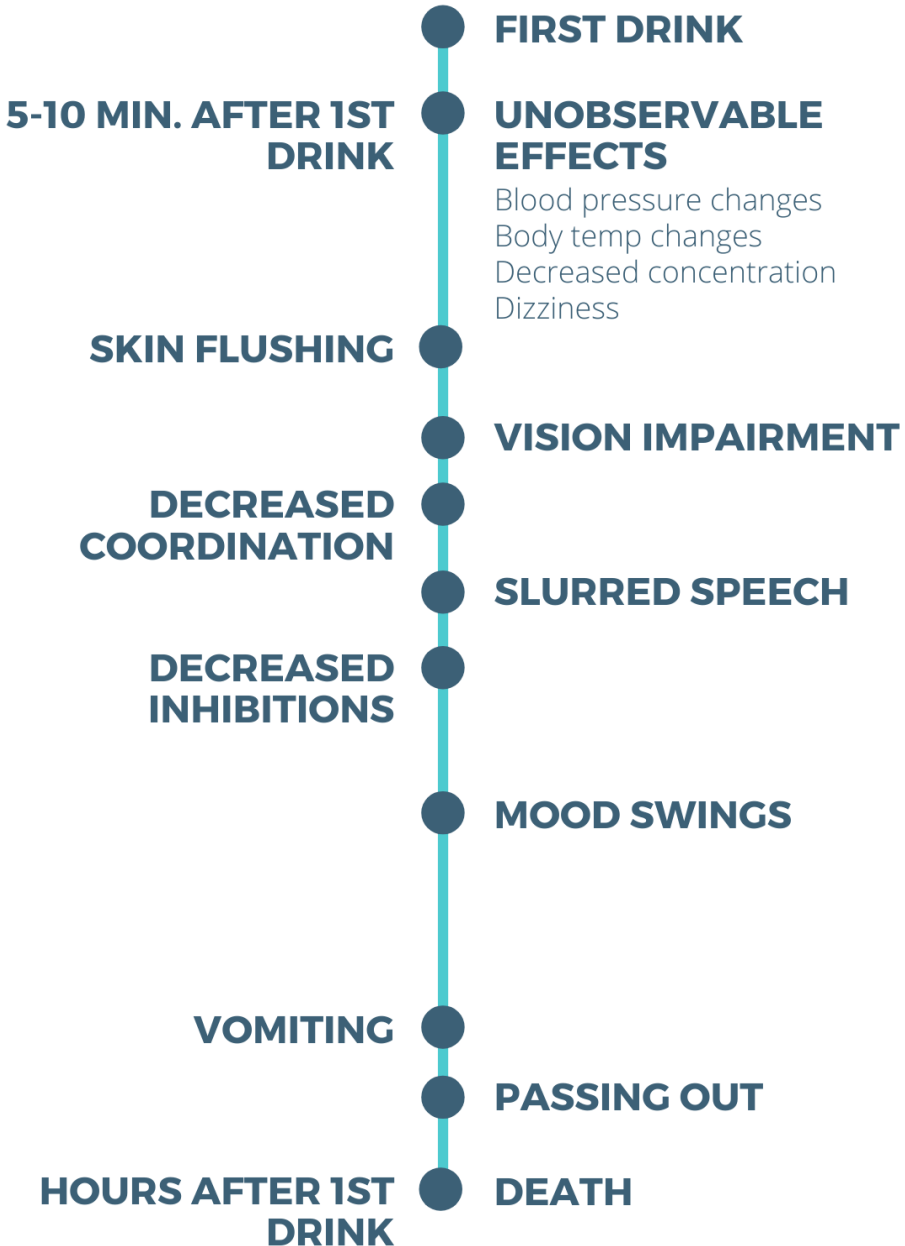
In the imaginary example above, when did you become drunk? When your body temperature increased? When your concentration began to suffer? When you started slurring words? Or was it only at the point when you started having mood swings? At what point does a person become drunk? One person will say it takes six drinks before they get drunk while another one says it only takes four. Then again, what ruler are they using to define when they are drunk? Most people imagine that drunkenness has only been reached when they start to exhibit gross cognitive impairment that leads to such observable symptoms as slurred speech and mood changes. However, there are so many effects that alcohol has on the brain and body before any observable effects manifest themselves.

The higher nerve functions of the forebrain, such as reasoning, judgment, and social restraint are impaired by very low concentrations of alcohol in the blood (qtd. in Jeffcoat 87).

To explain this effect, we must understand that ethyl alcohol is

THE PROCESS OF

DRUNKENNESS



Unobservable Effects

Body Temperature Changes

Blood Pressure Changes

Decreased Concentration

Dizziness

a drug that depresses the cognitive function of the brain. With the very first drink, alcohol is absorbed by the mucous membranes in the mouth, the stomach, and the small intestine, traveling almost immediately into the bloodstream (Biggers). “Medical authorities state that within four minutes after persons have taken an alcoholic beverage, alcohol is found in the blood,” (Jeffcoat 96). This translates to a person having to wait no longer than five to ten minutes before they start experiencing the effects of alcohol consumption (Biggers). As seen in the chart above, some of these effects are not observable, while others are. It is only because some of the very early effects of alcohol in the bloodstream are unobservable that people then conclude, “I can have four beers before I get drunk.” Rather, it takes the person four beers before he starts experiencing the observable effects of the alcohol but far less time before he endures the unobservable effects. It seems clear from all this information that drunkenness is a process that begins with the first drink of alcohol. This is very different from the modern perception that drunkenness is a point in time when gross cognitive impairment is observed.

Factors that Effect Drunkenness

There are many factors that affect how fast an individual experiences the observable effects of the process of drunkenness. Because there are so many ever changing variables, it is difficult for anyone to cite exactly how many drinks it takes for them to get observably drunk despite what one might boast.

Alcohol influence depends upon, (1) the time over which a given amount is consumed, (2) the amount of food in

the stomach, (3) the amount of food substance in the beverage, (4) the weight of the drinker, (5) the drinker's temperament, (6) the learned ability to control one's reactions, and (7) the degree of social control that is present (Jeffcoat 94).

If drunkenness were a point in time when observable effects are experienced, then a person would have to get "drunk" multiple times to get an idea of where their threshold really is. They would need to make sure they consumed the same measured dose of the same alcoholic beverage with the same alcoholic concentration, with the same amount of food in their stomach, weighing on a scale beforehand to make sure they hadn't lost any weight. Furthermore, they would need to make sure they had a stable temperament that wasn't affected by any stress factors ongoing in their life, and so on. When a Christian says they can have a couple of drinks without getting drunk, what they are really saying is, "I can have a couple of drinks before I get *observably* drunk, and I've gotten observably drunk before, so that's how I know what my threshold is...give or take six or seven variables." Such a person is speaking foolishly in order to justify their guilty pleasure. The fact that they have had to sin in order know roughly how much they can drink before they sin again is ludicrous at the least and mockery of God's holy calling at the worst.

The Bible on Drunkenness

If drunkenness or intoxication is indeed a process that starts with the first drink (and I believe wholeheartedly that it is), then many people need to rethink their drinking habits in the light of scripture. Let us not continue making illogical and

foolish justifications for the guilty pleasures of life. Not only does science agree that drunkenness is a process as opposed to a point in time, the Bible also agrees.

“For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who *get drunk* are drunk at night,” (1 Thessalonian 5:7).

About this phrase “get drunk” (*methusko*), W. E. Vine says the Greek means:

to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in *methuo*), to become intoxicated, Luke 12:45; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:7a. (qtd. in Jeffcoat 93).

The key word in the above definition is “process.” Paul is describing drunkenness as a process in 1 Thessalonians 5:7, a process that begins with the first drink and produces unobservable effects in only minutes. Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:7 with one of the other verses Vine cites where this inceptive verb *methusko* is used.

“But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and *begins to beat* the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and *be drunk* (*methusko*), the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers” (Luke 12:45-46).

First, Jesus is using the same verb describing drunkenness as a process. Second, at what point did the unfaithful servant begin

to beat his fellow servants? When observable whelps and stripes began to appear on their skin? When they started to cry from the pain? Or did the beating begin with the first crack of the rod across their backs? Likewise, at what point did the unfaithful servant become drunk? With the first, second, or third drink? Or was it only when he began to experience visible effects of intoxication? The answer is not difficult. Drunkenness is a process that starts with the first drink.

