

Be Not Drunk with Wine, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 5:18

Code: 1937

INTRODUCTION

A. The Topic

Ephesians 5:18a describes the topic of drinking and drunkenness. It raises the crucial question of whether a Christian should drink alcoholic beverages. Even though it gives a direct command against drunkenness, it does not say that Christians should totally abstain from drinking alcohol.

Not surprisingly, American society has a severe drinking problem. It is proud, self-indulgent, and pleasure-mad, hence filled with guilt, anxiety, and depression. People try both to live it up and forget it all by drinking. Strangely however, many Christians, who by definition are supposed to be meek, selfless, and filled with the joy of the Lord, seek their comfort from a liquor bottle.

B. The Trouble

A survey showed that 81% of all Roman Catholics and 64% of all Protestants drink alcoholic beverages. The subject of drinking is an important issue in the church. There is much discussion and confusion over the issue. Some people say a Christian should not drink at all because it is sin and absolutely forbidden in Scripture. Others say a Christian can drink in moderation, especially since the Bible indicates believers drank wine. Some Christians go to dinner and wouldn't think of ordering wine while others order wine first and think about dinner later.

I've met certain missionaries who have instructed me to stay in a particular place because the wine is better there. I've also met others missionaries who have never consumed any alcohol. There is much concern about whether drinking is an emblem of your spirituality, but spirituality isn't a matter of what you drink-- it's who you are! What you do in your life is simply a manifestation of who you really are inside.

1. The condemnation of drunkenness

Drunkenness is forbidden in Scripture. It is a sin.

a) Drunkenness disallowed(1) Romans 13:13--"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in reveling and drunkenness."(2) Galatians 5:19-21--"The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, wrath, factions, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and the like; of which I tell you before, as I have also told you in past time, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."(3) 1 Corinthians 6:9-10--"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, not covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."(4) 1 Peter 4:3--"The time past of our life may suffice us ... when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, carousings." That kind of life-style is part of the darkness of the past.(5) 1 Thessalonians 5:6-7--"Let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober-minded. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that are drunk are drunk in the night."Drunkenness is a part of the life-style from which many believers have come. But they have entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and drunkenness is not allowed. The Bible sternly warns against drunkenness. A believer is forbidden to be habitually drunk.b) Drunkenness definedWhat does drunkenness mean? It is the point at which alcohol takes over any part of your faculties. There are varying degrees of drunkenness and I don't profess to

know where that fine line is for everyone, but whenever you yield control of your senses to alcohol, you have become drunk.c) Drunkenness described(1) Proverbs 20:1--"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." A person who becomes drunk is a fool. He may think the wine is doing something good for him, but it is mocking in every way.(2) Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-35--"Be not among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh; for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.... Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange things, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not. When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."A person who becomes an alcoholic winds up in utter ruin. I've preached many times in skid-row missions and have seen many men clothed in rags because of their drunkenness. Drinking is such a deceiver. It does not produce a man of distinction, as society portrays, but only rags and emptiness.The most amazing thing about this description of drunkenness is in verse 35: "I will seek it yet again." After all the trouble of drunkenness, people will turn right around and get drunk again. Old Testament commentator Franz Delitzsch said, "The author passes from the sin of uncleanness [vv. 26-28 warn about the harlot and the adulteress] to that of drunkenness; they are nearly related, for drunkenness excites fleshly lust; and to wallow with delight in the mire of sensuality, a man, created in the image of God, must first brutalize himself by intoxication" (Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970 reprint], p. 120).(3) Isaiah 5:11--"Woe unto them who rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them!" One of the characteristics of an alcoholic is that he starts drinking in the morning and continues to drink all night.d) Drunkenness denounced(1) Isaiah 28:7-8--In a strong indictment of Ephraim, Isaiah said, "They also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way. The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink; they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in vision, they stumble in judgement. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean."Priests were forbidden to drink while they ministered (Lev. 10:9) because they represented God on earth and if they became drunk, they could easily misjudge or misrepresent God. These priests had made statements that were not true and had given the people wrong judgments, leading them astray. Verse 8 says they were even vomiting right in the place where they drank. It is no wonder that God severely judged them.(2) Isaiah 56:11-12--In indicting the watchmen of Israel, Isaiah said, "They are greedy dogs that can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink, and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."These watchmen were supposed to be caring for the people of Israel, yet they remained drunk. God in turn severely indicted them, as he does anyone in a position of spiritual responsibility who negates it by becoming drunk.(3) Hosea 4:11--"Harlotry and wine and new wine take away the heart." Many times in Scripture, drinking is linked with prostitution.God forbids drunkenness. Under no circumstances is a believer to yield control of his faculties to the evils of alcohol. All believers have a spiritual responsibility to represent God in the best way possible. Any act of drunkenness, no matter how minimal, violates God's standard of being controlled by the Spirit of God.

