

Myths About Wine and Alcohol in the Bible

Part 2

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This [section, taken from *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical study on the use of alcoholic beverages* by [Dr. Bacchiocchi](#)] is divided into four parts, the first three of which deal with wine-texts and the last one with the admonitions to sobriety and to temperance [abstinence]. Thus, the outline of the chapter is as follows:

1. Acts 2:13: "Filled with New Wine"
2. 1 Corinthians 11:21: "One is Hungry and Another is Drunk"
3. Ephesians 5:18: "Do Not Get Drunk with Wine"
4. [Abstinence in the New Testament]

PART I: ACTS 2:13: "FILLED WITH NEW WINE"

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

Some interpret this text as indicating the customary drinking of alcoholic wine in the earliest apostolic community. This interpretation rests on three major assumptions. First, the mockers would not have accused Christians of being drunk unless they had seen some Christians drinking on previous occasions. Second, the "new wine" (*gleukos*) was a "sweet wine" of alcoholic nature which could make a person drunk if consumed in large quantity. Third, Peter in his response denied the charge not by saying, "How can we be drunk when we are abstainers?" but by pointing to the early hour of the morning: "These men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day" (Acts 2:15).

Unwarranted Interpretation. This interpretation is unwarranted for three major reasons. It assumes that the accusation of the mockers was based on factual observation of Christian drinking. This is a gratuitous assumption, because mockers do not necessarily base their slander on factual observation. Even if they did, what they presumably had seen was Christians under the influence of the Holy Spirit rather than of alcoholic spirits. It is possible that they were misled by what they saw. The Jewish philosopher Philo, who lived at that time, tells us that the most sober persons, "abstainers," when under the influence of divine inspiration seemed to others to be in a drunken state.

This possibility, however, seems hardly applicable here, because if the mockers really wished to charge the disciples with drunkenness, they would have accused them of being filled with "wine" (*oinos*) and not with "grape-juice" (*gleukos*). The term "*gleukos*" was used to designate unfermented grape juice. Pliny, for example, explicitly explains that what the Greeks call "*aigleucos*, this is our permanent must." He goes on to tell how to prevent its fermentation.

The Meaning of "*Gleukos*." Several Greek lexicons and scholars acknowledge that *gleukos* designates exclusively unfermented grape juice. For example, Horace Bumstead, the author of one of the most scholarly defenses of the moderationist view, offers this clear and conclusive explanation: "*Gleukos*, as in classical Greek, corresponds to the Latin *mustum* meaning the newly expressed juice of the grape, and so has a less wide range of meaning than [the Hebrew] *tirosh* or *asis*.

It occurs only once [Acts 2:13] and I see no necessity for trying to prove it intoxicating, as some have done, including Robinson. . . . It seems to me that Alford, and others, in arguing for the intoxicating character of *gleukos*, as a *sweet* wine, have lost sight of the classical distinction already pointed out between *gleukos* = *mustum*, sweet, because unfermented grape juice, and *oinos glukus* = sweet wine, so-called because, though fermented, it was rich in sugar."

Earlier in his lengthy article (71 pages) published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Bumstead explains more fully that "with the Greeks the product of the wine-press could be sweet in three different senses: first, as *gleukos* (corresponding to the Latin *mustum*), when it was sweet from the lack of vinous fermentation; second, as *oinos glukus*, when it was fermented, but sweet from the presence of considerable untransformed sugar; and third, as *oinos hedus*, when it was sweet from the absence of acetous fermentation, or souring." *What this means is that when gleukos occurs by itself, as in Acts 2:13, it refers specifically to unfermented grape juice.*

The Irony of the Charge. In view of the meaning of *gleukos* as unintoxicating grape juice, the irony of the charge is self-evident. What the mockers meant is "These men, too abstemious to touch anything fermented, have made themselves drunk on grape juice." Or as Ernest Gordon puts it in modern speech, "These drys are drunk on soft drink." Bumstead perceptively asks, "If this was not the point of their 'mocking' how can the use of *gleukos*, instead of the common word *oinos*, be accounted for?" The inadequacy of the cause, grape juice, to produce the effect, drunkenness, is designed to add point to the derisive jest.

One can hardly fail to see in the irony of the charge that the apostles were drunk on grape juice (their usual beverage) an indirect but very important proof of their abstinent life-style and inferentially of the abstemious life-style of their Teacher.

Historical Confirmation. In his epistles, Peter, who acts as the spokesman of the Jerusalem Church in the first twelve chapters of Acts, alludes, as we shall see later in this chapter, to the practice of abstinence in the apostolic church. Later historical confirmation of this practice is provided by the testimony of Hegesippus, a church historian who, as Eusebius tells us, "lived immediately after the apostles." 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." We can assume that the strict abstinent life-style of James, who for a time served as the presiding officer of the Jerusalem Church, served as an example for Apostolic Christians to follow.

An investigation of early Christian sources on the life-style of such Jewish Christian sects as the Ebionites, the Nazarenes, the Elkesaites and the Encratites, might provide considerable support for abstinence from fermented wine in the Apostolic Church. The fact that some of these sects went to the extreme of rejecting altogether both fermented and unfermented wine and using only water, even in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, suggests the existence of a prevailing concern for abstinence in the Apostolic Church. Such a concern apparently assumed fanatical forms among certain religious groups. It is my intention to pursue this research as time becomes available and to publish it as an additional chapter in a future edition of this book. Time restraints have not made this research possible at this time.

Peter's Response. The assumption that Peter's response to the charge of drunkenness implies that the apostles used some kind of fermented wine, because he did not flatly deny the charge, is discredited by two major considerations. Peter used the argument best suited to the character of the mockers. Had he said, "How can we be drunk when we never drink?" the jeering rejoinder might have been, "Except when no one sees you!" An appeal to their abstemious life-style would have been useless since it was already challenged.

Thus, Peter met them on social grounds, challenging the credibility of their assumption. In effect he replied: "How can your assumption be right that we are drunk when it is only nine o'clock in the morning? You know, as well as I do, that people get drunk in the evening and not in the morning." Such a reply fit in the circumstance and exposed the insincerity of the mockers.

A second reason that Peter may have chosen not to deny flatly that they drank at all is suggested by the use of the word *gleukos* by the mockers. This word, we just observed, means unfermented grape juice which Christians, except the Nazirites, generally drank. To deny that Christians drank at all would have meant denying that they drank *gleukos* ("grape juice"), but that was not true.

Conclusion. Summing up we can say that Acts 2:13 provides an indirect but telling proof that the apostles abstained from alcoholic beverages. As Ernest Gordon says, "There would be no point in referring to unfermented wine as a source of intoxication and the strange actions following, if it were not generally understood that the apostles used no intoxicating wine."

PART II: 1 CORINTHIANS 11:21

"ONE IS HUNGRY AND ANOTHER IS DRUNK"

Importance of the Text. Moderationists see in Paul's reference to "drunkenness" at the communion table in the Corinthian church an unmistakable proof that alcoholic wine was used in the Apostolic Church both privately at home and publicly at the Lord's Supper. Paul's statement reads as follows: "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk" (1 Corinthians

11:20-21).

The reasoning of moderationists is that the problem of drunkenness at Corinth can only be explained by their use of alcoholic wine. As someone put it, "How could the Corinthians get drunk on Communion wine if it were not fermented?" Furthermore, it is argued that "it is significant to note that even in the light of their drunkenness, Paul does *not* issue a 'cease and desist' order in this matter." The argument is clear. Paul condemned the abuses at Corinth but not the use of alcoholic wine. We shall examine this claim by considering three points: (1) The Nature of the Feast; (2) The Meaning of the Verb *Methuo*; (3) The Implications of Paul's Admonition.

1. The Nature of the Feast

A Selfish Love Feast. To better appreciate the problems that developed at Corinth in conjunction with the Lord's Supper, we must understand the social customs of the time. It was customary for groups of people belonging to secular or religious organizations to meet together for common meals. In particular there was a certain kind of fellowship meal called *eranos* to which each participant brought food pooled together to make a common feast.

The early Church adapted this custom, developing it into what came to be known as the *Agape* or Love Feast. All the church members brought what they could to the feast, and when all the food was pooled together, they sat down to a common meal. It was a lovely way of producing and nourishing real Christian fellowship. Many churches practice something similar today when they have a pot-luck meal together after church service.