Consider the following passages, understanding that drunkenness is a process that begins with the first drink:

“Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and *drunkenness*, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy,” (Romans 13:13).

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor *drunkards*, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God,” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, *drunkenness*, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God,” (Galatians 5:19-21).

“And do not be *drunk* with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit...” (Ephesians 5:18).

If drunkenness is a process that starts with the first drink, then Paul is saying in all these verses that a Christian should not consume even one drink of alcohol. Every time the Bible forbids drunkenness, it is forbidding all recreational consumption of alcohol in all amounts and forms. This is an outlandish conclusion for some people. It is straight up unreasonable for most people. But what is really unreasonable is when a person reads all the evidence above and then concludes they can drink a glass of wine socially “as long as I don’t get *drunk*.” This person has redefined drunkenness, and they have completely missed the tenor of the Holy Spirit’s teaching on intoxicating beverages.

The Gluttony Argument

Before ending this discussion on drunkenness, there is one common objection that needs dealing with: the gluttony argument. Many people, in clinging to their bottle of beer, will shoot down the aforementioned definition of drunkenness by comparing it to the sin of gluttony. The argument goes something like this: “If drunkenness is a process that starts with the first drink of alcohol, then gluttony is a sin that starts with the first bite of food. After all, both sins are condemned together in Deuteronomy 21:20 and Proverbs 23:20-21. If this is true, then by your logic, a person can’t even eat a single bite of food without being a glutton!” It is a common but false debate tactic to draw comparisons between two items that are, in fact, not comparable, and proceed to draw conclusions based on the false comparison. That is what takes place when the

person holding the beer reaches for the gluttony argument. The comparison between drunkenness and gluttony is a false comparison for several reasons. The only thing that makes these two sinful actions comparable is the fact that alcohol and food are both consumed, nothing else. See the chart on the next page for the many contrasts between these two sins of consumption. (There is an asterisk placed by the non-addictive characteristic of food as some foods do have addictive properties.)

The person that wants to keep on drinking their beer will look right past all these valid points of contrast and continue clinging to the two passages where drunkenness and gluttony are condemned together. This is unfortunate but true. If all sins were guilty by association, then fornication, lying, and drunkenness are all wrong for the same reasons. After all, you will find several lists in scripture where these sins are grouped together (i.e., Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10), but no honest Christian is suggesting that sex outside of marriage is innocent unless you overindulge. No honest Christian is suggesting that lies are innocent enough, just not too many at once. Sins like drunkenness, gluttony, fornication, and lying are often listed together, because people that indulge in any one of these sins are likely to indulge in all of these sins. They are not grouped together, because the thing making each action sinful is the same across the board.

DRUNKENNESS

VERSUS

GLUTTONY

COMPARING ALCOHOL AND FOOD

Intoxicating

Non-intoxicating

Addictive

*Non-addictive

Alcohol effects cognitive function and sobriety with the first drink.

Food does not effect cognitive function or sobriety with the first bite or subsequent bites for that matter.

Science, scripture, and sound reasoning reveal that drunkenness is a process that starts with the first drink.

Science, scripture, and sound reasoning reveal that gluttony is a state that a person reaches as a consequence of overindulging.

Drunkenness is described as a process that starts with the first drink by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:7 when he used the inceptive verb (denoting a process) translated "get drunk."

Never described as a process that starts with the first bite of food by Paul or any other Bible writer. No inceptive verb (denoting a process) is ever used to describe the sin of gluttony.

Alcohol is never described as a good thing in the Bible except as medicine (Proverbs 31:6-7; 1 Timothy 5:23)

Food is frequently described as a good thing in the Bible (Luke 9:16), except when connected with gluttony or idolatry.

God's people are NEVER commanded to drink alcohol, except for use as medicine (Proverbs 31:6-7; 1 Timothy 5:23).

God's people ARE commanded to eat food (1 Kings 19:5-6; Matthew 4:4).

Jesus never tells His disciples to pray for alcohol.

Jesus tells His disciples to pray for food (Matthew 6:11).

Alcohol is a mocker, that bites like a serpent, and leads to misery, sorrow, contentions, and dissatisfaction (Proverbs 20:1; 23:21,29-32).

Food is a blessing from God (Matthew 6:31-33).

Conclusion

Misunderstanding drunkenness and what exactly the Bible is forbidding in its frequent lists of fleshly sins has led to so much false argument on this subject. So many Christians don't drink alcohol because their conscience pricks them, yet they cannot bring themselves to say the Bible condemns the recreational consumption of alcohol in any amount, because they have fallen prey to the false, redefinition of drunkenness that we have surveyed in this chapter. There is no wondering why Solomon said, "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly," (Proverbs 23:31). The person that looks at alcohol very long eventually consumes it, and consuming this intoxicating drug will have both physical and spiritual consequences.

Chapter 3

Jesus the Bartender An Examination of Jesus Turning Water Into Wine

By Aaron Battey

Introduction

Just writing the title for this chapter made my palms sweat. The thought of even suggesting Jesus as a bartender feels irreverent. But this description is perhaps the most appropriate caption a columnist could give to the ever so popular interpretation of what Jesus did at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. John 2:1-12 is the classic objection against the case for Christians abstaining from ethyl alcohol. The objection goes something like this, “If it’s wrong for Christians to drink alcohol, then how do you explain Jesus turning water into wine?” This is usually asked rhetorically with a smug smile and an air of self-reassurance. And it sounds so convincing. But then you read John 2 for yourself, and you try to put into words this interpretation that has Jesus turning hundreds of gallons of water into alcoholic wine to, in turn, serve the already stoned appetites of the wedding party, and you have to admit that the title—*Jesus the*

Bartender—sounds rather appropriate. Questioning this wildly popular interpretation of Jesus turning water into alcoholic wine is the pursuit of this chapter.

Four Key Items

There are four items about the wedding story of John 2 that deserve devoted attention: 1) what kind of wine resulted from Jesus' miracle, 2) how much wine did Jesus reproduce, 3) what did the master of the feast mean by "the guests have well drunk," and 4) what is John 2:1-12 really about? Any interpretation that fails to address these four important questions is incomplete.

Jesus Made Wine?

First, consider the wine Jesus miraculously made to come out of nowhere. In chapter 1 of this book, there was already sufficient proof given that the word "wine" in scripture does not always denote a fermented or alcoholic product (Ewing 79-80). There are many, many times it refers to nothing more than grape juice, syrup, or raisins. There are thirteen Hebrew words and three Greek words translated wine throughout the Old and New Testaments, with only one of these words which exclusively refer to fermented wine (see the discussion of "*sobe*" in Chapter 1). Many straightway assume that Jesus bartended liquor at His friends' wedding, because in modern English, the word "wine" has but one meaning. Always remember, the context is the primary factor in determining if the most popular words used for "wine" in the Bible (Hebrew = *yayin*; Greek = *oinos*) are intended by the Holy Spirit to mean unfermented or fermented drink. The word in John 2:3 is *oinos*, and so we

move on to look for context clues in the story that might hint toward the word's intended meaning.

How Much Wine?

Second, a study of the context brings attention to John 2:6 which says, "Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece." There are two levels of context that deserve cross examination at this point. The broader context of scripture makes it very clear that both the Old and New Testaments forbid drunkenness. Chapter 2 of this book already established that drunkenness is a process that starts with the first drink, but for this instance, assume the popular definition of drunkenness is true: drinking to the point of mind alteration. Habakkuk says, "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to your bottle, even to make him drunk..." (2:15). If Jesus, God in the flesh, turned any water into alcoholic wine, He is already pushing the limits of the law. But Jesus doesn't just push the limits. Think of the teenage kid that takes the joke way too far, to the point it's no longer funny. If the wine in John is alcoholic, then Jesus was acting like that teenage kid. The text says He commanded the servants to draw out of the water well 180 gallons of water (v. 6-7). Then He instructs, "Draw some out now!" (v. 8). Think really clearly about what is happening here. Jesus just proved, with 180 gallons of evidence, that the well contained nothing but water. Then, all the sudden, on gallon #181, there is wine in the well? That's what the good book says! It's not like He turned 180 gallons of water into wine; He turned the whole stinkin' well of water into wine! Now, these wedding party goers can drink till they pass out, that is, if the wine was indeed alcoholic. Both the

“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to your bottle, even to make him drunk...”

