

THE BIBLE AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

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The use of alcoholic beverages has become America's number-one public enemy, costing over \$117 billion a year and claiming at least 100,000 American lives per year, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined.¹ The real human cost of alcohol transcends any statistical estimate of deaths, disabilities or dollar figures. A 1987 Gallup Poll indicates that one family out of four is troubled by alcohol.² This means that more than 61 million Americans are affected by some alcohol-related problems such as retarded children, divorces, violence in the home, various forms of crimes, sickness and death.

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

Abandonment of Abstinence. Since the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 most evangelical churches gradually have abandoned their stand for total abstinence, adopting instead a moderationist

position toward alcohol use. A major factor that has contributed to this trend has been a weakening of the conviction that total abstinence is a clear Biblical and moral principle to be respected like other God-given principles. Billy Graham expressed this view when he said: "I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism . . . Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That wasn't grape juice as some of them try to claim."³ No longer having a compelling Biblical and moral conviction to remain or become abstinent, more and more Christians have given in to the social pressure of drinking alcohol. The extent of the drinking problem has been brought home to me during recent lecture tours across North America and overseas. Pastors and church members frequently ask me to explain certain Bible texts used by members of their congregation to justify their moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages. Confronted with frequent pleas for help, I felt that in good conscience I could no longer ignore the problem. The results of my research have been published in *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages*. This article represents a nutshell summary of the highlights of this research.

An Apparent Contradiction. As I began reading what Scripture teaches about the use of wine, it soon became evident that the Bible speaks on this subject in an apparently contradictory way. On the one hand, the Bible unreservedly disapproves of the use of wine (Lev. 10:8-11; Judges 13:3, 4; Prov. 31:4, 5; 23:31; 20:1; Hab. 2:5; Eph. 5:18; 1 Tim. 3:2, 3). On the other hand, it wholeheartedly approves of its use as a divine blessing for people to enjoy (Gen. 27:28; 49:10-12; Ps. 104:14, 15; Isa. 55:1; Amos 9:13; John 2:10, 11).

Advocates of moderation attempt to resolve this apparent contradiction by arguing that Scripture condemns the immoderate use of alcoholic beverages and commends their moderate use. This belief is based on the assumption that the Bible speaks only about fermented wine ("one wine theory") which it considers as a divine blessing when used with moderation. Consequently, any condemnation of wine in the Bible refers not to the kind of wine (alcoholic), but to the amount consumed.

A major weakness of this view is that Scripture both condemns and commends wine itself, irrespective of the quantity used. Wine is denounced as "treacherous" (Hab. 2:5) and as "a mocker" (Prov.

20:1) that "bites like a serpent and stings like an adder" (Prov. 23:32). To avoid the shame and suffering caused by drinking fermented wine, Scripture admonishes not moderation but total abstinence: "Do not look at wine" (Prov. 23:31). The reason for this absolute prohibition is the fact that gazing at something attractive is the first step toward partaking of it. Others try to resolve the apparent contradiction between the Biblical approval and disapproval of wine by arguing that the positive references represent a divine concession to human weakness rather than a divine approval. A main problem with this interpretation is that some passages speak of "wine," not as a divine concession but as a divine blessing for the people to enjoy. For example, the Psalmist says that God gives "wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart" (Ps. 104:14, 15). Here "wine" is joined together with food and oil as a basic divine blessing that enjoys God's approval.

The Meaning of "Wine". The apparent contradiction between the Biblical disapproval and approval of wine is dictated by the assumption that the Hebrew and Greek words for wine (*yayin* and *oinos*) always mean "fermented wine". Is this assumption correct? To find an answer to this question I investigated the Biblical and historical usage of the term "wine," beginning from the English *wine*, and then proceeding backward to the Latin *vinum*, the Greek *oinos*, and finally the Hebrew *yayin*. The result of the survey is abundantly clear: these four related words have been used historically to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented.⁴

Only a few examples can be cited in this brief article. The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language (1971) defines "must" as "Wine or juice pressed from the grapes but not fermented." In this definition "wine" clearly is used to denote unfermented grape juice.

The Meaning of the Greek Oinos. Examples of the dual usage of *oinos* abound in secular Greek. In his book, *Metereologica*, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) speaks of unfermented grape juice (*glukus*), saying: "though called wine [*oinos*], it has not the effect of wine, for it does not taste like wine and does not intoxicate like ordinary wine."⁵ In this text Aristotle explicitly informs us that

unfermented grape juice was called *oinos* ("wine") although it did not have the taste or the intoxicating effect of ordinary wine.⁶

In the Septuagint, an intertestamental Greek translation of the Old Testament, "the Hebrew word for grape-juice, *tirosih*," as Ernest Gordon points out, "is translated at least 33 times by the Greek word *oinos*, wine, and the adjective 'new' is not present. *Oinos* without qualification, then, can easily mean unfermented wine in the New Testament."⁷

A possible use of *oinos* in the New Testament to denote unfermented wine, is found in Matthew 9:17 where Jesus says that "new wine is put into fresh wineskins." In view of the fact that no fresh wineskins can resist the pressure caused by fermenting new wine, it is reasonable to assume that the "new wine" spoken of by Jesus was wine fresh from the press which had been strained and possibly boiled, and then placed immediately into fresh wineskins to insure the absence of fermentation-causing substances. Ancient authors attest to this practice.

The Meaning of the Hebrew Yayin. As in Greek the Hebrew term for "wine" (*yayin*) was used to refer to either fermented or unfermented wine. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* explains that "Fresh wine before fermenting was called '*yayin mi-gat*' (wine of the vat; Sanh 70a)."⁸ The *Halakot Gedalot*, which is the earliest Jewish compendium of the Talmud, says: "One may press out a cluster of grapes and pronounce the *Kiddush* over the juice, since the juice of the grape is considered wine [*yayin*] in connection with the laws of the Nazirite."⁹

The use of *yayin* in the Old Testament to denote unfermented grape juice is not always self-evident because it does not come under condemnation like the fermented *yayin*. However, in several passages, the context indicates that the word designates unfermented grape juice (Jer. 40:10, 12; Neh. 13:15; Lam. 2:12; Gen. 49:11; Songs 1:2, 4; 4:10).¹⁰ For example, Isaiah 16:10 tells of God's judgment upon Moab, manifested through the removal of the divine blessing from the vineyard and the grape juice: "And joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field; and in the vineyard no songs are sung, no shouts are raised; no treader treads out wine [*yayin*] in the presses; the vintage shout is hushed" (Isa. 16:10). The "wine"

the treaders tread out in the pressing vat, is unfermented grape juice since fermentation is a time-controlled process.

The above sampling of Biblical and historical testimonies suffice to show that the Bible speaks of both fermented wine, which it disapproves, and unfermented grape juice, which it approves.

Biblical Approval and Disapproval of "Wine"

Biblical Approval of Unfermented Wine. The vineyard, with its products of grape and wine, was vital in Biblical economy and theology. A glance at a concordance suffices to recognize this fact. The word *yayin*, occurs 141 times in the Old Testament and the word *oinos* occurs 30 times in the New Testament.