In the church at Corinth the Love Feast seems to have been incorporated within the Lord's Supper, as we shall show below. Its celebration, however, degenerated into a selfish feast. The art of sharing was lost. The rich did not share their food with the poor but ate it by themselves in little exclusive groups. The result was that at the meal some were hungry while others were filled to satiety. Class distinctions, which should have been eliminated at the communion table, were accentuated. Good order and decency were disregarded, and the solemnity of the occasion was lost.

Unhesitatingly and unsparingly Paul rebukes this state of affairs, first of all by reminding the Corinthians of the purpose of their assembling together, namely, "to eat the Lord's supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20, KJV). The meaning of Paul's rebuke could be paraphrased as follows: "Though you come together professedly to partake of the Lord's Supper, you really do not celebrate it in a manner deserving of the name.

For in eating, each one who has brought provisions goes ahead to eat eagerly and selfishly, ignoring the poor who have not been able to bring anything. The result is that while a member is *hungry* and unsatisfied, another is *filled* to satiety. Don't you have houses in which to eat and drink? Why do you transform the house of worship, dedicated to brotherly love, into a place of selfish feasting, putting to shame those who have nothing? There is no way I can commend you for such selfish conduct" (paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 11:20 - 23).

Private Supper or Lord's Supper? Paul's rebuke suggests that Christians in Corinth had unwisely confused the Lord's Supper with a social meal; possibly they had even reduced the Lord's Supper to a social festival similar to the festivals observed among the Greeks. The latter suggestion seems more probable, because there is no indication in the passage that a fellowship meal preceded the actual Lord's Supper.

Paul's statement, "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (1 Corinthians 11:20) clearly indicates that the purpose of the gathering was to celebrate the Lord's Supper, which, however, they had transformed into an ordinary festivity, presumably patterned after the feasts in honor of idols. This leads us to the following conclusion: *all* that was done at Corinth was irregular and improper. The Christians had entirely mistaken the nature of the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper, converting it into a secular festivity, where even intemperance prevailed.

Many have supposed that the fellowship meal at Corinth was derived from the Last Supper which Jesus instituted *after* eating the Passover with His disciples. But it must be observed that the Passover was never seen by Christians as corresponding to a *preliminary* fellowship meal to be followed by the Lord's Supper.

Instead, Passover was a sacred festival which was understood to be superseded by the Lord's Supper. There is no evidence in the Corinthian passage before us, or in any other New Testament passage, that the Lord's Supper was observed in connection with a fellowship meal. This means that whatever was done at Corinth was irregular, improper and against the very instructions that Paul had "received from the Lord" and had "delivered" to the church (1 Corinthians 11:23).

In the light of this fact, any alleged "drunkenness" occurring at the Communion table of the Corinthian church can hardly serve to prove the existence of drinking of alcoholic beverages in the Apostolic Church. A local perversion can scarcely be indicative of a general Christian practice. Moreover, if the Corinthians deviated from the instructions "delivered" unto them, then their misconduct is more a *warning* than an example for us.

2. The Meaning of the Verb *Methuo*

"Filled to the Full." It is generally assumed that drunkenness occurred at the Communion table of the Corinthian church. But is this true? Those who believe so base their conclusion on the common translation of the verb *methuei*, namely, "is drunk." The whole phrase in the RSV reads: "One is hungry and another is drunk" (1 Corinthians 11:21). On the basis of this translation many reason that if intoxicating wine was used by the Corinthians without apostolic rebuke, it can also be used by Christians today.

The fundamental fallacy of such reasoning is that it assumes that *methuo* means only "to be drunk." But our study of its usage in John 2:11 has shown that the verb *methuo* does not always signify intoxication and drunkenness. The context determines its exact meaning. In this case *methuei* is used antithetically to *peina* "hungry" and this requires that the verb be understood in the generic sense of "satiated" rather than in the narrow sense of "drunk."

Leon C. Field makes this point clearly and conclusively: "*Methuei* , in this case, is plainly contrasted with *peina* which is correctly rendered as 'hungry.' The antithesis, therefore, requires the former to be understood in the generic sense of 'surfeited,' not in the narrow sense of 'drunken.' The overfilled man is compared to the underfilled man. This is the interpretation adopted by the great body of expositors, ancient and modern."

Scholarly Support. Among the expositors cited by Field are Chrysostom, Bengel, Grotius, Wycliff, Kuinoel, Bilioth, MacKnight, Newcome, Bloomfield, Clarke, Lightfoot, Dean Stanley, and Whedom. Another who could be mentioned is Clement of Alexandria, who lived only a century and a half after Paul. In his *Instructor* (book 2, 1), Clement, as A. W. Samson points out, "contradicts the suggestion that intoxicating wine was there used. He indicates that it is *food* rather than the *drink* of the feast to which Paul refers, and that he reproves them for 'clutching at the delicacies,' for 'eating beyond the demands of nourishment.'"

Adam Clarke makes the same point in his commentary on this text: "The people came together, and it appears brought their provisions with them; some had much, others had less; some ate to excess, others had scarcely enough to suffice nature. 'One was hungry, and the other was drunken, *methuei*, was filled to the full;' this is the sense of the word in many places of Scripture."

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, provides numerous examples where *methuo* is used in the generic sense of "filled to the full." One of them is Psalm 23:5 which says: "my cup overflows" (*methuskon* -full to the brim). Another example is Psalm 65:10: "Thou waterest its furrows abundantly [*methuson*]." Yet another is Jeremiah 31:14: "I will feast [*methuso* -satiated] the soul of the priests with abundance." Examples such as these clearly show that *methuo* is often used in Scripture in a generic sense to express full satisfaction, satiety.

3. The Implications of Paul's Admonition

No Allusion to Drunkenness. Paul's rebuke and admonition suggest that drunkenness was not the problem at the Communion table of the Corinthian church. His words of rebuke are, "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (v. 22). If drunkenness had been the problem, presumably Paul would have said, "Do you not have houses to eat and get drunk in?" The fact that Paul in his rebuke makes no allusion to "drunkenness" suggests that the problem at Corinth was not intoxication with alcoholic wine but rather one of excessive indulgence in eating and drinking.

If it were true that the Corinthian Christians were guilty of the awful sin of becoming inebriated during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Paul would have condemned their sacrilegious conduct in different and much sterner language. In the previous chapter Paul does not hesitate to call the participation of some Corinthians at pagan religious meals as "to be partners with demons" (1 Corinthians 10:20).

Then he adds: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (1 Corinthians 10:21). Earlier in the same epistle Paul categorically states that no "drunkards . . . will inherit the kingdom of God" and he

admonishes the members "not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is . . . [a] drunkard" (1 Corinthians 6:10; 5:11). On the basis of this admonition it is fair to suppose that if some got drunk at the Communion table, Paul would have warned the rest to stay away from them.

Implication of the Admonition. Paul does not use strong language in condemning the abuses occurring in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. He merely admonishes the Corinthians to satisfy their hunger at home to avoid both the indecorum that had been manifested and the condemnation to which it had exposed them: "So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another - if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home-lest you come together to be condemned" (1 Corinthians 11:33-34).

This admonition suggests that the problem at Corinth was indulgence in eating rather than intoxication by drinking alcoholic wine. Had the Corinthian church members been drunk at the Communion table, then Paul could hardly have said earlier in the same letter that in the past some of them were drunkards "but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Conclusion. In the light of the above considerations we conclude that Paul's reference in the King James Version to "drunkenness" at the Communion table of the Corinthian church, offers no support for a moderate use of alcoholic wine either privately at home or publicly at the Lord's Supper. First, because whatever was done at Corinth, was a departure from the instructions Paul had "delivered" to the church and thus their actions are more of a *warning* than an example for us. Second, because the problem at the Communion table, as we have shown, appear not to have been intoxication with alcoholic wine but indulgence in eating.

PART III: EPHESIANS 5:18

"DO NOT GET DRUNK WITH WINE"

Importance of the Text. After admonishing the Ephesians to abstain from immorality and impurity, Paul particularizes his admonition saying: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Moderationists see in this passage a clear Biblical sanction of moderate drinking. They argue that what Paul condemns here is the *abuse* and not the *moderate use* of alcoholic wine. "The condemnation of misuse of wine," writes Markus Barth, "does not preclude a proper use of alcoholic beverage."