(Habakkuk 2:15).

remote and immediate contexts would indicate the word *oinos* in John 2:1-12 is in reference to nothing more than unfermented grape juice. By the way, turning water into Welch's is just as miraculous as turning water into Cabernet or Bordeaux.

Well Drunk?

Third, there is the troublesome statement by the master of the feast when he says, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have *well drunk*, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" (v. 10). Those who advocate the wine under discussion is alcoholic wine assume the master of the feast to be saying, "Everyone knows you serve the high dollar wine until the guests get tipsy and then bring out the cheapo liquor when they can't tell the difference." On the other hand, the master could be saying, "Traditionally you serve the high dollar Welches grape juice until the guest's appetites are satiated (filled) and then bring out the Great Value juice to save money." The conclusion hinges on the phrase "well drunk." Like the word "wine," the word "drunk" does not have only one meaning—intoxicated. "Drunk" can refer to filling one's appetite. The latter concept is reflected in the words of God through Jeremiah, "I will satiate (fill to the full) the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the Lord," (31:14). The word "drunk" used by the master of the feast is elsewhere used to denote this latter meaning of satiating the appetite as opposed to intoxicating the mind (see also Song of Solomon 5:1; Psalm 23:5; 36:8). It is so used when talking about the Lord's supper. "For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk," (1 Corinthians 11:21). If one straightway assumes the

master meant “well stoned” by “well drunk,” not only is the person making an unnecessary assumption, he/she is labeling Jesus the bartender of a raucous party. To insinuate Jesus turned an entire well into alcoholic wine is one thing, but then to say Jesus was pressing His neighbor’s already intoxicated lips to the bottle (see Habakkuk 2:15) is to strip Jesus of His sinlessness and deity.

What John 2 Is Really About?

Fourth, it is important not to lose sight of why John 2:1-12 is in the Bible. This doesn’t help distinguish whether or not Jesus was a bartender per se, but it does make for good Bible study. The same study approach that reveals the Holy Spirit’s purpose for including Jesus’ miracle in Cana will also help in determining whether or not this story should be used as an argument in favor of Christians drinking alcohol recreationally. For the sake of time and space, here are the cliff notes for why Jesus turned water into wine. There is perhaps a subtle contrast being made about the inadequacy of the Jewish system in contrast to the all-sufficiency of Christ. This contrast is perhaps alluded to in verse 6 where John throws in a caption about the Jewish purification ritual. John later announces this unique miracle to be the first powerful act of Jesus on earth; that alone is worthy of including a story in scripture one would think. But perhaps most significant of all, this story appears to announce that the long-anticipated blessings of the Messianic kingdom are about to be realized. The concepts of God, the Messiah, blessing His people with a wedding feast, abundance of wine, overrunning cups, and drawing salvation from wells frequent scripture (Psalm 23:5; 36:8; 65:11; 107:9; Isaiah 12:3; 25:6; 55:1-2; Joel 2:24-26; Matthew 8:11-12; Revelation 19:7-9). When

Jesus began preaching, Matthew describes His central message to be this—“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” (4:17). What would that kingdom be like? “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,” (Matthew 22:2). The first of Jesus miracles was a beautiful announcement of God’s kingdom promises being realized.

Conclusion

Jesus did not condone the recreational consumption of alcoholic beverages. There is an anonymous quote that captures well why so many people believe John 2 is teaching just that: “It’s easier to believe a lie one has heard a thousand times than to believe a fact one has never heard before.” If someone wants to justify something, he will use just about anything. Instead of using Jesus’ miracle of turning water into grape juice as a false argument, use it to proclaim the overabundance of goodness available in Christ. Jesus was not a bartender, but He is the master of a wedding feast Christians have yet to fully realize.

Chapter 4

Jesus the Winebibber An Examination of Jesus Being Called a Winebibber

By Aaron Battey

Introduction

The previous chapter tangled with the idea of Jesus being a bartender or someone who served alcoholic wine. In this chapter, we examine the accusation that Jesus consumed alcoholic wine for pleasure. This latter accusation is found in Luke 7:34 where Jesus quotes the slander of His enemies—"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a *winebibber*, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" This pejorative description of Jesus came from the Pharisees and Jewish lawyers (see v. 30) and was meant to portray Jesus as someone who ate excessively, drank wine excessively, and kept company with scoundrels! Some today quote or refer to this description of Jesus as though it were spoken in truth and worthy of all acceptance. The argument goes like this: "Jesus was a winebibber, so it must be okay for me to drink a little wine too!" But accepting the accusation of

Jesus as a winebibber comes with heavy baggage. Keep reading to find out what that baggage is.

Watching the News

As this chapter is being written, Donald Trump is the president of the United States. If you were to turn the TV to a liberal media network, without doubt, the media anchors would be accusing President Trump of the most egregious failures. Likewise, if you were to turn the TV to a conservative media network talking about former President Barack Obama, they would, in turn, have nothing but criticisms, slander, and incompetence to speak of him. Whether the president prays over a dying grandmother or helps serve up food at a soup kitchen, the old saying holds true, “He can’t win for losing.” The opponents can see no good. None. Such was the case with Jesus. Later in John 7, Jesus shows immense compassion to a repentant harlot who has humiliated herself before a host of onlookers, because she is fully convinced by the unquestionable miracles of Jesus, that He has the power to forgive sins (v. 36-50). Moved by the woman’s intense faith, Jesus says, “Your sins are forgiven you.” But instead of pulling out their hankies for the sake of tears, the Pharisees and lawyers go into alpha male mode and start questioning, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” They saw, good and well, Jesus heal illnesses, cast out demons, and give sight to the blind (v. 21), but for the sake of their own pigheadedness, they couldn’t see (pun intended) Jesus for anything more than a glutton, winebibber, and friend of scoundrels! It’s as if Jesus is the president, and you turned on the opposing media network.

What Jesus Really Did

Jesus had a thing or two of His own to say about these mockers. He said, “To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not weep.’ For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (v. 31-34). Jesus is shaming the Pharisees and lawyers with this response. He is basically saying, “John was a no-smiles, no fun-preacher who camped out in the desert and didn’t fraternize, and you said to him, ‘John, why so serious? Lighten up! You’re acting like a madman.’ Then I come along, live among the people, eat with the people, relate to the people, and you stick your nose up so as to say, ‘I expect more dignity and decorum from someone that claims to be a prophet, let alone the Messiah.’ There isn’t any pleasing you wishy-washy, grown-up children!” Jesus was not agreeing with their accusations whatsoever. Jesus ate food, but that didn’t mean He committed gluttony. Jesus drank fruit of the vine, but that didn’t mean He was the town drunk or that He drank *fermented* fruit of the vine whatsoever (refer to Chapter 1 in this book *Wine Is Wine, Unless It’s...Wine?*). Jesus dined with outcasts of society and those with very scarred and sinful pasts, but that didn’t mean He was accepting of their past lifestyles or accompanying them in ongoing carousing. As one anonymous author put it, “Jesus ate with sinners; He didn’t sin with them.”

**“Jesus ate with sinners; He
didn’t sin with them.”**

The Pharisees & Lawyers

A little context can shed a lot of light. Knowing who is calling Jesus a winebibber in John 7 makes all the difference in the world. Jesus' accusers were blind from envy. Beyond that, they were social elitists, meaning, they discriminated against people simply because of their social status. Review the story of the Good Samaritan. In that story, a priest and a Levite both pass by the wounded man who lay on Rt. 66 beaten half to death. Why? The story indicates it was not because they failed to see the man. The same class of people that would accuse Jesus of gluttonizing and winebibbing passed the half dead man right on by because of his social class and their pride. The people Jesus had dinner parties with, they were not necessarily active harlots, active drunks, active sinners. The fact that these dinner guests had a sinful past was enough for the goody-two-shoes Pharisees and lawyers to snub their nose at the whole scene and cast a pejorative label on Jesus. It's not so different with many people today.