In several instances the context indicates that the positive references to "wine" have to do with unfermented and unintoxicating grape juice. Because of its natural and nourishing properties, grape juice was used to represent the divine blessing of material prosperity (Gen. 27:28; 49:10, 11; Deut. 33:28), the blessing of the Messianic age (Joel 2:18, 19; Jer. 31:10-12; Amos 9:13, 14), the free offer of God's saving grace (Isa. 55:1), the wholesome joy God offers to His people (Ps. 104:14, 15; 4:7), and the acknowledgment of God through the use of grape juice as tithe, offerings and libations (Num. 18:12; Deut. 14:23; Ex. 29:40; Lev. 23:13).

"Wine" as unfermented grape juice is approved in the Scripture because it provides us with a wholesome and delightful beverage to gladden our hearts without making us "merry." Psalm 104:14, 15 states: "Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine [*yayin*] to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart."¹¹

In this song of thanksgiving the Psalmist enumerates God's bountiful provisions for the needs of His creatures. He refers to the plants providing us with food and to "wine," the juice of the grape which cheers the heart by its pleasantness. The ideas contrasted here are sustenance and sweetness. God provides us with sustaining nourishing food, and with a sweet delightful drink, grape juice. The capacity of grape juice to cheer the heart is attested in Psalm 4:7, which says: "Thou hast put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine [*tirosh*] abound" (See Judges 9:13).

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

It is important to remember that many ancient people loved sweet drinks. While today many think of milk and grape juice as babies' beverages and of coffee and wine as adults' drinks, in Bible times milk and grape juice were desirable beverages for both young and old. Pliny tells us that sometimes people added a considerable amount of honey to grape juice to make it even sweeter.¹² The sweeter a beverage, the more desirable it was. It is worth noting in this regard that the land of Canaan is praised as a land flowing with "milk and honey," two products known for their sustenance and sweetness.

Biblical Disapproval of Fermented Wine. The negative references to "wine" have to do with fermented and intoxicating wine, which Scripture uses to represent immorality, apostasy and divine wrath (Isa. 19:14; Rev 14:10; 16:19; 17:2; 18:3). The Biblical condemnation of the use of intoxicating wine is expressed in a variety of ways.

Some texts condemn outright the use of wine (Prov. 23:29-35; 20:1; Hab. 2:5; Eph. 5:18). Solomon, for example, admonishes in a most categorical way to refrain from even looking at wine in order to avoid the shame and suffering caused by it (Prov. 23:31). Lest a person be seduced by the attractiveness of fermented wine, Solomon goes on to describe its deadly nature by comparing it to the poisonous bite of a serpent and the sting of an adder (Prov. 23:32).

Others texts explain the physical and moral consequences of the use of alcoholic beverages. Some of the consequences mentioned are: they distort the perception of reality (Isa. 28:7; Prov. 23:33);

they impair the capacity to make responsible decisions (Lev. 10:9-11); they weaken moral sensitivities and inhibitions (Gen. 9:21; 19:32; Hab. 2:15; Isa. 5:11, 12); they cause physical sickness (Prov. 23:20, 21; Hos. 7:5; Isa. 19:14; Ps. 60:3); and they disqualify for both civil and religious service (Prov. 31:4, 5; Lev. 10:9-11; Eze. 44:23; 1 Tim. 3:2, 3; Titus 1:7-8).¹³

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

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

Abstinence from intoxicating wine is required in Scripture, not only of civil officials such as kings and rulers, but also of religious leaders, such as priests in the Old Testament and bishops/elders/deacons in the New Testament. In the Old Testament priests were explicitly required to abstain from alcoholic beverages: "Drink no wine or strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die" (Lev. 10:9). The reason given is that alcoholic beverages would impair their capacity to discern and to teach God's holy precepts: "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the clean and unclean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses (Lev. 10:10, 11; see Eze. 44:23). We shall see below that the same requirement of abstinence from alcoholic beverages is applied to church leaders in the New Testament.

The fact that the priests had to abstain from alcoholic beverages in order to preserve sanctuary holiness implies that alcohol as a beverage is viewed in the Scripture as profane and unholy. The

reason for this is to be found both in the intrinsic nature of alcohol, that is, in its power to intoxicate (Prov. 23:29, 30; 20:1; Hab. 2:5) and in its effects, that is, in its capacity to impair the discernment between the holy and the profane, and between right and wrong (Lev. 10:11; Eze. 44:23). In view of the fact that we as Christians are "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9) called to "keep sane and sober" (1 Pet. 4:7) in a world often insane and intemperate, God's injunction to abstain from alcoholic beverages to preserve our moral discernment is especially relevant for us today.

The foregoing considerations indicate that the Biblical approval or disapproval of "wine" is determined not by the amount of wine consumed but by the nature of the "wine" itself. The positive references to "wine" have to do with unfermented, unintoxicating grape juice. In contrast, all the indictments of "wine" have to do with alcoholic, intoxicating wine. The latter is condemned irrespective of the quantity used.

The Preservation of Grape Juice

A major objection against the view that Scripture approves the use of unfermented grape juice is the alleged impossibility in Bible times of preserving grape juice unfermented. To test the validity of this popular assumption I investigated the testimonies of ancient writers regarding the art of preserving fruits and wines in general and grape juice in particular.¹⁴ To my surprise I discovered that the ancients were far more knowledgeable in the art of preserving fruits and wines than is generally believed.

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

Marcus Porcius Cato (234-150 B.C.), who is considered the father of both Latin prose and literature on agriculture, refers to the use of some of these preservatives, saying:

If necessary, add to the new wine a fortieth part of must boiled down from untrod grapes, or a pound and a half of salt to the culleus

[a liquid measure]. If you use marble dust, add one pound to the culleus; mix this with must in a vessel and then pour into the jar. If you use resin, pulverize it thoroughly, three pounds to the culleus of must, place it in a basket, and suspend it in the jar of must; shake the basket often so that the resin may dissolve. When you use boiled must or marble dust or resin, stir frequently for twenty days and press down daily.¹⁵

Unfermented Grape Juice. In comparison to fermented wine, the preserving grape juice from becoming fermented was a relatively simpler process. Ancient sources inform us that it was accomplished in four main ways: (1) by boiling down the juice to a syrup, (2) by separating the fermentable pulp from the juice of the grape by means of filtration, (3) by placing the freshly pressed grape juice in sealed jars which were immersed in a pool of cold water, and (4) by fumigating the wine jars with sulphur before sealing them.¹⁶

Columella, a renowned agriculturalist who lived in the first century A. D., discusses at great length the different methods used to preserve unfermented grape juice. In speaking of its preservation by boiling, he writes: "Some people put the must in leaden vessels and by boiling reduce it by a quarter, others by a third."¹⁷ He goes on to explain that "afterwards, when it has cooled, you should pour it into vessels, cover it and seal it up; in this way it will keep longer and no harm will befall it."¹⁸ The custom of preserving grape juice by boiling it down into a syrup has survived through the centuries in the Near East and Mediterranean countries. This beverage is known as *vino cotto* (boiled wine) in Italian, *vin cuit* in French, *nardenk* in Syriac and *dibs* in Arabic.