Had Paul intended to forbid wine-drinking altogether, they claim, he would have said, as Kenneth Gentry puts it, "Drink no wine at all." Instead he said, "Be not *drunk* with wine" (Ephesians 5:18). The next phrase, "for that is debauchery" (RSV) or "wherein is excess" (KJV), is similarly interpreted as referring to the state of drunkenness and not to wine as the active principle of debauchery. Horace Bumstead, for example, maintains that "to connect *en ho* [in which] with *oinos* [wine], as some do, instead of with *methu-skesthe oino* [drunk with wine], is inconsistent with the employment of so strong a word as *methuskethe* [drunk]."

We shall examine the above claim by considering five points: (1) The Structure of the Passage,

(2) The Relative Clause, (3) Ancient and Modern Translations, (4) The Meaning of *Asotia*, and (5) Rabbinical Testimonies.

1. The Structure of the Passage

Two Contrasting Statements. The passage consists of two major statements placed in contrast (antithesis) to each other: "drunk with wine" *versus* "filled with the Spirit." The antithesis suggests that the contrast is not between moderation and excess, but between fullness of wine and fullness of the Spirit. The two statements point to an inherent incompatibility of nature and operation between the *sources* of such fullness, namely, inebriating wine and the Holy Spirit. The fact that inebriating wine and the Holy Spirit are mutually exclusive, because no one can be filled with half of each, precludes the sanction for a moderate use of intoxicating wine.

This point is made clearer by quoting the preceding text, which says: "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is," namely, that we should be filled not with ardent spirits but with the Holy Spirit. Thus, the structure of the passage suggests that Paul is not recommending a supposedly safe and moderate ingestion of wine, but a full infilling of the Holy Spirit. It is scarcely conceivable that a person "filled with the Spirit" would crave intoxicating wine.

Two Similar Passages. Numerous commentators, not themselves abstainers, illustrate this text by referring to two similar texts. The first is Luke 1:15 where the angel says to Zechariah concerning John the Baptist: "And he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit." The second passage is from the story of Pentecost and consists of two verses: "For these men are not drunk . . ." "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:15, 4).

In both of these passages the infilling of the Holy Spirit is connected to abstention from intoxicating drink. The striking similarity between these two passages and Ephesians 5:18 suggests that in the latter text also the infilling of the Holy Spirit precludes the drinking of alcoholic beverages.

In his comment on Luke 1:15, Hermann Olshausen aptly says: "Man feels the want of strengthening through spiritual influences from without; instead of seeking for these in the Holy Spirit, he in his blindness has recourse to the *natural* spirit, that is, to wine and strong drink. Therefore, according to the point of view of the Law, the Old Testament recommends abstinence from wine and strong drinks in order to preserve the soul free from all merely natural influences, and by that means to make it more susceptible of the operations of the Holy Spirit."

"Drink no Wine at All." The antithesis between wine and Holy Spirit present in Luke 1:15 and Acts 2:15, 4 may have been borrowed by Paul to express a similar truth in Ephesians 5:18. This may explain why Paul wrote "Do not get drunk with wine" instead of "Drink no wine at all." Like Luke, he may have wished to emphasize the contrast between fullness of wine and fullness of the Spirit.

Another reason that Paul may have chosen not to say "Drink no wine at all" is suggested by

1 Timothy 5:23, where he recommends the use of "a little wine" for medical purposes: "for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." ...The fact that Paul believed that there was a legitimate, though limited, use of "wine" would logically have precluded him from prohibiting the use of wine altogether in any form.

We must also remember that the generic term *oinos* "wine," as we have shown in [another section], could refer either to fermented or unfermented grape juice. Had Paul said "Drink no wine at all" without qualifications, he would have excluded even the drinking of wholesome, nourishing grape juice.

2. The Relative Clause

The Antecedent of the Relative Pronoun. Paul's admonition "Do not get drunk with wine" is followed by a warning which in the RSV is rendered "for that is debauchery." The question to be considered now is, What is debauchery? Is it wine as the causative agent of debauchery or drunkenness as a state of debauchery?

The answer depends on which of the two is taken to be the antecedent of the relative clause "*en ho* --in which." A literal translation of the Greek text would read: "And do not get drunk with wine, in which [*en ho*] is debauchery [*asotia* -literally, 'unsavableness']." The RSV rendering of "*en ho* -in which" with "for that" makes the condition of being drunk with wine, rather than wine itself, the subject of "debauchery." This construction of the sentence, as Leon Field points out, "is expressly founded on the assumption that the use of wine is elsewhere allowed in the New Testament, and not on any exegetical necessities in the text itself."

From a grammatical viewpoint, the subject of "in which" can be either the previous word "wine" or the drunkenness spoken of in the preceding clause. This fact is recognized by such commentators as R. C. H. Lenski, who says: "'In which' refers to the condition of being drunk with wine or to 'wine' as here used, a means for becoming drunk." Robert Young, the author of the *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, renders the relative clause "in which" accurately in his Bible translation: "And be not drunk with wine, *in which* is dissoluteness, but be filled in the Spirit."

Preference for "Wine." Historically, numerous translators and commentators have seen "wine" rather than the state of drunkenness as the antecedent of "in which." The reason is suggested by the position of *oino* ("with wine"), which in Greek comes immediately after the verb "drunk" and before the relative "in which." Though the immediate juxtaposition of "wine" between the verb and the relative is not absolutely determinative, it strongly suggests that the warning of the relative clause is about wine as the active cause of dissoluteness rather than drunkenness as a state of dissoluteness.

Support for this view is provided also by the fact that the words "Do not get drunk with wine," as *The Interpreter's Bible* commentary points out, "are cited from Proverbs 23:31 (the LXX according to Codex A)."²⁸ If Paul is quoting Proverbs 23:31 as found in the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, then we have reason to believe that Paul is warning against wine as such, since the text in Proverbs condemns the use of intoxicating wine ("Do not look at

wine when it is red"), rather than its abuse.

Ancient Translations. This understanding of Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation of intoxicating wine itself is supported by numerous ancient and modern translations. Tertullian (about A. D. 160-225), who is regarded as the father of Latin Christianity, renders the text as follows: "*et nolite inebriari vino, in quo est luxuria*" ("And be not inebriated with wine, in which is voluptuousness"). The connection between *vino* "with wine" and *quo* "which" is unmistakable in this Latin translation, because the relative *quo* has the same neuter gender of *vino*, upon which it depends.

Besides his translation, Tertullian reveals his understanding of the text as a prohibition against wine drinking in his usage of the text in his treatise *Against Marcion*, where he says: "'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess,'-a precept which is suggested by the passage of the prophet, where the seducers of the consecrated [Nazirites] to drunkenness are rebuked: 'Ye gave wine to my holy ones to drink' [Amos 2:12]. This prohibition from drink was given also to the high priest Aaron and his sons."

About two centuries after Tertullian, Jerome translated Ephesians 5:18 in exactly the same way in his famous Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate (about A. D. 400). The Vulgate has served through the centuries as the official Latin Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

Jerome's understanding of this text as an admonition to abstain from the use of wine is indicated also by his usage of the text. In a letter to Laeta, a lady who wrote to him asking how she should bring up her infant daughter, Jerome says: "Let her learn even now not to drink wine 'wherein is excess'" (Ephesians 5:18). In another letter to Eustochium, Jerome relates the story of a noble Roman lady,

Paula, who on her visit to the Holy Land "called to mind the cave in which Lot found refuge, and with tears in her eyes warned the virgins her companions to beware of 'wine wherein is excess' [Ephesians 5:18]; for it was to this that the Moabites and Ammonites owe their origin." Jerome's understanding of Ephesians 5:18 is significant since he is regarded as the most famous early Christian translator of the Bible.

Modern Translations. Several classical and modern translations have followed the Vulgate in its faithful literalness. For example, the French Synodal Version reads: "Ne vous enivrez pas de vin: car le vin porte à la dissolution" ("Do not inebriate yourselves with wine, for wine leads to dissoluteness").

To remove any possibility for misunderstanding, the translators have repeated the word "wine" in the relative clause. Other French translations, such as the David Martin and the Version d'Ostervald also establish a clear connection between wine and the relative clause. Both read: "Ne vous enivrez point de vin, dans lequel il y a de la dissolution" ("Do not inebriate yourselves with wine, in which there is dissolution").

