

Using Alcoholic Beverages

Introduction:

- A. There is a clear need to address these issues since not only is alcoholic consumption a problem in our society but increasingly it is defended by our own brethren.
 - 1. The following quotes are from an email discussion list (formerly *Markslist* – now *Marslist*).
 - a. “There exists no restrictions against alcohol in the entire NT save that of drunkenness.”
 - 1) We will see this evening that statement is simply NOT true.
 - b. “Many fear soooooo much accidentally crossing some line God has drawn, that they will draw the lines where God has not. I am opposed to sin, but drinking alcohol is not a sin.”
 - c. “Jesus clearly did drink wine with enough alcohol to get drunk. I don’t necessarily believe He got drunk. But could have if He kept drinking.”
 - 2. “God has NEVER forbidden the drinking of wine (and, yes, this is FERMENTED wine) ... what God has forbidden is the ABUSE of wine.” –<http://www.bibletruths.net/Archives/BTAR236.htm>
 - 3. I was told last week of a preacher in another state who recently preached on alcohol – but his lesson was in defense of alcoholic beverages, and the elders of that congregation are said to have commended and defended the lesson to the congregation.
- B. In this lesson we will discuss the following:
 - 1. What the question is NOT.
 - 2. What is “A Drink”?
 - 3. Wine in the Bible -vs- modern day wines.
 - a. “Strong drink” equivalent to modern beer.
 - 4. The ancients DID have ways of preserving unfermented grape juice.
 - 5. Their custom of diluting “wine” with water.
 - 6. A N.T. passage condemning ALL use of alcohol.
 - 7. Some passages offered in support of social drinking.

I. What the Question is NOT.

- A. **“Can a Christian drink to the point of being drunk?”**
 - 1. We all understand drunkenness is condemned by our Lord – Gal.5:21; 1 Cor.6:9-11; Rom.13:13
- B. **“Is it wrong to drink alcohol for medical purposes?”**
 - 1. We all recognize alcohol could be a useful drug in some circumstances – 1 Tim.5:23; Lk.10:34.
 - 2. Due to today’s medical technology such use would be highly unlikely.
 - 3. Also, self prescribing of such won’t work either.
- C. **The question is:**
 - 1. May a Christian drink alcoholic beverages in moderation in social settings, or perhaps even in the privacy of their own home, without sinning?

II. What Is "One Drink" of Alcohol?

- A. A standard drink is generally considered to be 12 ounces beer, 5 ounces wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (40% alcohol).
- B. Each contains roughly the same amount of absolute alcohol – approximately 0.5 ounce or 12 grams.

III. Wine in the Bible -vs- Modern-Day Wines.

- A. **The word “wine” as we use it today:**
 - 1. The Free Dictionary: (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/>)
 - a. **“A beverage made of the fermented juice of any of various kinds of grapes, usually containing from 10 to 15 percent alcohol by volume.”**
 - b. **“A beverage made of the fermented juice of any of various other fruits or plants.”**

2. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary: (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>)
 - a. "**an alcoholic drink which is usually made from grapes**, but can also be made from other fruits or flowers. It is made by fermenting the fruit with water and sugar."
 3. Cambridge Dictionary of American English:
 - a. "**an alcoholic drink made from grapes**, or less commonly an alcoholic drink made in a similar way but from other fruits."
 4. Compact Oxford English Dictionary: (<http://www.askoxford.com/>)
 - a. "**an alcoholic drink** made from fermented grape juice."
 - b. "**a fermented alcoholic drink** made from other fruits or plants."
 5. Encarta:
 - a. "alcohol fermented from grapes: **an alcoholic drink made by fermenting the juice of grapes**"
 6. Every one of the dictionaries I consulted defined wine in our English usage today as being alcoholic wine – being the **fermented** juice of the grape or some other fruit.
 - a. But when we read the word "wine" in our Bible it may or may not have reference to the fermented juice of the grape.
- B. O.T. Words for "Wine:"**
1. **TIROSH** (used 38 times).
 - a. Usually refers to what we call "grape juice."
 - 1) "Tirosh is a collective name for the natural produce of the vine. ... Tirosh is not wine at all, but the fruit of the vineyard in its natural condition."
– as quoted by William Patton in "Bible Wines", page 58
 - b. Passages where the word is used: Isa.65:8; Joel 2:24; Hosea 9:2; Prov.3:10.
 - c. Comments of the ancients:
 - 1) Anacreon (500 B.C.) said, "Only males tread the grapes, setting free wine (oinos)."
 - 2) Varro spoke of "gathering wine."
 - 3) Cato referred to, "hanging wine" and "unintoxicating wine."
 - 4) Celus said "Gather the berries of the myrtle, and from them express wine."
 - 5) Ovid, "And scarce can the grapes contain the wine they have within."
 - 6) Ibycus, "And newborn clusters teem with wine, beneath the shadowy foliage of the vine."
 - d. New or Sweet wine is grape juice.
 2. **SHAKAR** (used 22 times).
 - a. Word denoted & usually translated "*strong drink*."
 - b. "The true original idea of *shakar* is a *liquor obtained from dates or other fruits* (grapes excepted), or barley, *millet*, etc., which were dried, or scorched, and a decoction of them was mixed with honey, aromatics, etc."
– as quoted by Patton, page 57
 - c. All modern alcoholic beverages fall into this group.
 3. **YAYIN** (used 135 times).
 - a. "In the Hebrew Scriptures the word *yayin*, in its broadest meaning, designates *grape-juice*, or *the liquid which the fruit of the vine yields*. This may be new or old, sweet or sour, fermented or unfermented, intoxicating or unintoxicating. ... The specific sense which we must often assign to the word arises not from the word itself, but from the connection in which it stands"
– as quoted by Patton, page 56
 - b. "Yayin in Bible use is a very general term, including every species of wine made from grapes..."
– as quoted by Patton, page 56
 - c. "Yayin ... stands for the expressed juice of the grape – the context sometimes indicating whether the juice had undergone or not the process of fermentation"
– as quoted by Patton, page 56
 - d. Certainly different from our use of "wine" today!
 - e. Wine (*yayin*) is distinguished from strong drink (*shakar*) – Lev.10:9; Judg.13:4; Prov.20:1.