There are indications that the ancient Jews preserved wine by boiling it. John Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* says:

The Mishna states that the Jews were in the habit of using boiled wine. "They do not boil the wine of the heave-offering, because it diminishes it," and consequently thickens it, thus rendering the mingling of water with it when drunk necessary; but it is immediately added, "Rabbi Yehudah permits this because it improves it" (*Teromoth Perek 100, 11*).¹⁹

The fact that the Old and New Testaments do not discuss the art of preserving grape juice, does not mean that it was unknown in Bible times. The Jews were not less knowledgeable in the art of

preservation than the surrounding nations. Josephus tells us that the Romans were astonished to find in the fortress of Masada, wine, oil, fruits and cereals freshly preserved, although they had been stored for several years.²⁰ Furthermore, rabbinical sources specifically mention the use of boiled wine.²¹

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

Wine in the New Testament

The example and teachings of Christ are normative for Christian belief and practice. If, as many well-meaning Christians believe, Christ *made* fermented wine at the wedding of Cana, *commended* it in the parables of the new wine skins and the old wine, *admitted* to having used it in His description of His lifestyle ("eating and drinking") and *commanded* it to be used until the end of time at the institution of the Lord's Supper, then there hardly can be anything intrinsically wrong with a moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages.

Jesus and the Wedding at Cana

Many well-meaning Christians believe that the "good wine" Jesus made at Cana (John 2:10) was "good" because of its high alcoholic content. This belief rests on three major assumptions. First, it is assumed that the Jews did not know how to prevent the fermentation of grape juice; and because the season of the wedding was just before Spring Passover (see John 2:13), that is, six months after the grape harvest, the wine used at Cana had ample time to ferment. Second, it is assumed that the description given by the master of the banquet of the wine provided by Christ as "the good wine" means a high-quality alcoholic wine. Third, it is assumed that the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) used by the master of the

banquet indicates that the guests were intoxicated because they had been drinking fermented wine. Consequently, the wine Jesus made must also have been fermented. In view of the importance these assumptions play in determining the nature of the wine provided by Christ, we shall briefly examine each of them.

The first assumption is discredited by numerous testimonies from the Roman world of New Testament times describing various methods for preserving grape juice. We have seen that the preservation of unfermented grape juice was in some ways a simpler process than the preservation of fermented wine. Thus, the possibility existed of supplying unfermented grape juice at the wedding of Cana near the Passover season.

"The Good Wine." The second assumption that the wine Jesus provided was pronounced "the good wine" (John 2:10) by the master of the banquet because it was high in alcoholic content, is based on the taste of twentieth-century drinkers who define the goodness of wine in proportion to its alcoholic strength. But this was not necessarily true in the Roman world of New Testament times where the best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration. Pliny, for example, says that "wines are most beneficial when all their potency has been removed by the strainer."²² Similarly, Plutarch points out that wine is "much more pleasant to drink" when it "neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind or passions"²³ because its strength has been removed through frequent filtering.

The Talmud indicates that drinking to the accompaniment of musical instruments in festive occasions such as a wedding was forbidden.²⁴ The latter is confirmed by later testimonies of rabbis. For example, Rabbi S. M. Isaac, an eminent nineteenth-century rabbi and editor of *The Jewish Messenger*, says:

The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, including the marriage feast, ever use any kind of fermented drinks. In their oblations and libations, both private and public, they employ the fruit of the vine—that is, fresh grapes—unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction. Fermentation is to them always a symbol of corruption.²⁵

Although Rabbi Isaac's statement is not quite accurate, since Jewish sources are not unanimous on the kind of wine to be used

at sacred festivals, it still does indicate that some Jews used unfermented wine at wedding feasts.

"Well Drunk." The third assumption that the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) indicates that the wedding guests were intoxicated and thus "the good wine" provided by Christ must also have been intoxicating, misinterprets and misapplies the comment of the master of the banquet, and overlooks the broader usage of the verb. The comment in question was not made in reference to that particular wedding party, but to the general practice among those who hold feasts: "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine" (John 2:10, RSV). This remark forms parts of the stock in trade of a hired banquet master, rather than an actual description of the state of intoxication at a particular party.

Another important consideration is the fact that the Greek verb *methusko*, translated by some "well drunk," can also mean "to drink freely," as rendered by the RSV, without any implication of intoxication. In his article on this verb in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Herbert Preisker observes that "*Methuskomai* is used with no ethical or religious judgment in John 2:10 in connection with the rule that the poorer wine is served only when the guests have drunk well."²⁶

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

Moral consistency demands that Christ could not have miraculously produced between 120 to 180 gallons of intoxicating wine for the use of men, women, and children gathered at the Cana's wedding feast, without becoming morally responsible for their intoxication. Scriptural and moral consistency requires that "the good wine" produced by Christ was fresh, unfermented grape juice. This is supported by the very adjective used to describe it, namely

kalos, which denotes that which is morally excellent, instead of *agathos*, which means simply good.²⁷

New Wine in New Wineskins

Christ's statement that "new wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (Luke 5:38; Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22), is seen by moderationists as an indication that Jesus commended the moderate use of alcoholic wine. This view rests on the assumption that the phrase "new wine" denotes wine freshly pressed, but already in a state of active fermentation. Such wine, it is said, could only be placed in new wineskins because old skins would burst under pressure.

Fermenting New Wine? This popular interpretation is imaginative but not factual. Anyone familiar with the pressure caused by gas-producing fermentation knows that no bottle, whether of skin or glass, can withstand the pressure of fermenting new wine. As Alexander B. Bruce points out,

Jesus was not thinking at all of fermented, intoxicating wine, but of "must," a non-intoxicating beverage, which could be kept safely in new leather bottles, but not in old skins which had previously contained ordinary wine, because particles of albuminoid matter adhering to the skin would set up fermentation and develop gas with an enormous pressure.²⁸

The only "new wine" which could be stored safely in new wineskins was unfermented must, after it had been filtered or boiled. Columella, the renowned Roman agriculturist who was a contemporary of the apostles, attests that a "new wine-jar" was used to preserve fresh must unfermented:

That must may remain always sweet as though it were fresh, do as follows. Before the grape-skins are put under the press, take from the vat some of the freshest possible must and put it in a new wine-jar [amphoram novam], then daub it over and cover it carefully with pitch, that thus no water may be able to get in.²⁹

Symbolic Meaning. This interpretation is further confirmed by the symbolic meaning of Christ's saying. The imagery of new wine in new wineskins is an object lesson in regeneration. As fittingly explained by Ernest Gordon,

The old wineskins, with their alcoholic lees, represented the Pharisees' corrupt nature. The new wine of the Gospel could not be put into them. They would ferment it. "I came not to call the self-righteous but repentant sinners." The latter by their conversion become new vessels, able to retain the new wine without spoiling it (Mark 2:15-17, 22). So, by comparing intoxicating wine with degenerate Pharisaism, Christ clearly intimated what his opinion of intoxicating wine was.³⁰

"It is well to notice," Gordon continues, "how in this casual illustration, he [Christ] identifies wine altogether with unfermented wine. Fermented wine is given no recognition. It could be put into any kind of wineskin, however sorry and corrupt. But new wine is like new cloth which is too good to be used in patching rags. It is a thing clean and wholesome, demanding a clean container. The natural way in which this illustration is used suggests at least a general, matter-of-fact understanding among his Jewish hearers that the real fruit of the vine, the good wine, was unfermented."³¹

Was Jesus a Glutton and a Drunkard?