In English one could argue that the antecedent of "in which" is the drunkenness spoken of in the

preceding clause. This uncertainty is caused by the fact that in the English language the relative pronoun "which" has no gender, and consequently can be connected to any antecedent. In French, however, "lequel" ("in which") is masculine and thus can only refer to "vin" ("wine") which is also masculine. The connection between the two is unmistakable in these French translations.

The same clear connection between "wine" and "dissoluteness" is found in the two Spanish versions, Cipriano de Valera (A. D. 1900) and Nácar, Colunga, where the relative clause reads respectively: "en el cual hay disolucion" ("in which is dissoluteness") and "en el cual está el desenfreno" ("in which is excess"). In both instances the relative "cual" ("which") is preceded by the masculine article "el," because it refers to the masculine noun "vino" ("wine"). The connection is even clearer in the Spanish Catholic Version which reads "vino fomento da la injuria" ("wine which causes harm"). A similar rendering is found in the margin of the New American Standard Bible which reads: "wine, in which is dissipation."

The Good News German Bible ("Die Gute Nachricht") provides another clear example where wine is the subject of the relative clause: "Betrinkt euch nicht; denn der Wein macht haltlos" ("Do not get drunk; because wine makes one unsteady or unprincipled"). The Italian Protestant version Riveduta by Giovanni Luzzi, as well as the Catholic Version produced by the Pontifical Biblical Institute, follow the sentence construction of the French and Spanish versions cited above. The Riveduta reads: "E non v'inebriate di vino; esso porta alla dissolutezza" ("And do not inebriate yourselves with wine; it [wine] leads to dissoluteness"). The antecedent of "esso" ("it") is unmistakably "vino," because it is of the same masculine gender as "vino," since it depends upon it.

The sampling of ancient and modern translations cited above should suffice to show that historically many translators have understood the relative clause of Ephesians 5:18 as representing a condemnation not of drunkenness but of wine itself. If these translators are correct, as I believe they are for the reasons mentioned above, then Ephesians 5:18 provides a powerful indictment against the actual use of intoxicating wine and not merely against its abuse. A look at the noun *asotia*, rendered by the RSV as "debauchery," will help us appreciate the nature of the condemnation.

3. The Meaning of *Asotia*

Moral Dissoluteness. The noun *asotia* occurs in two other places in the New Testament, namely, in Titus 1:6 and in 1 Peter 4:4, and in both places it is rendered as "profligacy" in the RSV. The word is compounded of the negative *a* and a noun from the verb *sozein*, to save. Literally it signifies the absence of salvation—a state of hopeless moral dissoluteness. Albert Barnes explains that *asotia* denotes that "which is unsafe, not to be recovered, lost beyond recovery; then that which is abandoned to sensuality and lust; dissoluteness, debauchery, revelry. The meaning here [Ephesians 5:18] is that all this follows the use of wine."

The possible connection between wine as the causing agent of "drunkenness" and *asotia*, the condition of moral dissoluteness, suggests that the passage views not only the abuse but also the use of wine as intrinsically evil. Leon C. Field expresses this view, noting that "it would be

difficult to indicate any other arrangement of the words of this passage which would so clearly and forcibly express the idea that insalvableness *inheres* in wine as its essential characteristic."

Alcohol Affects the Mind. The reason that the use of intoxicating beverages can easily place a person in a state of *asotia*, that is, of moral corruption inimical to the reception of saving truth, is that alcohol deranges the functions of the mind, which is the channel through which the Holy Spirit works. This is why Paul urges Christians to be filled not with wine but with the Holy Spirit.

"Let Christians," counsels Albert Barnes, "when about to indulge in a glass of wine, think of this admonition [Ephesians 5:18]. Let them remember that their bodies should be the temple of the Holy Ghost rather than a receptacle for intoxicating drinks. Was any man ever made a better Christian by the use of wine? Was any minister ever better fitted to counsel an anxious sinner, or to pray, or to preach the gospel, by the use of intoxicating drinks? Let the history of wine-drinking and intemperate clergymen answer."

4. Rabbinical Testimonies

Condemnation of Wine. Rabbinical literature provides several examples to support and illustrate our interpretation of Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation not only of the abuse but also of the use of intoxicating wine. We shall cite several examples in order to dispel the mistaken notion that the Jews, like the Bible writers, saw nothing intrinsically evil in the moderate use of wine. This popular notion has greatly influenced the interpretation of those Biblical teachings dealing with alcoholic beverages.

In their commentary on the New Testament based on rabbinic comments, Strack and Billerbeck give numerous rabbinical statements under Ephesians 5:18. They introduce such statements, by noting: "In rabbinical writings there are numerous warnings against wine." For our purpose we shall quote the following statements cited by these authors:

"Wine separates man from the way of life and leads him in the pathway of death, because wine leads to idolatry... Thus we learn that wherever [Scripture] speaks of wine, there you find also dissoluteness ... For this Isaiah said: 'The strength of the law is in salvation, but the strength of wine is in sorrow. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine' (Isaiah 5:22). For this we read: 'Who has a woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? ... Those who tarry long over wine' (Proverbs 23:29-30). When wine enters the body, out goes sense; where ever there is wine there is no understanding."

Similar rabbinic warnings against wine are found in the compilation of Talmudic statements on wine by Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz. Here are some: "Whenever wine enters a person, his mind becomes confused." "Rabbi Isaac said, 'The evil spirit entices a person only while he is eating and drinking, and when one becomes merry by wine, then the evil spirit has the mastery over him. . . . The drinking of wine causes the evil inclinations to be awakened within a person, as it is written, 'And they made their father [Lot] drink wine that night etc.' (Genesis 19:33)."

Permanent Prohibition. Another statement attributed to Rabbi Eliezer makes the prohibition

against drinking wine a permanent law for all times: "Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Aaron, 'Do not drink wine nor strong drink.' Do not assume that this injunction against wine and strong drink was only for the past, namely as long as the holy Temple at Jerusalem was still in existence, as it is written, 'When ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation,' but you have to guard against wine for all times to come, for wine is an omen of curse."

An extreme example of how evil intoxicating beverages were in the mind of some Jews is the rabbinic statement that "Samuel did not pray in a house that contained intoxicating drinks (Talmud Babli Erubin 65a)."

Conclusion. The foregoing analysis of Ephesians 5:18 has shown that this text provides *no Biblical sanction for moderate use of alcoholic beverages*. On the contrary, the structure of the passage as well as the possible connection between "wine" and the relative clause, a connection recognized by numerous ancient and modern translations, makes this text *a most powerful Biblical indictment of intoxicating wine*.

The intent of Paul in this passage is to show the irreconcilable contrast that exists between the spirit of fermented wine and the Holy Spirit. In the life of a believer the two are mutually exclusive. Summing up, the thought of Ephesians 5:18-19 can be paraphrased as follows: "Do not get drunk with wine, because the use of wine places a person in a state of *asotia*, that is, of moral corruption inimical to the reception of saving truth. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Find enjoyment not in the stimulation of wine but in the inspiration of the Spirit who causes you to sing and make music in your heart to the Lord."

Abstinence in Acts 24:25. The New Testament writers retain the idea of abstinence in their use of *enkrateia*. The first occurrence of the word is in Acts 24:25 as one of the topics presented by Paul to Felix and Drusilla: "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance [*enkrateias*], and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (KJV). Felix was an unjust governor, addicted to licentious indulgence and living in adultery with Drusilla. In view of the notorious cruelty and licentiousness of the guilty pair, it is evident that when Paul spoke to them of *enkrateia*, his theme was not moderation but abstinence from all unlawful and sinful practices.

Wycliffe correctly renders *enkrateia* in this text by "chastitie." This meaning is most evident in 1 Corinthians 7:9 where Paul uses the verbal form to describe the same virtue of chastity: "But if they cannot exercise self-control [*enkrateuomai*] they should marry."

Abstinence in 1 Corinthians 9:25. In the same epistle Paul uses the verb a second time in a way which clearly includes the idea of abstinence: "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things [*panta enkrateuetai*]. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Corinthians 9:25, RSV). The KJV renders the verb in question "is temperate in all things."

Some appeal to this passage to defend the moderate use of alcoholic beverages. They believe that in this passage the apostle teaches Christians to be temperate, that is, moderate, in the use of all things including alcoholic beverages. This represents a misinterpretation of the text which has

been influenced by inaccurate modern translations.