2. The commendation of drinking

Drunkenness is directly forbidden by God, yet wine itself is commended in Scripture.

a) Exodus 29:39-40--Moses commanded the children of Israel to offer one lamb in the morning "and the other lamb thou shalt offer at evening: and with the one lamb a tenth part of flour mixed with the

fourth part of an hin of beaten oil; and the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering" (cf. Lev. 23:13). Although this wine offering was not for drinking, it was poured out to God as a libation.b) 1 Chronicles 9:29--Some "were appointed to oversee the vessels, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, and the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices." It is likely they kept a supply of wine in the Temple for drink offerings.c) Psalm 104:15--The psalmist said that wine "maketh glad the heart of man" (cf. Judges 9:13).d) Isaiah 55:1--Isaiah said, "Every one that thirsteth, come to the waters, and he that hath no money; come, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Wine here is equated with salvation.e) John 13:26--Jesus dipped a piece of bread in wine, the two elements of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-26).f) 1 Timothy 5:23--Paul told Timothy, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thy frequent infirmities."g) Luke 10:34--When the Good Samaritan found a beaten man on the side of the road, he "went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."h) Proverbs 31:6-7--King Lemuel said, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that are of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." When someone is sick and about to die, Scripture says give him wine as a sedative to ease his pain.

The Christian's Wine List

Drinking is seen in Scripture as a possible destroyer of human life but is also seen as an acceptable and sometimes even commendable act. Like many other things, wine has a potential for good and evil. Should a Christian drink alcoholic beverages? Does the Bible say anything to help answer this crucial question? The Bible does not forbid drinking wine, but it does give certain principles to determine how to deal with this issue. The following are eight checkpoints to ask yourself if you, as a Christian, should drink alcoholic beverages.

Question #1: Is drinking wine today the same as in Bible times?

Christians who drink point out that wine was commended in the Bible and assume it is therefore acceptable today. If drinking in biblical times is to be used as the basis for drinking today, the wine today should be the same as the wine used then. This deserves careful analysis.

A. The Biblical Words for Wine

1. Oinos/Yayin

The most common word in the New Testament for wine is the Greek word oinos. It is a general word that simply refers to the fermented juice of the grape. The Old Testament equivalent to the Greek word oinos is yayin, the root of which means to "bubble up" or "boil up." The 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia (vol. 12, p. 533) states that yayin, at least in the rabbinic period, was diluted with water.

2. Gleukos/Tirosh

The Greek word gleukos--from which we get the English word glucose, means "new wine." It is used in Acts 2:13 to refer to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. It says they were "full of new wine."

Although it was comparatively fresh and not yet fully aged, it was potentially intoxicating. The mockers in Acts 2:13 were accusing the apostles of being drunk.

The Old Testament word for new wine is tirosh. Hosea 4:11 says "wine [yayin] and new wine [tirosh] take away the heart." Drunkenness is the result of drinking this new wine.

3. Sikera/Shakar

The Old Testament word for strong drink is shakar, a term that eventually became restricted to intoxicants other than wine. According to the 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia, it refers to unmixed wine. The New Testament equivalent is the Greek word sikera.