More than nineteen centuries ago Jesus was accused of being "a glutton and a drunkard" because He came "eating and drinking" (Luke 7:33, 34; Matt. 11:19). In Jesus' description of His own lifestyle as "eating and drinking" (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34) moderationists find an unmistakable proof that He openly admitted having used alcoholic wine. Moreover, it is argued, Jesus must have drunk alcoholic wine for His critics to accuse Him of being a "drunkard."

Social Lifestyle. This interpretation ignores several important considerations. The phrase "eating and drinking" is used idiomatically to describe the difference between the social lifestyle of Jesus and that of John the Baptist. John came "eating no bread and drinking no wine" (Luke 7:33), that is to say, he lived a lifestyle of full social isolation, while Christ came "eating and drinking," that is to say, He lived a lifestyle of free social association.

No Mention of "Wine." A significant point, often overlooked, is that Jesus did not mention "wine" in describing His own lifestyle. Whereas of John the Baptist Jesus said that he came "eating no

bread and drinking no wine," of Himself He simply said: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking." If Jesus had wanted it to be known that, contrary to John the Baptist He was a wine-drinker, then He could have repeated the word "wine" for the sake of emphasis and clarity.

By refusing to specify what kinds of food or drink He consumed, Christ may well have wished to deprive His critics of any basis for their charge of gluttony and drunkenness. The omission of "bread" and "wine" in the second statement (Matthew omits them in both statements) could well have been intended to expose the senselessness of the charge. In other words, Jesus appears to have said, "My critics accuse me of being a glutton and drunkard, just because I do not take meals alone but eat often in the presence of other people. I eat socially. But my critics actually do not know what I eat."

Even assuming that His critics actually saw Jesus drinking something, they would have accused Him of being a drunkard, even if they saw Him drinking grape juice, or water, for that matter. On the day of Pentecost critics charged the apostles with being drunk on grape juice (*gleukos*, Acts 2:13). This helps us understand that no matter what Jesus drank, His unscrupulous critics would have maligned Him as a drunkard.

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

Jesus answered the baseless charge of His critics, saying: "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" (Luke 7:35). Textual evidence is divided between "children" and "works," but the meaning of this cryptic statement remains the same, namely, that wisdom is to be judged by its results. The wisdom of God is vindicated by the works of goodness to which it gives birth. Thus, to infer on the basis

of the aspersions of His critics that Jesus drank wine, shows a complete lack of wisdom. The results of His life of self-denial speak for themselves.

The Communion Wine

Fundamental importance is attached to the "wine" of the Last Supper because Christ not only used it, but even commanded it to be used until the end of time as a memorial of His redeeming blood. (See Matt. 26:28-29; Mark 14:24-25.) It is widely believed that the wine of the Last Supper was alcoholic for two main reasons: (1) the phrase "fruit of the vine" was allegedly as the functionally equivalent of fermented wine, and (2) the Jews supposedly used only fermented wine at the Passover. This belief is discredited by several important considerations.

"The Fruit of the Vine." The language of the Last Supper is significant. In the synoptic gospels Jesus calls the contents of the cup "the fruit of the vine" (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). The noun "fruit" (*gennema*) denotes that which is produced in a natural state, just as it is gathered. Fermented wine is not the natural "fruit of the vine" but the unnatural fruit of fermentation and decay. The Jewish historian Josephus, who was a contemporary of the apostles, explicitly calls the three clusters of grapes freshly squeezed in a cup by Pharaoh's cupbearer as "the fruit of the vine".³² This establishes the fact that the phrase was used to designate the sweet, unfermented juice of the grape.

"All" to Drink the Cup. If the contents of the cup were alcoholic wine, Christ could hardly have said: "Drink of it, all of you" (Matt. 26:27; see Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17), particularly in view of the fact that a typical Passover cup of wine contained not just a sip of wine, but about three-quarters of a pint.³³ Christ could hardly have commanded "all" of His followers to drink the cup, if its content were alcoholic wine. There are some to whom alcohol in any form is harmful. There are those to whom the simple taste or smell of alcohol awakens in them a dormant or conquered craving for alcohol. Could Christ, who taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," have made His memorial table a place of irresistible temptation for some and of danger for all?

The Law of Fermentation. Further support for the unfer-

mented nature of the Communion wine, is provided by the Mosaic law which required the exclusion of all fermented articles during the Passover feast (Ex. 12:15; 13:6, 7). Jesus understood the meaning of the letter and spirit of the Mosaic law regarding "unfermented things," as indicated by His warning against "the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). "Leaven" for Christ represented corrupt nature and teachings, as the disciples later understood (Matt. 16:12). The consistency and beauty of the blood symbolism cannot be fittingly represented by fermented wine, which stands in the Scripture for human depravity and divine indignation. We cannot conceive of Christ bending over in grateful prayer to bless a cup containing alcoholic wine which the Scripture warns us not to look at (Prov. 23:31). A cup that intoxicates is a cup of cursing and not "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor. 10:16); it is "the cup of demons" and not "the cup of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:21); it is a cup that does not symbolize fittingly the incorruptible and "precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18, 19). This gives us reason to believe that the cup He "blessed" and gave to His disciples did not contain any "fermented thing" prohibited by Scripture.