The older translations recognize that the true meaning of the verb in this passage is abstinence, not moderation. The Latin Vulgate renders it "*ab omnibus se abstinet*" ("he abstains himself from all things"). Wycliffe has the same rendering, "absteyneth hym fro alle thingis." Tyndale, Cranmer and the Geneva version follow the same translation.

This meaning is supported by the allusion to the training of athletes for the ancient games. Commentators give abundant illustrative references from ancient authors. Adam Clarke, for example, quotes the stoic philosopher Epictetus (about A.D. 100) who wrote:

"Do you wish to gain the prize at the Olympic games? Consider the requisite preparations and the consequences: You must observe a strict regimen; must live on food which you dislike; you must abstain from all delicacies; must exercise yourself at the necessary and prescribed times both in heat and cold; you must drink nothing cooling; *take no wine as formerly.*"

In his *De Arte Poetica* Horace has the famous lines which Francis translates as follows: "The youth who hopes the Olympic prize to gain, All arts must try, and every toil sustain; The extremes of heat and cold must often prove; And shun the weakening joys of wine and love [*Abstinit Venere et Bacco* -literally, "he abstains from love and wine"]."

In light of what we know about the rigorous abstinent life-style of ancient athletes, Paul's phrase *panta enkrateuetai* can be rendered correctly as "he abstains from all [harmful] things." This meaning is recognized by several commentators. Walter Grundmann explains that the verb under discussion in 1 Corinthians 9:25 "simply tells us that for the sake of the goal toward which he strives . . . he [the athlete] *refrains* from all the things which might offend or hamper." Similarly F. W. Grosheide comments that the meaning of the verb is "[he] trains himself by doing or *taking nothing* that would harm."

In the very next verses Paul illustrates this meaning by making a personal application. Continuing with the image of the athlete, he says, "Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). Such language scarcely supports the moderation view of temperance as a prudent use of intoxicating beverages. It rather implies a stern, self-denying discipline. It implies that to qualify for acceptance as citizens of heaven, we must subdue our craving for intoxicating substances by the power of divine grace (Philippians 4:13).

Abstinence in other Passages. The idea of abstinence is also present in the other passages in which *enkrateia* occurs. We shall make only a brief reference to them. In Galatians 5:22 this word stands as the completion and crown of the fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [*enkrateia*]; against such there is no law." The fruit of the Spirit, including the last named, stands in opposition to the "works of the flesh" enumerated in the preceding verse and among which "drunkenness" is prominent. This suggests that *enkrateia* is seen by Paul especially as the antithesis of drunkenness.

In 2 Peter 1:6 *enkrateia* occurs among the list of virtues, sometimes called "Peter's ladder," and is rendered "self-control" in the RSV. The Vulgate renders it *abstinentia*, and Wycliffe "absteynence." The adjective form *enkrate* occurs once in Titus 1:8 where it corresponds to *nephalion* ("abstinent") in 1 Timothy 3:2.

From this survey it is clear that the admonitions to sobriety and temperance in the New Testament call for a moderate use of all good things and total abstinence from all that is injurious. Applied to alcoholic beverages, the New Testament teaches total abstinence. Our study of the apostolic exhortations to sobriety expressed through the terms *sophron*, *nepho*, *nephalios*, and *enkrateia* has shown that these terms complement one another in emphasizing the Christian calling to mental vigilance and physical abstinence.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion emerging from the investigation conducted in this chapter into the apostolic teachings regarding alcoholic beverages is abundantly clear. Contrary to the prevailing perception, the New Testament is amazingly consistent in its teaching of abstinence from the use of alcoholic beverages.

We have found that the texts commonly used to support the moderationist view provide no support to such a view. On the contrary, some of them openly contradict the moderationist view.

The irony of the charge in Acts 2:13 that the apostles were drunk on *gleukos*, that is, grape juice, their common beverage, provides an indirect but important proof of their abstinent life-style and inferentially of the life-style of their Master.

Paul's reference to "drunkenness" at the Communion table of the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 11:21) offers no support for a moderate use of alcoholic wine, because whatever was done at Corinth was a departure from the instructions Paul had delivered to the church. Thus, their conduct constitutes a warning rather than an example for us. Furthermore, our study of the meaning of the verb *methuo* ("satiated") and of the implications of Paul's admonitions suggests quite clearly that the problem at Corinth was indulgence in eating rather than intoxication with alcoholic wine.

The intent of Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:18 ("Do not get drunk with wine") is not to sanction the moderate use of wine, but to show the irreconcilable contrast between the spirit of wine and presence of the Holy Spirit. The structure of the passage, as well as the possible connection between "wine" and the relative clause-recognized by many ancient and modern translations-makes this text one of the most powerful Biblical indictments against intoxicating wine.

The apostolic admonitions to sobriety and temperance call for a moderate use of all good things and total abstinence from all that is harmful. Our study of the Greek terms (*sophron*, *nepho*, *nephalios*, and *enkrateia*) used in the apostolic admonitions has shown how these terms complement one another in emphasizing the Christian need for both mental vigilance and

physical abstinence from intoxicating substances such as alcoholic beverages.

The fundamental reason given by Peter and Paul for their call to a life of vigilance and abstinence is eschatological, namely, preparation to live in the holy presence of Christ at His soon coming." (This above section on was written by Dr. Samuel Bacchiocchi and can be found in its entirety with references on his web site [Wine In The Bible: A Biblical Study On The Use Of Alcoholic Beverages.](#))

The Bible says, "Wine is a mocker [obviously fermented here], Strong drink is a brawler [causes violence], and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." (Proverbs 20:1) A 1987 Gallup Poll indicates that 1 in 4 families are troubled by alcohol. This means that more than 61[+] million Americans are affected by some alcohol-related problems such as retarded children (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome), divorce, and violence in the home, crime, sickness and death.

Now, I would like to cover a few more often asked questions on our web site Bible-Christian.org:

What does this verse mean? Proverbs 31: 7 says, "Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." "At first this advice seems to contradict such prohibitions as in Proverbs 23:31. However, it is obvious in context that the advice is given in irony to those who have drifted so far from God as to be 'appointed to destruction' [die, or Lit. "sons of passing away" NKJV] anyway, Proverbs 31:8." (Dr. Henry M. Morris Defender's Bible)

Didn't God have the Old Testament priests offer fermented wine to the Lord on the sacrifices? "All the best of the oil, all the best of the new wine and the grain, their first fruits which they offer to the Lord, I have given them to you. 13 Whatever first ripe fruit is in their land, which they bring to the Lord, shall be yours." (Numbers 18:12,13)

"In this passage, all the best of the wine [tirosh, grape juice] is associated with the best of the oil and of the wheat, denoting the most valuable natural productions-the direct gift of God.

"It is hardly to be credited [that this was fermented wine], when in the law (Leviticus 2:11) all leaven was forbidden as an offering, that God should require a fermented liquor which, of all others, is the most direct cause of wretchedness and woe in this life, and of eternal ruin in the future, as a religious offering [is unthinkable].

"Leaven was forbidden with all sacrifices, whether they were meat or peace offerings Exodus 23:18; 34:25; Leviticus 6:17; 7:12; 10:12. As all the other articles offered in worship were in their nature pure and harmless-were essential to the comfort and wellbeing of man, it is [impossible] that the [alcoholic] wine should be the one exception.

When the patriarch Isaac blessed his son Jacob he said, "Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine." (tirosh, grape juice) (Genesis 27:28) The blessing was on the actual growth of the field-that which 'the dew and

fatness of the earth produced,' these were the direct gifts of God." ([Bible Wines](#) William Patton)

The above information would make it impossible for Jesus to have offered up at His Last Supper a fermented drink as the First Communion. Offering up alcohol to His Heavenly Father would have been a sacrilege of the worst kind!

1. Is the "Fruit of the Vine" Alcoholic Wine?

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

It is true that the phrase "fruit of the vine" was *sometimes* used as equivalent to *oinos* (wine), but that does not mean that the wine used at the Last Supper must have been fermented. We have shown in Chapter 2 that *oinos*, like the Hebrew *yayin*, was a generic term for the expressed juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, uses *oinos* to translate *yayin* and *tirosh* in such passages as Jeremiah 40:10-11 and Judges 9:13, where the idea of fermentation is *excluded*.