C. The N.T. words for “Wine.”

1. GLEUKOS.

- a. It means sweet wine, and thus grape juice.
- b. “Josephus’ version of the butler’s speech is as follows: He said ‘that by the king’s permission he pressed the grapes into a goblet, and having strained the *sweet wine*, he gave it to the king to drink, and that he received it graciously.” Josephus here uses GLEUKOS to designate the expressed juice of the grape before fermentation could possibly commence.”

– as quoted by Patton, page 77

- c. Equivalent to the Hebrew word *tirosh*.
- d. Acts 2:13– The word was used in sarcasm against the Apostles joking that they were so crazy that they had gotten drunk on grape juice.

2. SIKERA.

- a. Equivalent to the Hebrew word *shekar*.
- b. Refers to strong drinks made from juice or grains.
- c. It is only found in Luke 1:15 where John’s parents are instructed to keep John away from wine and strong drinks.

3. OINOS (is often misused).

- a. Direct equivalent of the Hebrew word *yayin*.
- b. It is argued that since today’s wines are always intoxicating, that Jesus produced an intoxicating beverage when He turned the water to wine and deacons are permitted to partake of some intoxicants so long as they don’t partake of “much”.
 - 1) One position on OINOS is every time it is used it refers to intoxicating beverages.
- c. Others argue OINOS never talks about intoxicating beverages but always simple grape juice.
- d. Truth is neither position is correct since **the word itself implies NEITHER fermented nor unfermented grape juice**.
 - 1) It refers to all products of grape juice and only the context can determine to which is being referred.
- e. OINOS alone signifies the juice of the vine: its character (fermented or unfermented) is revealed by the context of the passage itself.

- D. When we read “wine” in the scriptures we must be careful not to assume that intoxicating beverages are under consideration, since the most often used word for wine refers to both the fermented and unfermented versions of the fruit of the vine.

IV. Ways of Preserving Unfermented Grape Juice.

- A. “If they were alcoholic, they would preserve themselves. The peculiarity was preserving them sweet. Chemistry tells us that the juice loses its sweetness when, by fermentation, the sugar is converted into alcohol. Preserving them sweet throughout the whole year meant preserving them unfermented.”

– Patton, page 26
- B. Patton points out four methods used by the ancients to preserve unfermented grape juice.

1. Boiling.

- a. “By this process the water is evaporated, thus leaving so large a portion of sugar as to prevent fermentation.”

– Patton, page 26
- b. “The grape-juice boils at 212°; but alcohol evaporates at 170°, which is 42° below the boiling point. So then, if any possible portion of alcohol was in the juice, this process would expel it. The obvious object of boiling the juice was to preserve it sweet and fit for use ~~du Patton, page 26~~ du Patton, page 26.”
- c. By so doing the juice would be reduced by half or more and it would produce a thick syrupy substance that could be preserved for years.
- d. They would then dilute it with water to produce the grape juice.