Conclusion

Jesus was no winebibber any more than He was an insurrectionist against Rome (see Luke 23:1-5). It was pure hate buried deep in the seed of the human heart that led Jesus' enemies to falsely accuse Him of so many different atrocities during His earthly ministry. It is unscrupulous twisting of the scriptures that leads people today to use John 7:30 as a proof text to justify Christians consuming alcoholic beverages recreationally. And so, it seems fitting to end with a quote from the late Martin Luther King Jr.: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that."

Chapter 5

Be Drunk for Your Adversary is a Pussy Cat An Examination of Sobriety

By Aaron Battey

Introduction

In the next chapter we will examine Peter's warning to Christians in 1 Peter 4:3 about how the world is certain to ridicule God's people for refusing to participate in drunkenness, revelries, and drinking parties, among other things. Only a few paragraphs later, Peter says something else that is very pertinent to this discussion about the Christian and alcohol. While as Peter is not talking specifically about the consumption of alcohol in 1 Peter 5:8, he says, "Be *sober*, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." In this chapter, we will examine how it is impossible for a Christian to obey this command while consuming any amount of recreational alcohol.

Disaster Stew Recipe

If you would like to cook a pot of Disaster Stew, here is what you will need: one young human, one tbsp. of peer pressure, and a pinch of suffering. Disaster Stew was Peter's concern leading into 1 Peter 5:8. As a review of 1 Peter, the last section in the epistle is about Christian suffering (3:13 - 5:14). The theme of suffering technically runs the course of the entire letter, but it is especially the focus in this last section. Peter already introduced the element of peer pressure in 4:4—"In regard to these [see list of sins in v. 3], they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you." It is in 5:5 that Peter draws attention to young people—"Likewise you younger people..." The Christians within the churches that Peter writes to are in a precarious situation. They need all the help they can get. And so, Peter gives these young whipper snappers a command tied to a spiritual reality check. The command—be sober. The spiritual reality check—be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. There is a lot we can learn from these two items in general, but especially focus on what they teach us about the Christian's relationship to alcohol.

Sobriety

The word *sober* has strong ties to alcohol. While sobriety relates to more than just abstinence from ethyl alcohol, nevertheless, when people hear the word *sober*, their mind most likely shifts to a man who has just graduated from Alcoholics Anonymous or something similar. The same Greek word for *sober* as found in 1 Peter 5:8, *nepho*, is used in contrast to the consumption of beverage alcohol in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-

8. There Paul warns, “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober (*nepho*). For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober (*nepho*).” Bauer, Danker, Arndt & Gingrich (*BDAG*), a highly respected dictionary of Greek words, says about this word *nepho*, “(to) be free from every form of mental and spiritual ‘drunkenness’, from excess, passion, rashness, confusion, etc.,” (672). Thus, in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8, Paul recognizes beverage alcohol to be an intoxicant that affects the individual’s mind or his sobriety, and for this reason he tells Christians to be sober (*nepho*) as opposed to drunk with alcoholic wine.

Alcohol as a Drug

This is a good time to talk about alcohol’s intoxicating effect on the human mind. Ethyl alcohol is a drug, and specifically, it is a depressant drug. “Depressant” does not mean that alcohol makes people sad necessarily, though it can have that collateral effect, rather, it means that alcohol depresses or decreases brain function. The visible result of alcohol depressing an individual’s brain function is seen when the town drunk finally passes out on the sidewalk. His brain function gets so inhibited by the consumption of the depressant alcohol, that he falls asleep. If he drinks enough of this depressant drug, he could go into a coma and die. Other well-known depressant drugs are heroine, marijuana, and morphine. The whole process of drunkenness that starts with the first ingestion of ethyl alcohol and potentially ends with Otis Campbell in a coma has been sufficiently explained in chapter 2 of this book. I interject this brief explanation of how alcohol works in order to provide a

pointed application of all that is entailed in Peter's command "be sober" (1 Peter 5:8).

Peter's Command

When Peter says "be sober," he is giving a general command to be very aware! To use the words of *BDAG*, Peter is saying, "Be free of anything that would cause mental or spiritual drunkenness, rashness, or confusion; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour!" The application of Peter's command to "be sober" might take a variety of forms. For example, Peter may mean, don't deprive yourself of sleep for no good reason so that you become delirious and subject to decreased self-control. Don't smoke marijuana so that your senses remain fully intact. Don't consume beverage alcohol, even though you claim to know how many drinks you can handle before your edge is gone. Don't let your guard down at any time, especially when you find yourself around bad activities or influences. All of these are proper applications of what Peter is commanding in the command to "be sober."

The Devil Is a Lion

Remember, if you want Disaster Stew, you will need one young human, one tbsp. of peer pressure, and a pinch of suffering. And if you want your Disaster Stew to be extra spicy, throw in one glass of alcohol. Keep adding alcohol until the desired amount of disaster is attained. Alcohol and the command to "be sober" mix like fire and gasoline. If they aren't mutually exclusive, then perhaps we have been misreading Peter this whole time. Perhaps he really said, "Be drunk, relax; because your adversary the devil walks about like a purring pussy cat,

“Be drunk, relax; because your adversary the devil walks about like a purring pussy cat, seeking whom he may scratch.”

seeking whom he may scratch.” This is where the spiritual reality check comes in. Have you ever watched a National Geographics video of a lion pouncing on an antelope and devouring the prey? If not, go do it right now! Lions are ferocious! Lions are no pussy cats! That’s what Peter is comparing the devil with: a lion! And it is because this ferocious predator never sleeps that Peter commands complete sobriety! The devil doesn’t even take Sundays off. He is wild, and he wants *you*. He would love his prey to have one or two drinks in him, but he will be prowling regardless.

No Lunch Breaks

Think about how difficult it is to fight off temptation when you *are* sober. Even when the Christian is in a sober state, Peter has to comfort him with the words, “Know that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world,” (1 Peter 5:9). Peter is echoing Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man.” If sober Christians have to daily pray, strain, trust, and discipline themselves to overcome impatience, pride, irritation, jealousy, and every other obstacle that the devil throws at them, how much more difficult would this daily grind be for a Christian who lets his guard down to drink a glass of beer. “Oh, but it’s only for a few hours! Give me a break!” the Christian explains. “Oh, I’m sorry. If you’re only going to let your guard down for a few hours, let me tell this lion over here to go on his lunch break. Sure thing,” Peter responds. That’s how silly it sounds for a Christian to act like he can recreationally take a depressant drug such as alcohol and be none the worse for it. “The Bible doesn’t say, ‘Thou shalt not drink alcohol!’” is the common response. No, but the Bible does say “be sober.”

Conclusion

Remember the following important points. Peter gives a command and a spiritual reality check in 1 Peter 5:8. The command is to be free from anything that would cause the Christian to be less than on high alert. Yes, that definition of sobriety includes the abstinence of all consumption of beverage alcohol. The spiritual reality check is that, who knew, the devil is not a pussy cat. Be sober.

Chapter 6

Whiskey, College Parties, Martinis, and the Christian An examination of 1 Peter 4:3

By Aaron Battey

Introduction

When people think of wine and the Bible, they think of a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee; they think of a Proverb that says something about not looking at wine while it swirls in the cup; they think of Ham walking in on his daddy sleeping in the buff. There are several other passages and stories that might occupy Christian discussions about wine and strong drink. Perhaps people are so pre-occupied with what exactly Ham did when he “saw the nakedness of his father” (Genesis 9:22) that they forget about 1 Peter 4:3 in the whole debate about Christians and alcohol. When I was maybe 9 years old, my mother had made some to-die-for cinnamon biscuits for the breakfast table—one of my favorites! After three or four passes, the biscuits were almost gone. I blurted out, “Save me one!” If Peter were given a seat at the discussion table about the Christian and alcohol, he might likewise blurt out for fear of

being overlooked, “Don’t forget about me!” Peter has something worth saying, so we pass him the biscuits in this chapter.