Historical Testimonies. Jewish and Christian historical testimonies support the use of unfermented wine at Passover/Lord's Supper. Louis Ginzberg (1873-1941), a distinguished Talmudic scholar (for almost forty years he was chairman of the Department of Talmudic and Rabbinic Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America) provides what is perhaps the most exhaustive analysis of the Talmudic references regarding the use of wine in Jewish religious ceremonies. He concludes his investigation by saying:

We have thus proven on the basis of the main passages both of the Babylonian Talmud and that of Jerusalem that unfermented wine may be used lekatehillah [optionally] for Kiddush [the consecration of a festival by means of a cup of wine] and other religious ceremonies outside the temple.³⁴

Ginzberg's conclusion is confirmed by *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. Commenting on the time of the Last Supper, it says:

According to the synoptic Gospels, it would appear that on the Thursday evening of the last week of his life Jesus with his disciples entered Jerusalem in order to eat the Passover meal with them in the

sacred city; if so, the wafer and the wine of the mass or the communion service then instituted by him as a memorial would be the unleavened bread and the unfermented wine of the Seder service.³⁵

The custom of using unfermented wine at Passover has survived through the centuries not only among some Jews, but also among certain Christian groups and churches. For example, in the apocryphal *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle*, which circulated in the third century, a heavenly voice instructs the local Bishop Plato, saying: "Read the Gospel and bring as an offering the holy bread; and having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when He rose from the dead on the third day."³⁶ This provides a clear testimony of the use of freshly pressed grape juice in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The practice of pressing preserved grapes directly into the communion cup is attested by councils, popes and theologians, including Thomas Aquinas (A. D. 1225-1274).³⁷ The use of unfermented wine is well-documented, especially among such Eastern Churches as the Abyssinian Church, the Nestorian Church of Western Asia, the Christians of St. Thomas in India, the Coptic monasteries in Egypt, and the Christians of St. John in Persia, all of which celebrated the Lord's Supper with unfermented wine made either with fresh or dried grapes.³⁸

In the light of the foregoing considerations we conclude that the "the fruit of the vine" that Jesus commanded to be used as a memorial of His redeeming blood was not fermented but unfermented and pure grape juice, a fitting emblem of Christ's untainted blood shed for the remission of our sins.

The claim that Christ used and sanctioned the use of alcoholic beverages has been found to be unsubstantiated. The study of the language of the Last Supper, the Passover law of fermentation, the consistency of the symbol and the survival of the use of unfermented grape juice at the Lord's Supper, all indicate that Jesus abstained from using intoxicating substances and gave no sanction to His followers to use them.

Wine in the Apostolic Church

The importance of the Apostolic Church as a model for Chris-

tian beliefs and practices extends to its teachings on the use of alcoholic beverages. The way the apostles understood, preached, and practiced the teachings of Jesus and of the Old Testament regarding alcoholic beverages is fundamental to determine whether we as Christians today should take our stand on the side of moderation or on the side of abstinence.

There are thirteen specific New Testament references to "wine" (*oinos*) outside the four Gospels,³⁹ eight of which occur in the book of Revelation. In the Apocalypse, "wine" is used mostly to represent either human depravity or divine retribution. In addition to the texts mentioning "wine" specifically, the New Testament contains more than twenty passages admonishing Christians to be "sober" or "temperate." In most cases these admonitions are directly related to drinking practices. We shall briefly examine first some of the wine-texts and then some of the admonitions to abstinence.

Acts 2:13: "Filled with New Wine"

Scarcely had the apostles begun their Messianic proclamation when they were accused of drunkenness. On the day of Pentecost the first company of believers received the gift of tongues enabling them to preach the Gospel in the languages of the people gathered for the feast at Jerusalem. While thousands believed in Christ as a result of the miracle, others began mocking the disciples, saying: "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13).

Some assume that the mockers would not have accused Christians of being drunk unless they had seen some Christians drinking alcoholic wine on previous occasions. The weakness of this reasoning is that it assumes that the accusation of the mockers was based on factual observation of Christian drinking. Mockers, however, do not necessarily base their slander on factual observation. Moreover, if the mockers really wished to charge the disciples with drunkenness, they would have accused them of being filled with wine (*oinos*) and not with grape juice (*gleukos*).

The Irony of the Charge. In view of the established meaning of *gleukos* as un-intoxicating grape juice, the irony of the charge is self-evident. What the mockers meant is "These men, too abstemious to touch anything fermented, have made themselves drunk on

grape juice." Or as Ernest Gordon puts it in modern speech, "These guys are drunk on soft drink."⁴⁰ One can hardly fail to see, in the irony of the charge that the apostles were drunk on grape juice (their usual beverage), an indirect but important proof of their abstinent lifestyle, and inferentially, of the abstemious lifestyle of their Teacher.

Historical confirmation of this practice is provided by the testimony of Hegesippus, who lived immediately after the apostles. Writing regarding "James, the brother of the Lord, [who] succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles," Hegesippus says: "He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh."⁴¹ We can assume that the strict abstinent lifestyle of James, who for a time served as the presiding officer of the Jerusalem Church, served as an example for Apostolic Christians to follow.⁴²

Ephesians 5:18: "Do not Get Drunk with Wine"

A powerful Biblical indictment against intoxicating wine is found in Ephesians 5:18, where Paul admonishes the Ephesians, saying: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18, RSV). The passage consists of two major statements placed in contrast (antithesis) to each other: "drunk with wine" versus "filled with the Spirit."

The antithesis suggests that the contrast is not between moderation and excess, but between fullness of wine and fullness of the Spirit. The two statements point to an inherent incompatibility of nature and operation between the sources of such fullness, namely, inebriating wine and the Holy Spirit. Such a mutual incompatibility precludes the sanction for a moderate use of intoxicating wine.

What is Debauchery? Paul's admonition "Do not get drunk with wine," is followed by a warning which in the RSV is rendered "for that is debauchery." A literal translation of the Greek text would read: "And do not get drunk with wine, in which [*en ho*] is debauchery [*asotia*, literally, unsavableness]." The RSV rendering of *en ho*, "in which" with "for that" makes the condition of being drunk with wine, rather than wine itself, the subject of "debauchery." This construction of the sentence is not based on any exegetical necessity of the text, but on the assumption that the moderate

use of fermented wine was allowed in New Testament times. Historically, numerous translators and commentators have seen "wine" rather than the state of drunkenness as the cause of debauchery. The reason is the position of *oino* ("with wine"), which in Greek comes immediately before the relative "in which." Support for this is provided also by the fact that the words, "Do not get drunk with wine," as *The Interpreter's Bible* commentary points out, "are cited from Prov. 23:31 (the LXX according to Codex A),"⁴³ where the text condemns the use of intoxicating wine ("Do not look at wine when it is red"), rather than its abuse.

Among the ancient translations which render Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation of intoxicating wine itself, mention can be made of the famous Latin Vulgate (about A. D. 400), which reads: "*et nolite inebriari vino, in quo est luxuria*" ("And be not inebriated with wine, in which is voluptuousness"). The connection between *vino* "wine" and *quo* "which" is unmistakable in this Latin translation, because the relative *quo* has the same neuter gender of *vino*, upon which it depends.