2. **Filtration.**
 - a. "By filtration, the gluten or yeast is separated from the juice of the grape. Whilst the juice will pass through the filtering implements, the gluten will not, and, being thus separated, the necessary conditions of fermentation are destroyed." – Patton, page 33
3. **Subsidence.**
 - a. "The gluten, being heavier than the juice, will settle to the bottom by its own weight if the mass can be kept from fermentation for a limited period. Chemistry tells us that, if the juice is kept at a temperature of 45°, it will not ferment. The juice being kept cool, the gluten will settle to the bottom, and the juice, thus deprived of the gluten, cannot ferment." – Patton, page 36
 - b. They could then pour off the clean grape juice and preserve it in jars.
4. **Fumigation.**
 - a. "...fermentation may be stopped by the application or admixture of substances containing sulphur..." – Patton, page 39
- C. Clearly, the ancients DID have ways of preserving unfermented grape juice.
- D. "When it was desired to preserve a quantity in the sweet state, an amphora was taken and coated with pitch within and without, it was filled with mustum lixivium, and corked so as to be perfectly air-tight. It was then immersed in a tank of cold fresh water, or buried in wet sand, and allowed to remain for six weeks or two months. The contents, after this process, was found to remain unchanged for a year..." – as quoted by Patton, page 48
- E. The argument some make about their having no way to preserve unfermented grape-juice is simply not true, and, in fact, it was the common practice to preserve it unfermented.

V. Their custom of diluting "wine" with water.

- A. [See *Wine Drinking in New Testament Times*, by Robert H. Stein, *Christianity Today*, June 20, 1975]
- B. **Plutarch (Symposiacs III, ix)**, for instance states, "We call a mixture 'wine,' although the larger of the component parts is water." The ratio of water might vary, but only barbarians drank it unmixed, and a mixture of wine and water of equal parts was seen as "strong drink" and frowned upon. The term "wine" or oinos in the ancient world, then, did not mean wine as we understand it today but wine mixed with water. Usually a writer simply referred to the mixture of water and wine as "wine."
- C. **Everett Ferguson (Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, p. 939)**: "The ordinary table beverage of the Mediterranean world was a mixture of wine and water."
- D. Ratios of Water to Wine:
 1. **Homer (Odyssey IX, 208f.): 20 to 1**
 2. **Pliny (Nat. Hist. XIV, vi, 54): 8 to 1**
 3. **Athenaeus (Learned Banquet): 3 to 1**
 4. **Alexis (The Nurse): 4 to 1**
 5. **Hesiod: 3 to 1**
 6. **Ion (On Chios): 3 to 1**
 7. **Talmud (Shabbath 77a): 3 to 1**
 8. **Nichocharas: 5 to 2**
 9. **Clement (Instructor II, ii)**: "It is best for the wine to be mixed with as much water as possible."
- E. Best Case for "Moderate" Drinking
 1. Wine from grapes of Bible land would only yield about 6% alcohol at maximum.
 2. That fermented wine was then cut:
 - a. Normal cut was 3-6 water to 1 wine, but will assume 3/1.
 - b. Yields drink of 1.5% alcohol by volume.
 - 1) Typical beer is 8%.
 - 2) Modern wine is 12-18%.
 - 3) Distilled spirits & liquor range from 25% - 50%.

- c. 22 glasses of N.T. wine vs. 2 modern drinks to intoxicate.
- d. If 6% cut 4/1, must drink 2.5 - 3 gallons an hour.
- 3. Most liberal case for N.T. time far from modern use!

VI. A N.T. Passage Condemning All Use of Alcohol.

- A. 1 Pet.4:3– There are three words connected to alcohol: Winebibblings, Revellings & Carousings.
 - 1. **Winebibblings** (KJV– “*excess of wine*”).
 - a. Several other translations render the greek word “*drunkenness.*”
 - b. The word for drunkenness in Gal.5:21 – refers to habitual intoxication, deep drinking, drunken bouts.
 - c. The word for winebibblings indicates habitual intoxication, but it is more.
 - 1) It marks a step in advance of mere drunkenness.
 - d. It describes the down-and-out drunk, the sickening wino, the gutter drunk.
 - e. None of us has a problem understanding such is sinful– Gal.5:21; 1 Cor.6:9-11; Rom.13:13.
 - 2. **Revellings.**
 - a. Henry Thayer says the word means, “a revel, carousal, i.e. in the Grk. writ. prop. a nocturnal and riotous procession of half-drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Baachus or some other deity, and sing and play before the houses of their male and female friends, hence used generally, of feast and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry.”
 - b. Revelling involves the drinking party where the reveller becomes drunk to the point of “flying high” on the effects of the alcohol.
 - c. Where winebibblings is the worse state of the alcohol user, revellings is on the next lower level and therefore not as severe as winebibblings but still worse than we ought to engage in.
 - d. Mardi Gras, bar scene, New Years Eve celebrations and many wedding receptions.
 - 3. **Carousings** (KJV– “*banqueting*”).
 - a. Both translations, *carousings* and *banquetings*, are obscure to the modern reader.
 - 1) The idea is NOT that of a social meal with speakers, awards, or entertainment.
 - b. The word describes a third, lower level of alcohol use.
 - c. Literally the Greek word means “a drinking” without reference to amount.
 - d. Trench’s Synonyms of the N.T., page 223, “the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, **not of necessity excessive** ... but giving opportunity for excess.”
 - e. William Barclay says, “**It means properly drinking; an act of drinking;** then a drinking bout; drinking together.”
 - f. It has reference to any occasion of drinking.
 - g. It covers and forbids the cocktail party, sipping wine with dinner, drinks with the boys and even consumption in the privacy of our own home.
 - h. Carousings, or banqueting, condemns the social use of alcoholic beverages!
- 4. 1 Pet.4:3 shows the social use of alcoholic beverages is unacceptable for the child of God.