College for Christians

If Peter were to preach 1 Peter 4:1-6 on Sunday morning, the title on the board might read “College for Christians.” To be certain, that title makes far too little of the circumstance that Peter’s actual audience found themselves in. They were enduring suffering for the name of Christ in ways that make the American college experience look like a walk in the park on a cool spring day. Nonetheless, if you have ever lived on a college campus, you will have a hard time avoiding what Peter describes. “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you,” (1 Peter 4:3-4, NKJV). The outline of 1 Peter looks something like this:

Salvation (1:1–2:12)

Submission (2:13–3:12)

Suffering (3:13–5:14)

The last section is where Peter preaches his little sermon “College for Christians,” and the part of the sermon that specifically pertains to this series about Christians and alcohol is where Peter singles out “drunkenness, revelries, and drinking parties.” In calling out behaviors that distinguish born-again Christians from non-Christians, Peter finds it appropriate that

three of the six frowned upon behaviors should center on the consumption of alcohol.

1 PETER 4:3

| GENERAL | SPECIFIC |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Lewdness | Drunkenness |
| Lust | Revelries |
| Abominable Idolatries | Drinking Parties |

Not only are drunkenness, revelries, and drinking parties frowned upon, they are so unbecoming of a Christian that Peter essentially says, “Do not take part in these activities even when it brings you suffering, and you can take my word for it, your refusal to participate in these things *will* lead to suffering.”

Drunkenness, Revelries & Drinking Parties

The most curious and helpful question pertaining to this posse of sins (drunkenness, revelries, and drinking parties) is: what is the difference between them? There is little known about any of these words, the only word occurring more than once in the New Testament Greek being “revelries.” In fact, “revelries” only occurs elsewhere in Romans 13:13 and Galatians 5:21. Two things are certain, all the phrases are describing the consumption of alcohol, and they each describe different types

of consumption. To this last point, some interpreters try and soften Peter's words against alcohol in 1 Peter 4:3. They would have these three phrases solely condemning the *excessive* use of alcohol. That sounds nice. That would allow me to have my glass of red wine with dinner and rest my conscience all at the same time if true. To compliment this interpretation, the KJV interprets "drunkenness" as "excess of wine." Drunkenness has already been devoted its very own chapter space, but to address this particular translation in 1 Peter 4:3, Gareth Reese responds, "The KJV reads 'excess of wine,' a translation sometimes improperly used to infer that some wine is OK, but that 'excess' is improper. This is squeezing more out of the word than the Greek allows," (102). I agree with Reese. Furthermore, it would be very redundant of Peter if he were simply condemning the excess of wine three times with three different words. In that case, 1 Peter 4:3 would read more like this, "...when we walked in lewdness lusts, excessive drinking, excessive drinking, excessive drinking, and abominable idolatries." This looks, sounds, and feels silly.

Cleaning Out the Liquor Cabinet

Let's take one more pass at the biscuits. Peter's list of sins in 1 Peter 4:3 has a certain generic quality to it. As the old baseball analogy goes, Peter covers all his bases when it comes to sins of the flesh that born-again Christians used to do in their past lifetimes of worldliness. The fact that Peter uses three different descriptors for the consumption of alcohol leads me to a seemingly logical conclusion: Peter is describing all consumption of alcohol as unfit for the Christian. Later on, the Holy Spirit could qualify this statement to allow for an exception, but as far as 1 Peter 4:3 goes, it appears Peter is

thoroughly cleaning out the liquor cabinet. To make Peter's list a little more practical, it's as if he is calling out the gentleman that can't get the morning started without a shot of Jim Bean (drunkenness), the college student who crashes the frat party every Friday night (revelries), and the dignified lady who enjoys her martini at the annual Christmas party (drinking parties). Peter is saying, "Whatever type of drinking you used to do before you became a Christian, don't be surprised when the world ridicules you for not taking part in it anymore." Peter is using all his words to make clear that recreational consumption of ethyl alcohol is sinful; at the same time, he is calling abstinence a practice worth suffering for.

Conclusion

In case you were wondering, nine-year-old Aaron got a cinnamon biscuit but not without a verbal reprimand for being impolite. I learned my lesson. But have Christians learned the lesson that Peter is trying to teach them? There is no, "Thou shalt not drink alcohol for recreational purposes," passage in the Bible. But there is a "We have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries" passage in the Bible. There is more than one of these type of passages in the Bible. But don't forget about Peter. Let Peter have his say at the discussion table.

Chapter 7

Paul the Pharmacist An examination of 1 Timothy 5:23

By Aaron Battey

Introduction

To this point in the book about alcohol and the Christian, the message has been a chorus of “alcohol is bad,” “don’t drink alcohol,” “Jesus didn’t drink alcohol, “alcohol...don’t drink it.” After all that you might be surprised by this chapter. Here we are going to seemingly reverse script and say, “drink alcohol!” There are occasions when consuming *some* alcohol is permitted! It is Paul’s admonition to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23 that gives the Christian instruction about when it is appropriate to use alcohol. At the same time, this instruction will further reinforce the fact that it is sinful for a Christian to drink alcohol outside of this singular exception. Now, let’s deep dive into 1 Timothy 5:23.

Why Is Timothy Sick?

1 Timothy 5:19-25 finds Paul giving Timothy some very difficult instructions about the work of an evangelist. Sometimes the

preacher's job is more sour than sweet, and in this case, Paul tells Timothy that there are times when the preacher has to help discipline leaders in the church—a sour job. Paul calls God the Father, God the Son, and the angels in heaven as witnesses to his charge to Timothy: “Observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality,” (1 Timothy 5:21). Obviously, Timothy was being given a serious responsibility. He was under a lot of stress having to deal with such things as church discipline. These facts about the verses surrounding 1 Timothy 5:23 have led some to draw the conclusion that Timothy was having sickness due to stress of the job, and because of this sickness Paul says, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.” Now, let's make a deal. Let's agree to not draw unnecessary conclusions and then talk about those conclusions as if they were fact. I say this, because that is what happens a lot in commentaries on this verse. With that said, I don't know if it was the stress of the job that made Timothy so sick to his stomach. That is a plausible explanation for his sickness, but at the end of the day, this is not hard fact, nor is it absolutely essential to know what was causing Timothy's sickness in order to understand Paul's instruction about alcohol.

Known Vs. Unknown

There are several things we do know for a fact about 1 Timothy 5:23. Here they are: 1) Timothy was drinking only water up until Paul wrote this letter, 2) Timothy had an ongoing stomach sickness, and 3) Paul instructs Timothy to use a small amount of wine as medicine for his current and future illnesses. That is what we know for a fact. But there are still lots of questions left unanswered by this list of facts. Why had Timothy only been

drinking water? What precisely was the stomach illness Timothy had? Was Paul instructing Timothy to use fermented wine or unfermented wine (i.e., grape juice)? How much is a “little” wine? These are the questions we would like to address by the end of this chapter.

Unnecessary Conclusions

First, I want to bring attention to the unnecessary conclusions people make about 1 Timothy 5:23. It’s amazing how many non-medical experts who lived 2,000 years after the time of Paul’s writing, with only one verse to go off, can draw such definite conclusions about everything from Timothy’s diagnoses to what was causing the sickness. This writer has heard some conclude that Timothy must have had a stomach ulcer. It is possible that Timothy’s illness was stress induced, and there is such a thing as stress induced stomach ulcers, but I don’t know of anyone that has seen Timothy’s endoscopy report performed by Dr. Luke and sent to Paul by first century telegraph. Another very common assumption is that Timothy had been drinking polluted water. Wayne Jackson even goes so far as to say, “The apostle *obviously* suspects bad ‘water’ as the source of the young man’s problem. Since the days of Hippocrates it was recognized that contaminated water could produce illness. Moreover, Ephesus was an ancient and decaying city,” (156). Obviously. It might as well be said, “Obviously Timothy had been eating some bad Mexican food and just couldn’t lay off the enchiladas.” Is there anything in verse 23 that speaks inevitably to Timothy’s water source being polluted? If we can ever find the endoscopy report, we might also find the water testing results from the lab that visited Timothy’s house and sent word to Paul by the same telegraph.

There is absolutely nothing in the text that would indicate Timothy *obviously* had contaminated water. Certainly, contaminated water was *an* issue in the first century world, but to assume Timothy's water was polluted or that this is the only explanation for his stomach illness is more than presumptuous.