Modern Translations. Numerous modern translations follow the Vulgate in its faithful literalness. For example, the French Synodal Version reads: "*Ne vous enivrez pas de vin: car le vin porte à la dissolution*" ("Do not inebriate yourselves with wine, for wine leads to dissoluteness"). To remove any possibility for misunderstanding, the translators have repeated the word "wine" in the relative clause. The same clear connection is found in the French translation of David Martin, in the French Version d'Ostervald, in the margin of the New American Standard Bible, in the Robert Young's translation, in the Good News German Bible ("*Die Gute Nachricht*"), in the Italian Protestant version Riveduta by Giovanni Luzzi, as well as in the Italian Catholic Version produced by the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

In the light of the numerous ancient and modern translations that have rendered the relative clause of Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation not of drunkenness but of wine itself, it would appear that, because of their predilection for wine, some English translators have chosen, as Ernest Gordon puts it, to "save the face of wine while condemning drunkenness."⁴⁴

1 Tim 5:23: "Use a Little Wine for the Sake of Your Stomach"

When the subject of wine in the Bible is brought up, the first text which seems to come to mind to most people is 1 Timothy 5:23, where Paul counsels Timothy saying: "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." This text has been used during the past nineteen centuries by countless people to justify drinking alcoholic beverages. Thus, it is important for us to establish the nature of Paul's counsel and its application for us today.

The Nature of Paul's Advice. Paul's advice to Timothy must be regarded first of all as an expression of paternal concern, not as a mandatory injunction. The apostle is not ordering his beloved son in the Gospel to drink wine freely; rather he advises him to use a little wine "for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments"

The prudent caution of the apostle's language is most significant. He does not say, "No longer drink water," but rather, "No longer drink only water." He does not say, "Drink wine," but rather "use a little wine with water." He does not say, "for the physical pleasure of your belly," but rather, "for the medical need of your stomach." Even if the "wine" were fermented, this text does not support its regular use as a beverage in any way. He did not say to Timothy, "Drink . . ." but "Take . . ." The verb "take" is used by a doctor when prescribing the dosage of a medication to a patient. Similarly, the adjective "little" implies a moderate use of wine. This sounds more like a doctor's prescription to a patient than a general principle for all people.

Timothy Had Been an Abstainer. Another fact often ignored is that the advice "No longer drink only water" implies that Timothy, like the priests and Nazirites, had abstained until that time from both fermented and unfermented wines, presumably in accordance with the instructions and example of Paul. Earlier in the same epistle, Paul tells him to require of a Christian bishop to be not only abstinent (*nephalion*), but also a non-participant at drinking places and parties (*me paroinon*, 1 Tim. 3:2, 3). It is reasonable to assume that the apostle would not have instructed Timothy to require abstinence of church leaders without first teaching him such a principle. The fact that Timothy had been

drinking only water implies then that he had been following his master's counsel scrupulously.

The abstinence of a Christian minister was presumably based on the Old Testament legislation prohibiting priests from using intoxicating drinks (Lev. 10:9-10). The natural feeling would be that a Christian minister should be no less holy than a Jewish priest, especially since the reason for the Mosaic law remained the same: "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses" (Lev. 10:10, 11). The principle of abstinence was not violated by Paul's recommendation because the use of a little wine was recommended for medicinal purposes rather than for the pleasure of the belly.

The Kind of Wine. It is assumed generally that the wine Paul recommended to Timothy was alcoholic. But this is by no means certain, for two reasons. First, because the term *oinos* ("wine"), as we have shown, was used in a generic way to denote either fermented or unfermented wine. Second, because there are historical testimonies attesting the use of unfermented wine for medical purposes.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) recommended the use of a sweet grape juice, called *glukus* in Greek, because, he wrote, "though called wine [*oinos*], it has not the effect of wine . . . and does not intoxicate like ordinary wine."⁴⁵ Athenaeus, the Grammarian (A.D. 280), specifically counsels the use of unfermented "sweet wine" (*glukon oinon*) for stomach disorders. He writes: "Let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, especially that kind called *protropos*, the sweet Lesbian *glukus*, as being good for the stomach; for sweet wine [*oinos*] does not make the head heavy."⁴⁶ Here we have advice which sounds strikingly similar to Paul's, with the difference that Athenaeus qualifies the kind of wine recommended, namely, the sweet wine, called "lesbian" (*effoeminatum*), because its alcoholic potency had been removed.

Similar advice regarding the medical use of wine is given by Pliny (A. D. 79), a contemporary of Paul and author of the celebrated *Natural History*. He recommends using a boiled, unfermented wine called *adynamon* for sick persons "for whom it is feared that wine

may be harmful."⁴⁷ He also recommends avoiding the side effects of alcohol by using wines whose alcoholic content were removed through filtration: "Wines are most beneficial when all their potency has been overcome by the strainer."⁴⁸

In light of these testimonies, it is reasonable to assume that the wine recommended by Paul to Timothy may well have been unfermented. Ellen White supports this conclusion, saying: "Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake and oft infirmities, but he meant the unfermented juice of the grape. He did not advise Timothy to take what the Lord had prohibited."⁴⁹

Admonitions to Abstinence

The apostolic admonitions to abstinence are expressed through the Greek verb *nepho* and the adjective *nephalios*. (Used in 1 Thess. 5:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8; 2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Tim. 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2). There is noteworthy unanimity among Greek lexicons on the primary meaning of the verb *nepho* as "to abstain from wine" and of the adjective *nephalios* as "abstinent, without wine."⁵⁰

This meaning is attested in the writing of Josephus and Philo, who were contemporaries of Paul and Peter. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus writes of the priests: "Those who wear the sacerdotal garments are without spot and eminent for their purity and sobriety [*nephalioi*], not being permitted to drink wine as long as they wear those garments."⁵¹ Similarly, Philo explains in his *Special Laws* that the priest must officiate as *nephalios*, that is, totally abstinent from wine, because he has to carry out the directions of the law and must be in a position to act as the final earthly court.⁵²

If Josephus, Philo, and a host of other writers used *nepho/nephalios* with the primary meaning of "abstaining from wine," we have reasons to believe that Paul and Peter also used these terms with the same meaning. This conclusion is supported, as we shall see, by the context in which these terms are used. Yet these words have been usually translated figuratively in the sense of being "temperate, sober, steady." Such inaccurate translation has misled many sincere Christians into believing that the Bible teaches moderation in the use of alcoholic beverages, rather than abstinence from them. Let us examine some of the apostolic admonitions to abstinence.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul admonishes the believers to "be sober" in view of Christ's sudden and unexpected coming, saying: "So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober [*nephomen*]. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober [*nephomen*], and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:6-8).

This passage consists of a number of contrasting parallels: light and darkness, day and night, waking and sleeping, to be sober and to be drunk. In light of the contrasts between the sons of the day who are sober and those of the night who are drunk, it is evident that the exhortation to "be sober" means not merely to be mentally vigilant but primarily to be physically abstinent.

This conclusion is supported by the connection between sobriety and wakefulness: "Let us keep awake and be sober" (vs. 6). The first verb, *gregoromen*, refers to mental watchfulness and the second, *nephomen*, to physical abstinence. Otherwise it would be a needless repetition: "Let us keep awake and be awake." It is evident that Paul connects mental watchfulness with physical abstinence, because the two go together. Mental vigilance in the New Testament is often connected with physical abstinence. This will become clearer as we consider the passages that follow.