VII. Some passages offered in support of social drinking.

- A. Those who defend social drinking point to several N.T. passages where the word “wine” is used.
 - 1. John 2:1-11– Jesus turned the water to wine at the marriage feast in Cana.
 - 2. 1 Tim.3:3; Titus 1:7– Qualification of one to be an elder– “*not given to wine.*”
 - 3. 1 Tim.3:8– Qualification of one to be a deacon– “*not given to much wine.*”
 - 4. Titus 2:3– “*that aged women likewise be reverent in demeanor, not slanderers nor enslaved to much wine...*”
 - 5. 1 Tim.5:23– “*Be no longer a drinker of water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.*”– We already stated we have no objection to the medical use of alcohol.

- B. First, these passages CANNOT be interpreted to say alcohol use is okay when the other passages and principles we have studied shows it is wrong.
1. Our understanding of these passages must harmonize with what we have already learned.
- C. Quickly the passages.
1. John 2:1-11– The marriage feast in Cana.
 - a. The word translated wine here is oinos – the context must determine if it is alcoholic.
 - b. Did Jesus turn water into fermented wine? NO!!!
 - c. If the wine of the feast was intoxicating wine and Jesus provided them with even more potent wine, then Jesus would clearly have been contributing to their drunkenness or revelry, which we have noticed was to be condemned.
 - d. He would have been guilty of sin since the O.T. taught against using intoxicating wines or serving such to your neighbor (see Hab.2:15).
 - e. Jesus turned the water into wine, fresh grape-juice, as described in Isaiah 16:10; 65:8.
 - f. “*Good Wine*”– Jn.2:10.
 - 1) The phrase does not necessarily imply alcoholic wine.
 - a) Plutarch, and Horace state the best wine was that which was harmless or innocent.
 - i) Pliny said good wine is that which has had its strength broken by the filter.
 - g. “*Well Drunk*”– (KJV) Jn.2:10.
 - a) NIV– “...had too much to drink.”
 - 2) Some believe they were already drunk from the wine originally served.
 - 3) Jesus’ wine was even better and thus, it is argued, was more intoxicating.
 - 4) If that is the case then Jesus was guilty of providing 100+ gallons of intoxicating wine to those already drunk!
 - 5) The idea is simply that the crowd had indeed had plenty to drink (accounts for them running out), but does not address the matter of intoxication.
 2. 1 Tim.3:3; Titus 1:7 and 1 Tim.3:8; Titus 2:3.
 - a. Are elders to abstain from the drinking of any intoxicating beverage while deacons are permitted to partake of small amounts?
 - b. The phrase “*not given to wine*” has one of two meanings:
 - 1) Tarrying at, or given to, wine.
 - 2) Or one who is a brawler, one who is abusive.
 - c. It seems to me the qualification is that for a brother to be an elder he must not be a drinker or one who acts like a drinker; that is, he must not be quarrelsome and a brawler.
 - d. A brother who is naturally quarrelsome, contentious or abusive cannot serve as an elder.
 - e. The other phrase, “*not given to much wine*,” is the same except for the word “*much*.”
 - 1) It is argued that this implies some will be okay.
 - 2) 2 Pet.3:14 speaks of those whose eyes are “*full of adultery*.”
 - a) Does this imply that a little adultery is acceptable?
 - 3) In Mk.12:27 Jesus says, “*ye do therefore greatly err*.” [greatly/much – same Greek word]
 - a) Was Jesus endorsing erring moderately or a little?
 - 4) Paul said, “*Alexander the coppersmith had done me great harm*” – 2 Cor.13:7.
 - a) Does this imply he could have done Paul moderate harm without sinning?
 - 5) Does “*not given to much wine*” necessarily imply we can partake of some?
 - a) Is that the conclusion we MUST draw from the passage.
 - b) NO!

Conclusion:

- A. Satan has conquered over many with alcohol and other drugs.
- B. Let’s be wise and keep our thoughts and bodies under control so he will not cause us to lose our souls.