Why Timothy Wouldn't Drink

Now, let's go on to address why Timothy had been drinking only water and what kind of wine Paul instructed him to drink for medicinal purposes. Timothy must have had access to other beverages besides water, otherwise Paul would not have inserted wine as a viable alternative. The fact that Timothy had access to wine but wasn't drinking it says something about the nature of this wine. Some agree the wine in reference was fermented wine, and Timothy was simply abstaining from fermented wine, not because it was a sin, but because he was denying himself any luxuries (i.e., asceticism). People can assume all they want that Timothy was living an ascetic lifestyle, but this can be added to the list of assumptions for which there is absolutely no proof. Some believe the wine in reference was simply grape juice. We learned from the chapter "Wine is Wine Unless It's—Wine" that the Greek word *oinos* used in 1 Timothy 5:23 is generic and can refer to either fermented or unfermented juice. However, it makes no sense that Paul should have to give Timothy permission to drink grape juice. There is and was absolutely no stigma surrounding the drinking of grape juice. Neither is there any proof that Timothy had taken some type of Nazarite vow in which he was forbidden to eat or drink grapes. After all, Timothy had to commune and drink grape juice at least each Sunday (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:17-26). No, there was something

about this wine that kept Timothy from drinking it ordinarily. Consider these scriptures that speak against God's people consuming alcohol: Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 1 Thessalonians 5:7; 1 Timothy 3:3, 8; 1 Peter 4:3; 5:8. The most logical conclusion in keeping with the greater context of scripture on the subject of alcohol is that Timothy was purposefully abstaining from fermented wine (i.e., alcohol), because he understood it to be a sin to consume fermented wine in any amount. It took an inspired apostle (Paul) to inform an inspired prophet (Timothy) that there is a singular circumstance wherein the Christian can consume a measured dose of alcohol—as medicine.

Paul's Inspired Prescription

Finally, consider Paul's prescription. I will not use precious space to argue the fact that fermented wine has medicinal benefits for the human gut as some abstainers would argue against. Pharmacy in the first century was primitive. If people in that time believed that fermented wine had gut healing benefits, that's all that matters. If someone wants to write a treatise about how it is the grape and not the product of fermentation that holds medicinal benefits, they need to address their treatise to Paul the pharmacist and find that telegraph we referenced earlier. Whether or not Paul's prescription was FDA approved should not be a focus of argument. What should garner attention is the part where Paul gives dosing instructions to Timothy. If Paul was telling Timothy to use grape juice, then why say, "Use a *little* wine...?" Why not say, "Use a *lot* of wine?" The answer—because Paul was prescribing a measured dose of alcoholic wine which would otherwise be sinful to consume in any amount. Paul tells

“It took an inspired apostle (Paul) to inform an inspired prophet (Timothy) that there is a singular circumstance wherein the Christian can consume a *measured* dose of alcohol—as medicine.”

Timothy to *use* a little wine. He doesn't say to *drink* a little wine (Bonifay). Paul is not advocating that Timothy should tip back the bottle and drown his sorrows and stresses away. No, Paul is instructing Timothy to *use* a small, measured dose of alcohol as medicine. This is the only time in scripture besides Proverbs 31:6 that people of God are encouraged or permitted to consume alcohol in any amount whatsoever; Proverbs 31:6 is the Old Testament equivalent of 1 Timothy 5:23. Neither is there a positive example of a person of God consuming fermented wine (i.e., alcohol) in all of scripture (see "Jesus the Bartender" and "Jesus the Winebibber" for responses to commonly cited positive examples). In every other context fermented wine and the associated term "drunkenness" is spoken of derogatorily and/or condemned.

Conclusion

In this study we have examined what Paul meant when he told Timothy, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities," (1 Timothy 5:23). We don't know what kind of stomach disease Timothy had. We don't know what was causing his stomach illness, stress or otherwise. We don't know if Timothy's water well was polluted or not. We don't know whether or not Timothy was a practicing ascetic. There's a lot we don't know that people like to impose on this text. But based on what we do know of the text, the conclusion was that Paul the pharmacist instructed Timothy to take a measured dose of fermented wine as medicine for his present and future illnesses when needed. This is the lone, exceptional circumstance where Christians are encouraged to consume any amount of alcohol whatsoever, and

it will prove a helpful verse when examining Paul's command to the deacon.

Chapter 8

Why the Deacon Can Drink Some Wine An Examination of 1 Timothy 3:8

By Aaron Battey

Introduction

The idea that drunkenness is a process that starts with the first sip of alcohol is hard for many people to swallow. After all, this is not how culture defines drunkenness. The fact that the word “wine” in the Bible can refer to either fermented or unfermented juice of the grape is equally difficult to comprehend, because culture uses the word “wine” exclusively in reference to fermented beverages. Perhaps difficult concepts like these in the alcohol debate have turned 1 Timothy 3:8 into a difficult verse. There Paul tells the deacons they are not to be given “to *much* wine.” Not a little hoopla has been made out of this verse by those who would have the Bible endorsing the *moderate*, social drinking of alcohol. This chapter will be disappointing for advocates of moderate, social drinking. Instead, I will put forth what is hopefully a simple explanation of the deacon’s qualification “not given to much wine.”

The Popular View

Let's start with presenting the mainstream interpretation of this verse. As mentioned already, advocates of moderate, social drinking of alcohol love this verse; they hold this verse up as their permission passage to drink whenever and wherever. Here is a good representation of this position: "Paul doesn't prohibit a deacon from drinking wine, but he instructs that they better be able to stop after that first or second drink," (1 Timothy 3:8-16). Essentially, since Paul adds the word "much" to his prohibition against wine, this is read more as an endorsement to drink as opposed to a stop sign. This is the mainstream view of "not given to *much* wine."

What Paul Wasn't Saying

Now, consider that Paul was not, in fact, condoning a glass of wine at the dinner table or a Bud Light at the ballgame. Paul was not saying, "Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, drinking no more than two, or three, or four beers at a time (depending on body weight, metabolism, genetics, toleration, etc.), not greedy for money..." Perhaps it sounds like I am being ridiculous with my *Society of Social Drinkers Bible Translation* of 1 Timothy 3:8, but all things considered, this is a fair representation of the mainstream position on this verse. I believe this position is wrong.

What Paul Was Saying

In contradiction to the mainstream position, I believe Paul is actually condemning the general consumption of alcoholic wine in 1 Timothy 3:8 just like he does in v. 3 when he says the elder is to be "not given to wine." First, I believe Paul is saying the same thing to the deacon that he is saying to the elder, with only

a slight and inconsequential change in his phraseology. Second, condemnation of sin in excess does not permit sin in moderation. Third, I believe Paul does endorse the consumption of a *little* wine, but this endorsement comes with a very specific set of guidelines that does not include recreational consumption. Consider these three points for the remainder of the chapter.

The Same Thing Twice

First, there is no consequential difference between Paul's qualification to the elder (not given to wine) and his qualification to the deacon (not given to much wine). Paul is saying the same thing in slightly different words. Consider other examples where people say the same thing in different ways. If a mother wants to communicate to her son to stay out of the street while playing, she might express her wishes in a number of ways: don't play in the street, don't play near the street, stay in the yard, don't be reckless, don't be too reckless out there. The mother could use any of these five statements to get the same point across. While the wording is different in each statement, the meaning does not change across the board. Here is another example. A teacher wants to silence two students in her classroom during a class assignment. She could choose to use any of the following phrases to silence the students: don't be so loud, don't be loud, lower your voice, be quiet. The phrasing is different with each statement, but the meaning remains the same across the board: the students need to be quiet during the assignment. No one could reasonably hear the mother tell her son, "Don't be too reckless," and conclude the mother was endorsing her son to play in the street as long as there was no traffic. You can be a little reckless, just

not too reckless? No. Likewise, no one could reasonably hear the teacher say, “Don’t be so loud,” and walk away concluding the teacher was encouraging the students to speak in her class. No. These are not permissive statements; they are prohibitive statements. In the same way “not given to wine” and “not given to much wine” are not permissive statements; they are prohibitive statements. In addition, they are not two different prohibitions; Paul is giving the same prohibition in both verses with the variation of a single word—much.