1 Peter 1:13. The admonition to physical abstinence, expressed through the verb *nepho*, occurs three times in the first epistle of Peter (1:13; 4:7; 5:8). It is noteworthy that in these texts, Peter's exhortation to abstinence is given in the context of readiness for the imminent return of Christ. This implies that Peter, like Paul, grounds his call to a life of abstinence and holiness in the certainty and imminence of Christ's return. The first usage of *nepho* by Peter occurs in 1 Peter 1:13: "Therefore gird up your minds, be sober [*nephontes*], set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Peter correlates mental vigilance ("gird up your minds") with physical abstinence ("be sober").

The admonition to "be abstinent" assumes a radical form in 1 Peter 1:13 because it is followed immediately by the adverb *teleios*, which means "perfectly" or "completely." The correct translation

then is, "be completely or perfectly abstinent." Most translators, presumably because of their predilection for drinking, have chosen to make *teleios* a modifier of the following verb *elpisate* ("set your hope"), thus, rendering it "set your hope fully" (RSV) or "hope to the end" (KJV). But the idiom used elsewhere in the New Testament for "to the end" is not *teleios* per se, but a compound such as *mechri telous* or *heos telous* (Heb. 3:6, 14; 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:13).

It is noteworthy that the Vulgate, Jerome's famous Latin translation which has served as the official Catholic Bible throughout the centuries, translates *teleios* as a modifier of *nephontes*, thus, "*sobrii perfecte*" ("perfectly sober"). In my view Jerome's translation reflects accurately the intent of Peter, who repeats his call to abstinence twice again in his epistle. Thus, the correct translation should be: "Therefore gird up your minds, being wholly abstinent, set your hope upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 4:7. Peter's second use of *nepho* occurs in 1 Peter 4:7: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane [*sophronesate*] and sober [*nepsate*] for your prayers." Here again Peter exhorts Christians to keep mentally vigilant and physically abstinent. The meaning of *nepho* as abstinence from wine is suggested also by the context, where Peter contrasts the past lifestyle of "licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry" (1 Pet. 4:3) with the new lifestyle of temperance and abstinence. The passage may be paraphrased as follows: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be sober in mind and abstemious in life in order that you might be able to maintain a healthy devotional life at this critical time."

1 Peter 5:8. Peter's third usage of *nepho* occurs in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober [*nepsate*], be watchful [*gregoresate*]. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour." As in the previous two instances, Peter associates mental vigilance with physical abstinence, because the two are mutually dependent. Intoxicating drinks diminish the power of conscience and reason, thus weakening inhibitions to evil-doing. The ultimate result is that the Devil is better able "to devour," literally, "drink down" (*katapino*) such persons.

The contrast between *nepsate* (from *ne piein*, "not to drink")

and *katapiein* (from *kata piein* "to drink down") has been recognized by Adam Clarke, who comments:

It is not every one that he can swallow down. Those who are sober and vigilant are proof against him; these he may not swallow down. Those who are drunk with the cares of this world, and are unwatchful, these he may swallow down. There is a beauty in this verse, and striking apposition between the first and last words, which I think have not been noticed; Be sober, *nepsate*, from *ne*, not, and *piein*, to drink—do not swallow down—and the word *katapien*, from *kata*, down, and *piein*, to drink. If you swallow strong drink down, the devil will swallow you down. Hear this, ye drunkards, toppers, tipplers, or by whatsoever name ye are known in society, or among your fellow-sinners, strong drink is not only your way to the devil, but the devil's way into you. Ye are such as the devil particularly may swallow down.⁵³

Summing up, the five usages of *nepho*, two by Paul and three by Peter, all show an amazing consistency in urging both mental vigilance and physical abstinence. It also is significant that all five admonitions to abstinence are given in the context of the preparation for the imminent return of Christ.

Nephalios as Physical Abstinence. The adjective *nephalios* is used three times by Paul in his description of the qualifications desired of bishops, women, and older men. The first two instances occur in 1 Timothy 3:2, 11: "Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate [*nephalion*], sensible [*sophrona*], dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard [*me paroinon*]. . . . The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate [*nephalious*], faithful in all things." The third instance is found in Titus 2:2, "Bid the older men be temperate [*nephalious*], serious, sensible [*sophronas*], sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness."

Earlier we noticed that the adjective *nephalios* is used by contemporary authors such as Philo and Josephus to denote abstinence from wine. This literal interpretation is supported by the fact that in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 2:2 the adjective *nephalios* occurs together with *sophron*, the first to denote physical abstinence and the second mental vigilance. The connection between the two requires a literal interpretation of *nephalios*, as abstinence from wine.

"No Drunkard." Some argue that the literal interpretation of *nephalios* as abstinent is contradicted by *me paroinos*, rendered "no drunkard" by the Revised Standard Version. Their reasoning is that Paul could not have enjoined a bishop first to be abstinent and then "no drunkard," that is, moderate in the use of wine. This apparent contradiction is resolved by recognizing that the meaning of *paroinos* goes beyond "addicted to wine, drunken"⁵⁴ to the complementary idea of being *para* "near" *oinos* "wine," that is, near a place where wine is consumed. "The ancient *paroinos*," as Lees and Burns explain, "was a man accustomed to attend drinking parties, and, as a consequence, to become intimately associated with strong drink."⁵⁵

Albert Barnes, a respected New Testament commentator, explains the meaning of *paroinos*, saying:

The Greek word (*paroinos*) . . . means, properly, by wine; that is, spoken of what takes place by or over wine, as revelry, drinking-songs, etc. Then it denotes, as it does here, one who sits by wine; that is, who is in the habit of drinking it. . . . It means that one who is in the habit of drinking wine, or who is accustomed to sit with those who indulge in it, should not be admitted to the ministry. The way in which the apostle mentions the subject here would lead us fairly to suppose that he did not mean to commend its use in any sense; that he regarded it as dangerous and that he would wish the ministers of religion to avoid it altogether.⁵⁶

The meaning of *paroinos* as "near wine," that is, near a drinking place, is supported by ancient and modern Greek lexicons. The *Lexicon Graeci Testamenti Alphabeticum*, published in 1660, defines *paroinos* in Greek and Latin as *para to oino, apud vinum*, which may be translated "near or in the presence of wine."⁵⁷ Liddell and Scott define the related word *paroinios* as "befitting a drinking party."⁵⁸

Understood in this sense, *me paroinos* does not weaken *nephalios*. On the contrary, it strengthens it. What Paul is saying is that a bishop must be not only abstinent, but he must also withhold his presence and sanction from places and associations which could tempt his abstinence or that of others. This fits well with Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 5:11, "I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is

an idolater, reviler, *drunkard*, or robber—not even to eat with such a one.”⁵⁹

The fundamental reason given by Paul for living abstinent and godly lives is eschatological:

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:11-14, RSV).

