

Is Drinking Alcoholic Beverages Right or Wrong?

We believe what we want to believe. We are now in the throes of postmodernism, humanism to the max, and a spiritual coup d'état that re-arranges the worldview concerning the subject of dinking. As believers are now morphing past the point of diversity on the subject to condoning and, in some cases, pushing other believers to imbibe, I cannot remain silent. Therefore, allow me to share some insights that may help you make one the most important decisions in your life, i.e. to drink or not drink.

1. In defining wine, dual definitions have existed, until recently.

Should you consult most modern English dictionaries, the definition of wine immediately goes to that which is fermented, in other words, of the alcoholic nature. Have you ever studied our history of the English definitions? For example, in 1955 Funk and Wagnall's New "Standard" Dictionary of the English Language defines wine as follows: "1. The fermented juice of the grape: in loose language the juice of the grape whether fermented or not." Forty-six years ago loose language allowed that it may or may not be fermented. In the 1828 Webster's Dictionary defines the word "must" as "new wine- wine pressed from the grape but not fermented." Benjamin Marin's *Lingua Britannica Reformata* or *A New English Dictionary*, published in 1748, defines "wine" as follows: "1. The juice of the grape. 2. A liquor extracted from other fruits besides the grape." In this old English definition fermentation is not even mentioned.

The Old Testament word "yayin" and the New Testament word "oinos" as well as the Latin word "vinum" clearly and historically bear two usages the fermented and non-fermented use of that which is classically translated wine. Referring to the Greek "oinos," Aristotle, in his book *Meteorologica*, refers to grape juice as one of the kinds of wine. He speaks of it as a sweet beverage (glukus) which "though called wine (oinos), it has not the effect of wine, for it does not taste like wine, for it does not intoxicate like ordinary wine."

2. Safeguards were in practice to prevent drunkenness.

It is known, from ancient sources, that there were ways of preserving juice, thus preventing fermentation. The ancient Roman statesman, Cato, said: "If you wish to have "must" [grape-juice] all year, put grape-juice in an amphora and seal the cork with pitch; sink it in a fishpond. After 30 days take it out. It will be grape-juice for a whole year" (*De Agri Cultura* CXX). Because the ability to keep things preserved has been perfected in modern times, the ancient Christians did have a method whereby they would not even accidentally become inebriated. The godly, aged women were warned: ".that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things" (Titus 2:3). Lest they indulge in a beverage that was not perfectly preserved, they are commanded not to give themselves to much wine. In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Chicago: Moody, 1980, Vol. I, p. 376, it says in reference to wine of Bible days: "not fortified with extra alcohol. Concentrated alcohol was only known in the Middle Ages when the Arabs invented distillation ('alcohol' is an Arabic word) so what is now called liquor or strong drink (i.e., whiskey, gin, etc.) and the twenty per cent fortified wines were unknown in Bible times. The strength of natural wines is limited by two factors. The percentage of alcohol will be half of the percentage of the sugar in the juice. And if the alcoholic content is much above 10 or 11 percent, the yeast cells are killed and fermentation ceases. Probably ancient wines were 7-10 per cent . . . to avoid the sin of drunkenness, mingling of wine with water was practiced. This dilution was specified by the rabbis in NT times for the wine customary at Passover."

3. There are passages, which illustrate that God falls on the side of total abstinence.

Proverbs 20:1 says, "*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*" In Proverbs 23:29-31 God declares that those who drink will have sorrows, contentions, wounds, redness of eyes, temptations for adultery and fornication, and a disorientation that causes distortion of judgment (this has surfaced horrendously in modern car wrecks, due to drunk driving). To

make it even more plain and simple, God's Word says in Proverbs 23:31, "*Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.*" When the wine or juice of the grape begins to ferment, God says, don't even look at it, to avoid even the very temptation.

One of the strongest arguments comes in the first miracle that Jesus performed, i.e., turning the water into wine. Many who fall on the other side of this argument will often use it to defend drinking alcohol. Herein is a mistake in not knowing your Bible manners and customs. The customs of many of the ancient feasts was to pull out the best, good, or sweet, which are fresh, wines at the beginning of a feast. This was to insure that the women and especially children would not be partaking of the "hard stuff." As the feast continued and the children retired, then the ladies, the alcoholic drinks would surface. But when at the wedding feast, Jesus turned the water into wine, we hear this comment from the ruler of the feast: "*...Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now*" (John 2:10). The ruler was amazed that the beverage that Jesus brought forth was the same as that which is used at the beginning, non-alcoholic juice.

Without going into too much detail, think of this, would our Lord use that which is rotten, which basically is exactly what alcohol is, to symbolize His spotless blood? If the bread was unleavened for the Lord's Supper, so also would the beverage. "*For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*" (Matthew 26:28). "*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things...But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:*" (I Peter 1:18, 19).

3. There is a practicality to total abstinence, in protecting your testimony.

In almost forty years of trying to be a soul-winner, I have yet to meet my first unconverted person who has been offended by my stance on not drinking. On the other hand there are those who are not Christians, as well as a great many Christians who are offended by people who call themselves Christians and drink. To win his brethren, Paul was even willing to do without certain foods: "*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend*" (I Corinthians 8:13). Paul never took the attitude, I don't care what others think, I'll do as I please. "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God*" (I Corinthians 10:31, 32). By the way, a good question to ask ourselves before we partake in any activity should be, "May I do this for the glory of God?"

4. There is the doctrine of progressive illumination that should be considered.

As we learn the Bible, we do so progressively, "*But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little...*" (Isaiah 28:13). Over the years of Bible learning we not only have one, but multiple lifetimes of Bible teachers. As we look at prophecy, Lewis Sperry Chafer and C.I. Schofield in light of current events with the line upon line of Bible learning knew more of eschatology than Luther, Calvin or Zwingli. To use the argument that some church fathers did not see the problems of alcohol is to ignore progressive illumination. Many of the reformers were just coming out of the Catholic Church, they were just getting a grip on justification, and many things were yet to be learned. By inspiration Daniel said, at "*...the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*" (Daniel 12:4). In every field knowledge has increased. Because many of my Victorian preachers whom I admire used tobacco, I shall not ignore the warnings of what we do know about tobacco because my old heroes had feet of clay. And I shall not limit smoking to only half a pack. No, it is all wrong. I shall not put down those in the church of ancient days that did not foresee problems. And I shall not in turn be a social drinker; I shall be a total abstainer! Be as Spurgeon who upon discovery that drinking was bringing England down, he not only stopped drinking wine, he donned the blue ribbon of the Temperance League and fought against alcohol by drink (from Lewis Drummond's *Spurgeon, Prince of Preachers*, pp. 438-440). He was progressively

illuminated.

In closing I plead with my brothers and sisters in Christ: *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing..."* (II Corinthians 6:17)!

- Pastor Pope -

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