Mosaic law regarding "unfermented things" (Exodus 13:7) are indicative of different religious traditions among the Jews. The Orthodox Jews, who are conservative, use mostly unfermented wine, while the Reformed Jews, who are liberal, use mostly fermented wine.

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

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

This translation is confirmed by Robert Young, author of *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. In his *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible*, Young renders Exodus 12:14, 19 as

follows: "...for anyone eating anything fermented from the first day till the seventh day, even that person hath been cut off from Israel. ...anything fermented ye do not eat, in all your dwellings ye do not eat leavened things."

Thus the entire passage of Exodus 13:6-7 may with literal accuracy be rendered: "Seven days you shall eat of unfermented things, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unfermented things shall be eaten for seven days; no fermented thing shall be seen with you in all your territory."

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

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

The exclusion of fermented things during the Passover feast was *not* merely to remind the Israelites of the haste with which they left Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:3), having no time to put leaven in their dough. This is evident from Exodus 12:8, 39 where the command to eat unleavened bread was given before the departure from Egypt, when there was plenty of time for the dough to rise.

The primary purpose of the law against leaven is found in the symbolic meaning Scripture attaches to leaven which, as we have seen, is sin and corruption. Ellen White brings out this purpose of the law, saying: "Among the Jews, leaven was sometimes used as an emblem of sin.

At the time of the Passover the people were directed to remove all the leaven from their houses, as they were to put away sin from their hearts."If ferment, the symbol of corruption and insincerity, was out of place at the Jewish Passover, how much more unsuitable it should be at the Christian Lord's Supper!

The symbolic, moral significance attached to leaven is further indicated by its exclusion from the cereal offering (Leviticus 2:11), the sin offering (Leviticus 6:17), the consecration offering (Exodus 29:2), the Nazarite offering (Num. 6:15) and the showbread (Leviticus 24:5-9). But salt, because it represents preservation from corruption, was required with sacrifices: "With all your offerings you shall offer salt" (Leviticus 2:13). If leaven was not allowed with the sacrifices, which was a type of Christ's atoning blood, how much more out of place would have

been fermented wine to represent His atoning blood!

Jesus understood the meaning of the letter and spirit of the Mosaic law regarding "unfermented things," as indicated by His teaching (Matthew 16:6, 12). This gives us reason to believe that the cup He "blessed" and gave to His disciples did not contain any "fermented thing" prohibited by Scripture. We cannot imagine that our Lord disregarded a Biblical command by choosing fermented wine to perpetuate the memory of His sacrifice, of which all the other sacrifices were but types.

Consistency of Symbol. A second reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is the consistency and beauty of the blood symbolism which cannot be fittingly represented by fermented wine. Leaven, we have seen, was used by Christ to represent the corrupt teachings of the Pharisees and is viewed in Scripture as an emblem of sin and corruption.

Could Christ have offered His disciples a cup of fermented wine to symbolize His untainted blood, shed for the remission of our sins? Could the redeeming and cleansing blood of Christ have been represented aptly by an intoxicating cup which stands in the Scripture for human depravity and divine indignation?

We cannot conceive that Christ bent over to bless in grateful prayer a cup containing alcoholic wine which the Scripture warns us not to look at (Proverbs 23:31). A cup that intoxicates is a cup of cursing and not "the cup of blessing" (1 Corinthians 10:16); it is "the cup of demons" and not "the cup of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 10:21).

Up to that moment the redeeming blood of Christ had been represented by the blood of goats and bulls (Hebrews 9:13-14); henceforth the new emblem was to be the wine of the Lord's Supper. The blood of Christ was free from defilement and corruption. There was no taint of sin in His veins. "He whom God raised up saw no corruption" (Acts 13:37) either in life or in death. To symbolize the purity of His blood (life) poured out for the remission of sin, Jesus took a cup and over its content, declared: "This is *my* blood" (Matthew 26:28). The content of the cup could hardly have been fermented wine, because the latter cannot properly symbolize the incorruptible and precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Fermented wine is an appropriate emblem for decay and death, for fermentation destroys most of the nutrients found in grape juice. On the other hand, unfermented grape juice, on account of its innocent and nutritious properties, is a proper symbol of the blessings of salvation and immortal life bestowed upon us through the blood of Christ.

His blood is said to purify our "conscience from dead works" (Hebrews 9:14), but fermented wine weakens our moral inhibitions and awakens our baser passions, thus causing the defilement of our consciences. Can such a product properly represent the cleansing power of Christ's redeeming blood? Hardly so. It is more fitted to represent moral disease and guilt than pardon and purification.

The value of a symbol is determined by its capacity to help us conceptualize and experience the spiritual reality it represents. Grape juice untouched by fermentation supplies life-sustaining nutrients to our bodies, thus it has the capacity for helping us to conceptualize and to experience the assurance of salvation represented by Christ's blood.

Ellen White aptly says: "The Passover wine, untouched by fermentation, is on the table. These emblems Christ employs to represent His own unblemished sacrifice. Nothing corrupted by fermentation, the symbol of sin and death, could represent the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot'" (1 Peter 1:19).

The Language of the Last Supper. A third reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is suggested by the language in which its institution is recorded. The words have been preserved with singular uniformity in the synoptic Gospels and almost in the same form in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We will briefly consider three phrases of the narrative.

After blessing and breaking the bread Jesus "*took a cup*" (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; cf. Luke 22:17; 1 Corinthians 11:25). Most authorities suggest that the reference is to the third of the four cups of the Passover meal, called the "cup of benediction" (*Cos ha-Berachah*). This cup by which the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted retained its name as "the cup of blessing" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Evidently the name was derived from the blessing Christ pronounced over its contents. Such could never be the intoxicating wine of which God clearly disapproves in the Scripture. As mentioned earlier, we cannot imagine Christ bending over prayerfully to bless a cup containing intoxicating wine. The supposition is sacrilegious. Such a cup would be a cup of cursing rather than a cup of blessing, "the cup of demons" rather than "the cup of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 10:21).

After blessing the cup, Jesus gave it to His disciples and said: "*Drink of it, all of you*" (Matthew 26:27, cf. Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17). Christ's invitation to drink the memorial cup of His blood is extended to "*all*" without exception. There is no reason that anyone should refuse the cup, if its content is unfermented, nutritious grape juice. But if its content is fermented, intoxicating wine, many of Christ's faithful followers cannot and should not partake of it.

To imagine that Christ would sanction such ill-effects by personally offering a sizeable cup of alcoholic wine to His disciples, is tantamount to destroying the moral integrity of His character. Believers who truly accept Christ as their sinless Savior instinctively recoil from such a thought.

Christ commands "*all*" of His followers to drink the cup. If the content of the cup were alcoholic wine, not all Christians could drink. There are some to whom alcohol in any form is very harmful. Young children participate at the Lord's table should certainly not touch wine.

There are those to whom the simple taste or smell of alcohol awakens in them a dormant or

conquered craving for alcohol. Could Christ, who taught us to pray "Lead us not into temptation," have made His memorial table a place of irresistible temptation for some and of danger for all?...

Another significant element of the language of the Last Supper is the phrase "*fruit of the vine*," used by Jesus to describe the content of the cup. We noticed earlier that this designation best applies to natural, unfermented juice. Fermented wine is not the natural "fruit" of the vine but is the result of disintegrating forces. Thus, the very designation used by Christ, "fruit of the vine" supports the unfermented nature of the wine used at the Last Supper.

The Survival of the Practice. A fourth reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is the survival of such a practice among certain Christian groups or churches. A significant example is the apocryphal *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle*, which circulated in the third century.

A heavenly voice instructs the local Bishop Plato, saying: "Read the Gospel and bring as an offering the holy bread; and having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when He rose from the dead on the third day." This is a clear testimony of the use of freshly pressed grape juice in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Another indication is provided by the view expressed by Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200), Bishop of Lyons, that the communion bread and wine are the first fruits offered to God: "Giving directions to His disciples to offer to God the first-fruits of His own created things... He [Christ] took that created thing, bread, and gave thanks, and said, 'This is My body.' And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong, He confessed to be His blood."

[T]he 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. The reader is referred to these authors for documentation and information about these oriental churches.

Our inquiry into several aspects of the communion wine, such as the Jewish Passover wine, the language of the Last Supper, the Passover law of fermentation, the consistency of the symbol, and the survival of the use of unfermented grape juice at the Lord's Supper, has shown that all of these indicate our Lord used and commanded the use of unfermented, nutritious grape juice to perpetuate the memory of His blood, shed for the remission of our sins.