Healthful and holy living is commended in the Scripture not merely for the sake of personal health and goodness, but primarily for the sake of God's desire to dwell within us in this present life (see 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:13) and to fellowship with us in the life to come. It is this hope of being ready to receive Christ, and to be received by Him on the day of His glorious appearing, that should motivate every Christian to “purify himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). It is to this hope that Peter appeals when he urges mental vigilance and physical abstinence in the three texts examined earlier. His admonition to “gird up your minds, be completely abstinent” is followed immediately by the exhortation “set your hope upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13, RSV). For Christians who believe in the certainty and imminence of Christ's Return, the apostolic admonitions to abstain from intoxicating beverages, assumes added significance: it represents a tangible response to God's invitation to make concrete preparation for the second coming of Christ.

Conclusion

The Biblical teachings regarding the use of alcoholic beverages can be summarized in one sentence: the Scripture is consistent in teaching moderation in the use of wholesome, unfermented beverages and abstinence from the use of intoxicating fermented beverages. The practical implication of this conclusion can also be stated in one sentence: when we accept the Biblical teaching that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically harmful but also morally

wrong, we will feel compelled not only to abstain from intoxicating substances, but also to help others to do the same.

Endnotes

1 The figures are provided by the 1986 report of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, as quoted in “Coming to Grips with Alcoholism,” *U.S. News & World Report* (November 30, 1987):56.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

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

4 The survey is found in “The Meaning of ‘Wine,’” *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages*, chap. 2.

5 Aristotle, *Metereologica* 388. b. 9-13. See also *Metereologica* 388. a. 34 which states: “There is more than one kind of liquid called wine [oinos] and different kinds behave differently. For new wine contains more earth than old, and so thickens most under the influence of heat, but solidifies less under the influence of cold.” The reference to the thickening of new wine under the influence of heat implies that new wine was preserved unfermented by boiling it down.

6 On a similar vein in *Metereologica* 384. a. 4-5, Aristotle says: “For some kinds of wine [oinos], for example must [gleukos], solidify when boiled”

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

8 “Wine,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906 ed., vol. 12, p. 533.

9 Cited by Louis Ginzberg, “A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies,” *American Jewish Year Book*, 1923, p. 409.

10 My analysis of these texts is found in *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 67-69.

11 Emphasis supplied.

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

13 My analysis of the Biblical teachings on the consequences of drinking intoxicating wine is found in *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 95-101.

14 The testimonies of ancient writers regarding the art of preserving fermented and unfermented wine are cited and analyzed in *Wine in the Bible*, Chapter 4.

15 Marcus Cato, *On Agriculture* 23, trans. William Davis Hooper, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

16 For documentation and discussion of each of the four methods of preserving grape juice unfermented, see *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 114-127.

17 Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 19, 1, trans. E. S. Forster and Edward H. Heffner, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955).

18 *Ibid.*, 12, 26, 1.

19 “Passover,” *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 ed., vol. 2, p. 477.

20 Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 7, 8, 4.

21 See, for example, *Abodah Zarah* 30a, trans. I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud* (London, 1936), pp. 148, 149.

22 Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24, trans. W. H. S. Jones, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961).

23 Plutarch, *Symposiac* 8, 7.

- 24 See *Sotah* 48a; also *Mishna Sotah* 9, 11.
- 25 Cited in William Patton, *Bible Wines, Laws of Fermentation* (Oklahoma City, n. d.), p. 83. Emphasis supplied.
- 26 Herbert Preisker, "Methe, Methuo, Methuskomai," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1967), vol. 4, p. 547, emphasis supplied.
- 27 "It must be observed," notes Leon C. Field, "that the adjective used to describe the wine made by Christ is not *agathos*, good, simply, but *kalos*, that which is morally excellent or befitting. The term is suggestive of Theophrastus' characterization of un-intoxicating wine as moral (*ethikos*) wine" (*Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* [New York, 1883], p. 57).
- 28 Alexander Balman Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels in The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 500. A similar argument is presented by Ernest Gordon (n. 10), p. 20.
- 29 Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 29.
- 30 Ernest Gordon (n. 7), p. 20.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 32 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2, 5, 2.
- 33 According to J. B. Lightfoot, each of the four Passover cups contained "not less than the fourth part of a quarter of a *hin*, besides what water was mingled with it" (*The Temple-Service and the Prospect of the Temple* [London, 1833], p. 151). A *hin* contained twelve English pints, so that the four cups would amount to three-quarters of a pint each.
- 34 Louis Ginzberg (n. 9), p. 414.
- 35 "Jesus," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 edition, vol. 5, p. 165.
- 36 *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 8, pp. 532, 533.
- 37 For references and discussion, see *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 168, 169.
- 38 Information about these churches is provided by G. W. Samson, *The Divine Law as to Wines* (New York, 1880), pp. 205-217. See also Leon C. Field, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* (New York, 1883), pp. 91-94; Frederic R. Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (London, 1894), pp. 280-282.
- 39 Rom. 14:21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Tim. 3:8; 5:23; Titus 2:3; Rev. 6:6; 14:8; 14:10; 16:19; 17:2; 18:3, 13; 19:15.
- 40 Ernest Gordon, (n. 7), p. 20.
- 41 As quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* 2, 23, 4, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. 1, p. 125.
- 42 An investigation into the lifestyle of such Jewish Christian sects as the Ebionites, the Nazarenes, the Elkesiates, and the Encratites, might provide considerable support for abstinence from fermented wine in the Apostolic Church. Some information in this regard is provided by G. W. Samson, *The Divine Law as to Wines* (New York, 1880), pp. 197-210. The value of his research, however, is diminished by the lack of accurate references.
- 43 *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, 1970), vol. 11, p. 714.
- 44 Ernest Gordon (n. 7), p. 31.
- 45 Aristotle, *Metereologica* 387.b. 9-13.
- 46 Athenaeus, *Banquet* 24 2, 24.

- 47 Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 18.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 23, 24.
- 49 Ellen G. White, "The Marriage in Cana of Galilee," *The Signs of the Times* (Sept. 6, 1899): 6.
- 50 See, for example, articles on "Nepho," G. W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961); James Donnegan, *A New Greek and English Lexicon*, 1847 edition; Thomas S. Green, *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament*, 1892 edition; E. Robinson, *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, 1850); G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1937 edition; and on "Nephalios," Hesychius of Alexandria, *Hesychii Alexandri Lexicon*, 1858 edition; Demetrios C. S. Byzantios, *Lexicon Epitomou tes Ellenikes Glosses*, 1939 edition.
- 51 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 12, 2, trans. William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 81.
- 52 Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 4, 183.
- 53 Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (New York, 1938), vol. 2, p. 869.
- 54 "Paroinos," Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968 edition.
- 55 Lees and Burns (n. 38), p. 367.
- 56 Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (New York, 1873), p. 140.
- 57 "Par-oinos," *Lexicon Graeci Testamenti Alphabeticum*, 1660 edition.
- 58 "Paroinos," in both Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968 edition; and G. Giannakopoulou and E. Siapenou, *Ariston Ellenoggaikon Lexicon*, 1971 edition.
- 59 RSV, emphasis supplied.