B. The Historical Data Regarding Wine

1. Unfermented wine

Because of refrigeration problems in ancient times, wine was often boiled until the liquid evaporated, leaving behind a thick, unintoxicating paste that stored well. It was somewhat similar to modern

grape jelly. The people would spread it on bread like a jam, and some still do today in the Middle East.

a) Pliny the Elder--This Roman historian in his Natural Histories said such wine could last as long as ten years. He wrote of wine that had the consistency of honey.

b) Horace--This Latin poet wrote in his Odes of unintoxicating wine, that he recommended quaffing under the shade (l:18).

c) Plutarch--This Greek essayist wrote in his Moralia that filtered wine neither inflames the brain nor infects the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink. He liked the kind of wine with no alcoholic content.

d) Aristotle--This Greek philosopher spoke of wine that was so thick, it was necessary to scrape it from the skins it was stored in and to dissolve the scrapings in water."

e) Virgil--This Latin writer spoke of the necessity of boiling down wine.

f) Homer--The celebrated bard, in the ninth book of The Odyssey tells of Ulysses, who took with him in his visit to the Cyclops a goatskin of sweet, black wine that needed to be diluted with twenty parts of water before being consumed as a beverage.

g) Columella--This Latin agronomist, a contemporary of the apostles, wrote that it was common in Italy and Greece to boil wine. That would not have been done if they had wanted to preserve the alcoholic content.

h) Archbishop Potter--Archbishop Potter, born in 1674, wrote in his Grecian Antiquities wrote to boil down their wines and then drink them four years later (Edinburg, 1813, vol. 2, p. 360). He also refers to Democritus, a celebrated philosopher, and Palladius, a Greek physician, as making similar statements concerning wine at that time. These ancient authorities referred to the boiled juice of the grape as wine.

i) Professor Donovan--Donovan in his Bible Commentary said, "In order to preserve their wines ... the Romans concentrated the must or grape juice, of which they were made, by evaporation, either spontaneous in the air or over a fire, so as to render them thick and syrupy" (p. 295).

j) The Talmud--The Talmud, the codification of Jewish law, mentions repeatedly that the Jews were in the habit of using boiled wine (e.g., 'Erabin 29a).

k) W. G. Brown--Brown, who traveled extensively in Africa, Egypt, and Asia from 1792 to 1798 said that the wines of Syria are mostly prepared by boiling immediately after they are pressed from the grape until they are considerably reduced in quantity, when they are then put into bottles and preserved for use.

l) Caspar Neumann--Dr. Neumann, Professor of Chemistry in Berlin, 1795, said, "It is observable that when sweet juices are boiled down to a thick consistency, they not only do not ferment in that state, but are not easily brought into fermentation when diluted with as much water as they had lost in the evaporation, or even with the very individual water that exhaled from them" (Nott, London edition, p. 81). The wine evidently lost much of its intoxicating properties after being reconstituted.

m) Dr. A. Russell--Russell, in his Natural History of Aleppo (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1794), said that the concentrated wine juice, called "dibbs," was brought to the city in skins and sold in the public markets. He said it had the appearance of a coarse honey.

The wine that was consumed in biblical times was not what we know as wine today. It was more of a concentrated grape juice with its intoxicating properties basically removed. You cannot defend wine-drinking today on the basis of wine-drinking in Bible times because the two are totally different.

2. Fermented wine

a) The procedure

Wine stored as a liquid, however, would ferment. Professor Robert Stein, in his "Wine-drinking in New Testament Times" (Christianity Today, 20 June 1975: 9-11), tells us liquid wine was stored in large jugs called amphorae. The pure, unmixed wine would be drawn out of these jugs and poured into large bowls called kraters, where it was mixed with water. From these kraters, it would then be

poured into kylix, or cups. Wine would never be served directly from the amphora without first being mixed. And according to other historical data on this period, the mixture could be as high as a 20:1 ratio or lower than 1:1.

b) The perception

Drinking unmixed wine was looked upon by Greek culture as barbaric. Stein quotes Mnesitheus of Athens as saying, "The gods have revealed wine to mortals, to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse. For it gives food to them that take it and strength in mind and body. In medicine it is most beneficial; it can be mixed with liquid and drugs and it brings aid to the wounded. In daily intercourse, to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer; but if you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse."