Drinking In Moderation

Second, the condemnation of sin in excess does not permit sin in moderation. This is an important point, because Paul says the deacon should be “not given to much wine.” Much has been made of the word “much” in this qualification by those who would have Paul permitting social consumption of alcohol in moderation. However, as Jim McGuiggan says:

There can be no moderate use of the unlawful! God doesn’t approve of the moderate use of the unlawful ... the unlawful is unacceptable in any amount. In regard to intoxicating drinks, the debate is whether or not it is lawful in the first place. That it is unlawful in excess we know, but then so is harmless food, for gluttony is condemned by God. In regard to that which is unlawful, the use of it at all is excess and abuse,” (126).

A person would have to prove that the consumption of alcohol for non-medicinal use was lawful outside of 1 Timothy 3:8 before he could use this verse to condone the moderate drinking

of alcohol. McGuiggan has more to say about the case for moderate drinking and 1 Timothy 3:8:

Can we not urge a man to avoid drunkenness without approving moderate drinking? I know you can. I know I've done it. "Don't be addicted to wine" is not an approval of moderate drinking. "Don't be enslaved to sin" is no approval of moderate sinning. "Don't be a drug addict" is no approval of the occasional use of heroin. "Don't be greedy of filthy lucre" doesn't imply approval of a moderate degree of desire for it (126-127).

Need more be said about the moderate use of alcohol? Paul does not condone drinking alcohol in moderation by his condemnation of drinking in excess.

Don't Forget Your Prescription

Third, I believe Paul does endorse the consumption of a *little* wine, but this endorsement comes with a very specific set of guidelines that does not include social consumption. In the chapter entitled *Paul the Pharmacist*, I explained 1 Timothy 5:23 where Paul gives an inspired permission for a Christian to "use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities." As was made clear in that discussion, 1 Timothy 5:23 permits a Christian to *use* (not *drink* or consume without measure) a *little* (measured dose) of alcohol for the express purpose of medicine. So, if someone were to read 1 Timothy 3:8 and say, "See, the deacon can drink *some* wine!" I would agree. The deacon can use *some* wine. In the very same book, the very same author gave explicit parameters for when a

deacon, or any Christian for that matter, can use some wine: as medicine.

One Last Argument

Finally, before we call it quits on this discussion, I would like to address an interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:3 & 3:8 that, though it comes from good intentions, I believe creates more confusion than clarity. I do not believe the Greek phrase translated “not given to wine” has any deeper meaning than what is obvious in the English translation. Some would insist otherwise. In 1 Timothy 3:3 the Greek phrase is *me paroinos*, and according to Bauer, Danker, Arndt & Gingrich’s Greek-English lexicon means “pertaining to one who is given to drinking too much wine, addicted to wine, drunken,” (780). Strong’s definition of this phrase adds “staying near wine.” Different English Bibles translate the phrase as follows:

- “not given to wine”—NKJV
- “not overindulging in wine”—NASB
- “not a drunkard”—ESV
- “not addicted to wine”—AMP
- “not an excessive drinker”—CSB
- “not given to drunkenness”—NIV

Any of these translations get the meaning across accurately. Some make a case that Paul is prohibiting an elder from even being in the proximity of alcohol whatsoever. This is drawn from definitions like that of Strong’s cited above—“staying near wine.” However, the spirit of this definition when placed alongside the companion definitions seems to convey the idea of someone who is drinking a bottle of wine, staying near the

bottle, and continuing to drink the contents. It is understood that the person who “stays near wine” is consuming the wine. To conclude Paul is saying an elder must not be in the proximity of wine, while this may be good advice generally, it does not seem a logical conclusion. This conclusion creates even more problems when comparing Paul’s command to the elder with that of the deacon. Paul does not use the phrase *me paroinos* with the deacon. He uses the phrase *me prosechontas* which means simply “to be addicted to wine” (Strong’s). Is Paul telling the elder that he cannot even be in the proximity of wine, but he is telling the deacon that he can be? Is Paul implicitly proposing that if a wayward brother is found to be drinking at home and needs a mature Christian to go reason with him, the deacon can go but the elder cannot? This does not make any sense to me. Paul is simply saying to the elder and the deacon alike: don’t be a drinker of wine. There is no deeper, sophisticated meaning than what the English translation conveys.

Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed four reasons why the qualification “not given to wine” does not authorize the moderate consumption of alcohol for recreational purposes. A person is hard pressed when they have to go to a passage condemning the drinking of alcohol in order to somehow justify their enjoyment of it. If I had interpreted my parents’ directives to clean my room the way some Christians interpret our heavenly Father’s directives to keep the cork in the bottle, I wouldn’t have a hind side for all the whipping. Let us not grasp at straws to get a drink. Instead, do not be given to wine.

**“The unlawful is
unacceptable in any amount.”**

Appendix A

Fighting Fermentation in the First Century

By Trever Calvert

Introduction

You're probably thinking after reading the definition of fermentation, "Thanks for the science lesson, but from a biblical perspective why does this even matter?" Well, I'm glad you asked! I'd like to invite you on a brief journey with me to spend a moment in a first century Christian's shoes (or sandals). Let's

What is fermentation?

Without getting too scientific (although this chapter does at times), fermentation is basically the breakdown of a substance by an organism that results in a new substance being produced. For example, grape juice being transformed by yeast into wine, a beverage that contains alcohol.

see...how about ole Cornelius from Acts chapter 10? You remember him, right? He and his household were converted to Christianity by the Apostle Peter. Now, imagine Cornelius and his family woke up one Sunday morning and it was their

turn to prepare the Lord's table for communion. As Cornelius opens their grape juice jar, he is appalled to discover that the liquid inside has spoiled! The juice has become wine and he knows there is absolutely no way it can be used for the Lord's supper—he needs pure grape juice, just like Jesus used when He instituted the communion service (Luke 22:17-18). For that matter, he knows there is no way that, as a Christian, he can use this fermented beverage for anything other than campfire fuel.

If you read many commentaries on the Bible, you will be left with the impression that men and women in the first century had absolutely no way to preserve grape juice from fermenting. This is an assumption. Thankfully, due to modern food preservation techniques (like pasteurization and refrigeration) Christians today don't have to worry about grape juice spoiling. And as we will find out, it is complete assumption that men like Cornelius had no methods to keep wine from fermenting. It is complete assumption that all their wines had to be watered down to reduce the alcoholic concentration content. This reasoning is used as a justification for Christians drinking moderate amounts of alcohol today "as long as you don't get drunk." But this study will prove that it is never good to assume.

Preventing Fermentation in Biblical Times:

Was it possible for Cornelius and other members of the early church to prevent fermentation and thereby have sufficient supplies of non-alcoholic fruit of the vine with which to worship, as well as for everyday consumption? Well, as a matter of fact, it was!

There are three primary types of fermentation: alcoholic, acetic, and lactic fermentation. We will only be noticing alcoholic fermentation, but all three are detailed at the end of this chapter if you are interested in learning more.

Grape juice has two main components, glucose (sugar) and albumen. Albumen, which is found in the grape skin lining and the grape seed envelope, contains fermenting agents or yeasts. Once the albumen decays, the yeasts break down grape sugar into carbon dioxide gas and ethyl alcohol. This process (aka fermentation) can occur only if certain conditions are met, such as moderate temperature and presence of moisture and air in the grape juice (Bacchiocchi 95).

There were primarily four methods the ancients used to protect grape juice from fermenting, and we will take a brief look at each.

- 1.) *Boiling*—The practice of boiling grape juice decreases the moisture content and thereby can slow, and even stop the growth of yeast germs. Additionally, much of the yeasts and molds will be destroyed due to the high temperatures. This method was used in ancient times to reduce grape juice down to a syrup which would allow them to safely preserve it for a long time. When it was ready to be drunk, the syrup would be diluted in water (Ibid. 96).
- 2.) *Filtration*—This ancient method simply involved placing grapes into a bag, called a sacco, and squeezing them so that the juice could be expressed into a vase or jar, thus

separating the juice from the fermenting agents contained in the grape skin and seed (Ibid. 103).