Here is a comment we received from a person who strongly believes that the Bible is teaching us it is alright to drink as long as we don't get drunk: **"If I may digress, I would like to add that being a drunkard is obviously a bad thing. So is being a glutton. However, we are not told to stop eating; we are just told to not be gluttons. We are not told to not drink wine, we are told to not be drunkards."**

This is an interesting statement, and kind of sums up what many Christians are teaching these

days, as compared with the Bible and teaching of godly Christians in days gone by. That is, they believe as long as you don't get drunk, it is ok to drink. This could not be further from the truth, and I encourage you to read another article I have written on this very thing. It is called ["Is it alright for Christians to drink alcohol?"](#) It addresses this very issue.

Let me just say that you are putting an assumption in with a fact. The assumption is that the word 'wine' in the Bible is always alcoholic. So if you read this into your statement. The statement itself is flawed. It is like asking the question, When did you stop beating your wife? Since the word 'wine' in the Bible is not always alcoholic, then it would be alright to drink some wine (grape juice) in moderation, even as Paul told Timothy to do. Also, we are not told that we will go to hell if we tell one lie, but we are told that those who practice lying will not go to heaven. Does that mean it is ok to tell some lies? No, and the same is true of drinking alcohol.

The Bible does not say if you drink one drink of alcohol you are not going to heaven. It does say that if a person is practicing drinking or a drunkard they will not go to heaven. That is, of course, if they don't get right with the Lord. Jesus can save us no matter what, if we ask Him to save us! Knowing this, should we get a close to the fire as possible? Or should we get as far away from the fire as possible?

I know that what I am teaching flies in the face of what many of the churches teach. But my question to you is, "Are you willing to check it out for yourself, or are you going to assume that the churches are always right?" You might be interested to know that these same churches did not always teach that it was alright to drink alcohol in moderation.

Look at their historical doctrines, and you might be surprised at what you find, probably even in your own church. And look at how much heartache it has caused in Christian homes, since they did start teaching it was ok to drink in "moderation."

I believe this is the reason that even some translations of the Bible have been translated the way they were in some references to alcohol, and that is because of the prevailing views of alcohol in the society when a translation is made.

Reading in the Greek and Hebrew you see a view of fermented or "strong drink" as harmful, not helpful, with the exception of using it to pour on a wound. (Luke 10:34) or using it for a dying person to kill the pain (Proverbs 31: 6). Even as they offered it to Jesus on the cross, but when He had tasted it he would not drink it, Matthew 27:34.

Also Proverbs 31: 7 says, "Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." "At first this advice seems to contradict such prohibitions as in Proverbs 23:31. However, it is obvious in context that the advice is given in irony to those who have drifted so far from God as to be 'appointed to destruction' [die, or Lit. "sons of passing away" NKJV] anyway, Proverbs 31:8." (Dr. Henry M. Morris *Defender's Bible*)

Some people think that all believers drank alcohol in the Bible so they bring up passages like

this one in 1 Samuel. Here it talks about when Hannah was at the tabernacle praying for a baby, "And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.

"Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, 'How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!' But Hannah answered and said, 'No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit.

"I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now.'" (1 Samuel 1:12-16) She was not drinking a fermented drink or getting drunk, because she did not want to be considered "a wicked woman."

Is Paul endorsing the consumption of alcoholic beverages when he instructs Timothy to drink wine for his stomach's sake in I Timothy 5:23?

We do get a little insight into how the early apostles lived by looking at I Timothy 5:23. Here Paul tells Timothy, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine (grape juice) for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities."

They seem to be so afraid that if they drank any grape juice it might be fermented, that they would not even try it. At least this is the experience of Timothy. Paul was suggesting that a little grape juice would be good for Timothy's stomach. (My doctor tells me that the dark Concord grape juice is good also for your heart. He suggests a couple glasses a day.)

The disciples of Jesus went on the verses from the Old Testament like Proverbs 23:31-32 that warn us "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper."

Another good question is about references like: 1Timothy 3:2, 3; Titus 1:7; 1Timothy 3:8 and Titus 2:3.

The New International Version translates 1Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 here as, "not given to drunkenness." This translation does not make any sense at all, in light of Proverbs 23:31-32, and the rest of the injunctions against any drinking of alcohol by Paul and the other Apostles. **(So be very careful which versions of the Bible you study! The best version by far, in this area of alcohol, is the New King James Version.)**

Many, if not most, of your older commentaries would contradict this phrase from the Greek being translated as "not given to drunkenness" as the NIV translates it. This translation is contrary to almost all historical references and commentaries on this phrase. Here is what a very respected commentary *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states about this passage:

"2. Blameless. Irreproachable; the same Greek word is used in 5:7 and 6:14. **Vigilant.** ASV,

temperate. Originally meant '*temperate* in use of wine,' but here it is to be taken figuratively, since the next verse forbids intemperance." As seen earlier in the article 'temperance' is taught all through the New Testament so why would an elder of church be allowed to be intemperate?

This just shows the bias of the New International Version for the use of alcohol, and is a reflection of the times we are living in. Many Christians today want to believe that it is alright to drink alcohol, and that against the plain teaching of the Word of God, and historical evidence! (Look at our article *Is it alright for Christians to drink Alcohol?*)

Paul has said in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that if a person is a drunkard they are not even going to heaven. How could a person who is, as the NIV states it, 'not given to drunkenness' be a good example of a believer? How many times could he get drunk before he would be considered unqualified or unfit for the office of bishop?

Jesus Himself says that if we even start to drink with drunkards we are not going to heaven: "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 24:46-51

In references such as 1 Timothy 3:2-3 and Titus 1:7, we have the phrase, "not given to wine" this is taken by some to mean, "not to be addicted" to alcohol. But in reality the Greek word used here is, "mee-paroinon", literally, not at, by near, or with wine (alcohol). According to Paul, total abstinence is an indispensable qualification for bishops (pastors)."

"'Not given to wine.' The Apostle Paul, in this first letter to Timothy, whom he calls his 'own son in the faith,' names thirteen qualifications for a bishop or pastor. The language is imperative [commands], 'must be' thus designating that these qualifications are indispensable. He [spoke] with authority, being inspired of God.

"It is not my purpose to examine to examine each of these thirteen [qualifications], but to call attention to three of them, as bearing particularly on the duty of abstinence. In the Authorized Version [KJV], we read, 'Vigilant, sober, not given to wine.' [in the New King James these three words are temperate, sober-minded, not given to wine.]

"[W]e must look at the Greek words used by the apostle. *Vigilant* [temperate NKJV]-The Greek is *neephalion*, which Donnegan's *Lexicon* renders 'abstemious that abstains, especially from wine.' Hence, 'sober, discreet circumspect, cautious.'

"*Robinson's New Testament Lexicon* defines the word, 'Sober, temperate, especially in respect to wine.' In the adjective form, the word occurs only 1 Timothy 3: 2, 11, and Titus 2: 2, from

the verb *neepho*, which Donnegan defines, 'To live abstemiously, to abstain from wine.' (See *Bible Wines* William Patton) *Green's New Testament Lexicon*, 'To be sober, not intoxicated; metaphorically, to be vigilant, circumspect.'

"*Sober*- The Greek is *sóphrona*. Donnegan, 'That is, of sound mind and good understanding; sounds in intellect, not deranged; intelligent, discreet, prudent, or wise.' Green 'Sound; of a sound mind, sane, staid, temperate, discreet. Bloomfield, 'Sober-minded, orderly.'

"*Not given to wine*- The Greek is *mee-paroinon*: *mee*, a negative particle, *not*; *paroinon*, compounded of *para*, a preposition governing the genitive (of, from, on the part of), the dative (at, by, near, with), the accusative (together, with, to towards, by, near, at, next to); and *oinos*, wine. Literally, not at, by, near, or with wine. This looks considerably like *total abstinence*. It applies equally to private habits and public conduct.

"Notice the care steps of the progress. He must be *neephalion*, abstinent, sober in body, that he may be *sóphrona*, sound in mind, and that his influence may be unimpaired, mee-parion, not with or near wine. We find in this passage no [allowance] for the moderate use of intoxicating wine, but the reverse, the obligation to abstain totally.