As a beverage, wine was always thought of as a mixed drink in Greek culture. The ratio of water might have varied but only barbarians drank it unmixed. Stein cites patristic writings that show the early church served mixed wine.

c) The present

Beer has approximately 4% alcohol, wine 9-11%, brandy 15- 20%, and hard liquor 40-50% (80-100 proof). So, unmixed wine in biblical times measured at approximately 9-11%. Mixed wine, at a 3:1 ratio, would therefore be between 2.25- to-2.75%. By today's standards, a drink has to exceed 3.2% to be considered an alcoholic beverage. The wine they consumed was either completely non-alcoholic or sub- alcoholic by today's standards. To become drunk with wine in those days you would have to drink all day. That is why the Bible commands elders in the church not to be addicted to much wine (1 Tim. 3:3). With such a low alcoholic content, you would have to purpose to become drunk.

So, is drinking wine today the same as in Bible times? No.

Question #2: Is drinking wine necessary?

Because of the lack of fresh water, it was often necessary to drink wine in biblical times. That is sometimes the case today. If you were in a country and wine was all there was and you were dying of thirst, you would take whatever was available.

A. The Past Necessity

In the New Testament, the Lord produced wine and spoke about drinking wine (John 2:1-11; Matt. 26:26-29). In the Old Testament as in the New, wine was used out of necessity. This was in a day and age when all they had to drink apart from wine was fruit juice, milk, and water. Due to a lack of refrigeration, even wine mixed from the syrup base, if left standing long enough, could ferment. These people had little choice in deciding what to drink.

B. The Present Preference

Today you can go to a supermarket and the variety of non- alcoholic beverages is seemingly endless. Many parts of the world have an almost unlimited access to running water. Drinking wine is rarely a necessity today. It is a preference, not a necessity. Perhaps you're afraid your host would be offended if you refused their wine. But if a group of your friends got together at a party and all decided to scratch behind the left ear, would you scratch behind your left ear because you wanted to feel a part of the group? If everyone on your block decided not to use deodorant, would you join in? That is essentially the same kind of reasoning.

If for some reason you were in a situation and where wine was all you had available, you would have little choice but to drink it. You would deal with it as a necessity. But in our society, drinking alcohol is simply and only a preference.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Ephesians 5:18 describes the topic of _____ and _____.
2. True or False: Many Christians, who by definition are supposed to be meek, selfless, and filled

with the joy of the Lord, seek their comfort from a liquor bottle.

3. What should your spirituality be based on?

4. Is drunkenness forbidden in Scripture? Support your answer.

5. What is the definition of drunkenness?

6. Any act of _____, no matter how minimal, violates God's standard of being controlled by the Spirit of God.

7. True or False: Drunkenness is directly forbidden by God, but drinking wine is commended in Scripture.

8. How is the subject of drinking seen in Scripture?

9. What criterion must be met if drinking in biblical times is to be sufficient reason for drinking today?

10. List the different words used for wine in the Bible and explain each.

11. What is the difference between mixed and unmixed wine?

12. What was the difference between wine stored as a solid and wine stored as a liquid?

13. How was drinking unmixed wine looked upon in Greek culture? In the early church?

14. What was the approximate alcoholic content of wine during biblical times?

15. Is drinking wine necessary today?

16. In our society, drinking alcohol is _____ and _____ a preference .

Pondering the Principles

1. The wine spoken of in Bible times is not the same as the wine of today. Wine today is not mixed with water and can be very intoxicating. The wine people mostly drank during Bible times was mixed with generous amounts of water and was largely unintoxicating. Have you considered those principles in deciding whether to drink alcoholic beverages? The Bible gives examples of people in positions of spiritual responsibility who abstained from alcohol. Study the following passages and ask God to make it clear to you whether you should abstain from alcoholic beverages: Leviticus 10:8-11, Judges 13:3-4, and Luke 1:14-15.

2. The Bible condemns drunkenness but also commends the occasional use of wine. However, there is one instance apart from drunkenness when drinking is forbidden when it causes a fellow believer to stumble (Rom. 14:1-23; 1 Cor. 8:9-13). Are you using your Christian liberty to drink wine but at the same time causing a brother to stumble? Evaluate your actions with the preceding passages and determine if you are causing anyone to stumble.

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