- 3.) *Reduced Temperature*—Fermentation can be prevented if grape juice is kept at a temperature of less than 40^o F. Although people in biblical times didn't know the science behind this principle, they realized its application. They discovered that they could preserve grape juice by placing it in a jar, called an amphora, and carefully sealing it with pitch. They would then immerse the amphora in a pool or cistern of cool water and leave it there for up to two months—thus preserving it in an unfermented state (Ibid. 123).

- 4.) *Sulphur Fumigation*—This ancient practice consisted of “filling jars nearly full with fresh unfermented grape juice, then burning sulphur dioxide in the empty portion, and while the sulphur fumes are present, the jars are tightly closed,” (Ibid.). The oxygen in the air would be absorbed by the sulfur, thereby preventing the formation of yeast (Ibid. 106).

Conclusion

If one is to conclude that modern-day Christians must abstain from alcoholic beverages, then it must be first established that Christ's followers in the first century had ways to prevent fermentation so they could partake of grape juice in its unintoxicated form.

Going back to our example of Cornelius—thankfully he wakes up and realizes that the spoiled grape juice fiasco was only a

dream! He feels reassured when he remembers it was just yesterday that he filtered the juice and then asked his wife to boil it, just for good measure! The congregation has an alcohol-free supply of grape juice with which to worship, and Cornelius and his family will have a refreshing beverage they can enjoy on any hot, sunny day in Caesarea.

Three Primary Types of Fermentation:

1. *Alcoholic fermentation*: This is the process by which the sugars and gluten in a fruit or grain are broken down by microbes (typically yeast) into acids and alcohols. One type of alcoholic fermentation is vinous fermentation, the process by which grape juice is converted into wine.
2. *Acetic acid fermentation*: This type of fermentation occurs when an alcohol is exposed to a certain class of bacteria (*Acetobacter*) which results in the conversion of alcohol into acetic acid and water. The primary product of acetic fermentation is vinegar. Wine can undergo this process and become “sour wine” such as what was offered to Jesus in Matt. 27:48. It is important to note that once a substance has completed the acetic stage of fermentation it is no longer considered to be intoxicating.
3. *Lactic acid fermentation*: This is a type of fermentation in which bacteria (and sometimes yeasts) break down the sugars and starches of a substance into lactic acid. The result is the formation of non-alcoholic products like yogurt and sauerkraut.

*For more information on fermentation and early preservation methods, see *Wine in the Bible* by Bacchiocchi, Samuele.

Appendix B

Fermented Wine in the Lord's Supper

By Aaron Battey

Introduction

The information in these appendices is a bit more technical and narrow in focus compared to the rest of the book. General audiences may not be as interested in these discussions surrounding fermentation, but there has long been debate and interest over the use of fermented wine in the Lord's supper. Fermented wine has long been the drinking element in the Catholic mass, but there are many denominations and some Churches of Christ here and there that employ and defend this practice as well. This appendix will be brief, but if you would like to read more on the subject, I recommend the *Harper-Trail Discussion* from 1933 which can be accessed free online.

If you have read everything up to this point, my stance on the use of fermented wine in the Lord's supper should not be a mystery. I firmly believe such a practice is wrong, without any scriptural authority, leaving a heavy burden of proof on those

who would defend the practice. I believe this for at least three reasons which I will briefly review here.

Three Reasons Fermented Wine in the Lord's Supper is Unscriptural

Reason #1—Everything we can read from scripture indicates that Jesus used unfermented wine (grape juice) during the Last Supper. Remember, Jesus and the disciples were partaking of the Passover in the upper room, and the Law of Moses clearly mandated that all leaven be removed from the houses of Israel during the Passover meal (see Exodus 12:8,15,17). Without leaven in the house, there could have been no fermented wine which is the product of yeast (leaven) acting upon the juice from the grape. Some will retort that it was impossible to keep wine protected from fermentation in those days, but this is simply untrue (see Appendix A). Anyone who makes this latter claim is naive at best or a deceiver at worst. Jesus certainly knew that grape juice could be preserved from fermentation (i.e., Luke 5:38), and He also knew the Passover regulations from the Law of Moses. Now, there may be much lacking in our knowledge of Jesus, but this we do know: “(He) committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth,” (1 Peter 2:22). Jesus perfectly kept the Law of Moses including all the Passover regulations. Some might try and cite some Jewish customs about the use of fermented wine in the Passover, but this would prove nothing about Jesus’ Passover. After all, Jesus rebuked many Jewish customs in Matthew 23. The burden of proof lies squarely on the person who tries to push fermented wine into Jesus’ Last Supper, when all the evidence we do have says otherwise. The person might respond, “Well the Bible doesn’t

say Jesus DIDN'T use fermented wine in the Last Supper!" The proper response to this charge is: "More importantly, the Bible doesn't say Jesus DID use fermented wine in the Last Supper!" The person holding the assumptions should not enjoy the privilege of cross examination.

Reason #2—The drink element named in all the Gospel accounts of the Lord's Supper is "the fruit of the vine." The word for "wine" is never used. As Chapter 1 of this book made clear, it wouldn't matter if the word "wine" was used in the Gospel accounts, the Greek word for "wine" is generic and does not necessitate a fermented beverage. Nonetheless, the phrase used was "fruit of the vine" in both Matthew, Mark, and Luke. If fruit of the vine is fruit of the vine, then we can be confident that the drink element used by Jesus was not fermented wine.

In the *Harper-Till Discussion*, H.C. Harper was the Church of Christ preacher affirming: "It is scriptural to use grape juice as the drink element in the communion." Dr. A.J. Trail was the one denying the proposition. Brother Harper put forth the following syllogism to Dr. Trail which helps clarify the importance of the phrase "fruit of the vine" as used by the Gospel writers.

1. The fruit (*gennema*) of the vine was the drink element used in the communion (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18).
2. Grape juice is the fruit (*gennema*) of the vine (by definition).
3. Therefore, grape juice was the drink element used in the communion.

(*The Harper-Trail Discussion* 11)

In his comments on the phrase “fruit of the vine,” Ronny Wade said the following:

Should one go into a vineyard and squeeze the clusters of grapes into a vessel, would not the juice that comes forth be the fruit of the vine or grape juice? ... Alcoholic wine is not the fruit of the vine, but rather a by product of the vine,” (266).

Does more need to be said? You don’t get fermented wine into the Last Supper without reading it into the text, but you do get unfermented fruit of the vine.

Reason #3—Drunkenness is a process that starts with the first drink of alcohol. Go back and read Chapter 2 of this book if you need refreshing on this point. If drunkenness is a process, then even a single drink of alcohol is sinful (see Chapter 7 for the lone exception). As the character from *Green Eggs and Ham* said, “I do not like fermented wine. I do not like it, Sam I am. I do not like it in a box. I do not like it with a fox. I do not like it with the Lord’s supper. I do not like it, Sam I am.” Obviously, Sam didn’t use those exact words, but it drives the point home. It doesn’t matter if you drink alcohol at a ballgame, at dinner with guests, or around the Lord’s table; drunkenness is drunkenness, and it starts with the first drink. It would be sinful to use fermented wine if for no other reason than the fact that wine causes drunkenness.

Conclusion

No doubt, this appendix will not satisfy those who insist on the practice of using fermented wine in the Lord's Supper. When someone wants to do something, they will find a way. But for honest students seeking the truth of God's word on this issue, I plead with you to carefully consider the scriptures and reasoning set forth here, not only in the appendix but the whole book. Read, pray, and answer.

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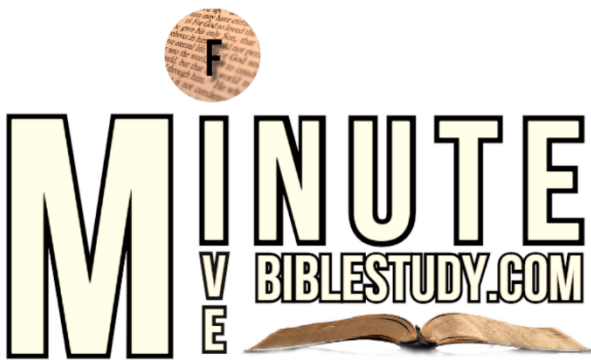
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