"That both Paul and Timothy understood that total abstinence was an essential qualification for the Christian pastor, is evident from the compliance of Timothy. In this same letter, v. 23 Paul advises Timothy, 'Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy [your] stomach's sake and thine [your] often infirmities.'

"The fact is plain that Timothy, in strict accordance with the direction, 'not given to wine,' that is, not with or near wine, was a total abstainer. The recommendation to 'use a little wine' is exceptional, and strictly medicinal." (See *Bible Wines* William Patton)

The second type of reference that has caused confusion to some, are the ones that talk about the conduct of deacons 1 Timothy 3:8 and Titus 2:3."not given to much wine." (KJV, NKJV) In order to understand these verses we will need to understand a popular vice of that time. That was to drink a lot of unfermented wine. They used various methods to promote thirst. These drinkers might continue drinking all night at their feasts.

Excessive drinking, even of non-alcoholic drinks corresponded to gluttony-the excessive use of food. Paul is simply guarding the deacons against a vice of the day. It would be similar in our day to "bulimia" (eating or drinking to the point of being gorged and then vomiting). This is unbecoming behavior for a Christian in any age!

William Patton says about these verses: "1 Timothy 3:8, Deacons-"not given to much wine." This is held as evidence not only that they might use some wine, but also that the wine was intoxicating.

"The Greek word *prosko* occurs twenty-four times, and is eight times rendered beware; six times, take heed; four, gave heed; one, giving heed; two, gave attendance; one, attended; one,

had regard; one, given to wine.

"Robinson's rendering is, 'to give or devote one's self to anything;' and other lexicons, 'be addicted to, engage in, be occupied with,' as in 1 Timothy 1:4; 3:8. The deacons of the primitive churches were converts mostly from idolatry, and in their unconverted state were accustomed to [gluttony] and sensuality.

"In the previous pages, we have seen that those who were dissipated and drinkers preferred [sometimes] the wine whose strength had been broken by the filter, because it enabled them to drink largely without becoming intoxicated.

"They used various methods to promote thirst. These drinkers continued at times all night at their feasts. 'Excessive drinking, even of uninebriating drinks, was a vice prevalent in the days of St. Paul, and corresponded to gluttony, also common-the excessive use of food..'-Bible Commentary p. 368. Paul is simply guarding the deacons against a vice of the day.

"Such devotion to any kind of wine showed a [gluttony which would be unbecoming] in one holding office in the church of Christ. 'To argue that, forbidding much wine, Paul approves of the use of some wine [alcohol] and of any and every sort, is to adopt a mode of interpretation [and translation that is] dangerous and wholly inconsistent with common usage.'

"When applied to the clause, 'not greedy of filthy lucre,' it would sanction all avarice and trade craftiness short of that greed which is mean and reckless.' But Paul, and other inspired writers, makes all covetousness to be idolatry, and not to be once named, much less practiced by the saints, even moderately.

"1 Timothy 3:11, 'Wives, be sober.' The same Greek word is in verse 2 rendered vigilant, and which Donnegan renders [it] abstemious, that abstains, especially from wine. The N.T. Greek lexicons define it, 'temperate, abstinent in respect to wine.'" (*Bible Wines* by William Patton)

In the Old in Proverbs 31:4-5 it says, "*It is* not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted." Then in Revelation 1:6 it says, "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." "And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10)

We are told that we are kings and priests in the New Testament.

The Old Testament priests were warned not to drink any wine (alcohol) or intoxicating drink when they went into the tabernacle (or temple) Leviticus 10:8-10 This does not mean that they could drink an intoxicating drink at other times, just that this was a serious warning as to dire consequences if they did drink it before going into the tabernacle or temple. We are told we are priests in 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10. "...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus

Christ."

"But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." Then we have in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 3:16 where it says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

God is telling us in no uncertain terms in the entire Bible that we are not to drink alcohol! Even though today the word 'wine' is not generally thought of as grape juice in our vocabulary at this time. However, it is in fact, as shown in this study to be a generic term in the Bible meaning both fermented and unfermented, depending on the context.

Many Christians today believe the teaching, that is going around, that says the Bible encourages people to drink a little alcohol. We have shown from the Bible and history that this teaching is just a myth (a lie)! There are even 'Evangelicals' who are speaking around the country today teaching that a little alcoholic wine is good for you.

I would say to them, first, you are going against the clear teaching of God's Word (in so doing leading many astray) and, second, if you want something healthy to drink, why not drink pure grape juice, which has only good medicinal effects on the heart and stomach?

Look at our link to [Welch's Grape Juice Company](#): To use their own words they say of grape juice that it has, "Twice the antioxidant power of orange juice and 120% Vitamin C. It helps support a healthy immune system and a healthy heart. No sugar added - ever! Our grapes are sweet enough. Our Concord grapes are grown by our farmer-owners." [Without using harmful pesticides, I might add.]

Here is a quote from a film *Alcohol and Human Physiology* I have used in public in the public school library of films. (Synopsis) "The film begins with an illustration of the various aspects of social life that habitually entail the use of alcohol. 'Happy hours' are contrasted with devastating statistics and images of the abuse of alcohol, a mind-altering toxic drug.

"A physician then gives the facts of how alcohol affects the body. Beginning with the mouth, he reviews the major organs and body systems, and points out the damaging results of drinking. He discusses the ill-effects of alcohol on the digestive, circulatory, muscular, skeletal, urogenital, and nervous systems.

"The film uses real medical pictures, x-rays, microscopic images, and organs removed in autopsies to create a superbly convincing case against alcohol. The physician's narration and demonstration of alcohol-induced damages to the body are intertwined with dramatic testimonials from six recovering alcoholics; they briefly recount the particular physiological damages that resulted from their alcohol abuse-intestinal ulcer, fatty liver, pancreatitis, birth

defects, muscular atrophy, and blackouts.

"In the conclusion, the film warns that psychosis is more frequent among alcohol abusers than among users of any other drug. Brain cells, once destroyed by alcohol, will never grow back again. Close to fifty-percent of the admissions to state mental hospitals and one-third of all admissions to hospitals are alcohol-related.

Ultimately, chronic alcohol abuse may lead to death." (Medical authenticity by Basil Clyman MD Veterans Administration Medical Center Sepulveda, California; Michael Meyers MD Coldwater Canyon Hospital North Hollywood, California; Jeffrey Miller MD Memorial Hospital Glendale, California; Frank Mohaupt MD San Pedro Peninsula Hospital San Pedro, California; Theodore Williams MD Los Angeles County Commission on Alcoholism.)

Days gone by preachers of God's Word warned people of the dangers of drink; today the church is leading the way, in some cases, in encouraging people to drink. Here is what used to be preached by godly men and women: This is the answer that the great Bible teacher R. A. Torrey gave when asked about 'Temperance' (abstinence). The question was: "What place do you give temperance in your meetings?"

He answered, "A very prominent place. One of the commonest and most destructive sins of our time is that of intemperance. It is doing more to break hearts and ruin homes than almost any other sin, so I constantly attack in my sermons the use of intoxicating liquors, and their sale. I urge upon Christians the duty of total abstinence for their own sake and for the sake of others." (Practical and Perplexing Questions Answered R.A. Torrey)

Other famous Bible teachers and preachers who took a stand against alcohol were men and women like D. L. Moody, Henry Ward Beecher, Sojourner Truth, R.A. Torrey, J. Vernon McGee, Dr. Henry M. Morris, and the list could go on and on. It is only in our time that Christians are compromising so much that they cannot even take a stand against something that has roots of teaching throughout history. The tour guide my wife had when she visited Israel said it was not always allowed even in Israel to drink alcohol as they do today.

Christians need to listen to God's Word and obey it! Where it tells us that we are priests and kings to our God, and that we are not to be drinking alcohol of any kind! Also, that we are to be of a sound mind, sober, ready and watching for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ!

"Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:26b-27)

For more study on this subject read also: Genesis 9: 20-27; 19: 30-36; Leviticus 10: 8-10; Deuteronomy 29:19; 1 Samuel 1:13-16; Proverbs 4:14-17, 20:1, 23:29-35; Isaiah 5:11-12, 22-23, 28:1-2,3,7-8, 56:12; Jeremiah 35:1-6,18,19; Daniel 1:8-16; Amos 2:12; Habakkuk 2:5,15-

16; Matthew 24:45-51; 1 Peter 1:13; 1Thessalonians 5:6-8.

For more information: bible-christian.org