

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Some Thoughts on Alcoholic Beverages

By Brian R. Kenyon

It is not uncommon to hear people, even in the church, claim that because Jesus turned water into “wine” (Jn. 2:1-11), it must be okay to drink alcoholic beverages in moderation. However, God’s people must “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thes. 5:21). When put to the test, the Christian-can-drink-alcohol-in-moderation view is not good. Consider the following truths about wine.

How Do You Define “Wine”?

Many people make the mistake of taking the modern definition of “wine” and reading it back into the Bible text. In contemporary American culture, the word “wine” is used almost exclusively to refer to intoxicating beverage. However, as the late brother Guy N. Woods said and developed in his comments on John 2:9-10, “*Oinos*, translated wine in the New Testament, does not of itself indicate the content of alcohol ... [‘wine’] signified no more than the liquid of the grape” (52). The context in any given passage is the determining factor as to whether the “wine” is intoxicating or not! Although some may argue that “wine” in the Bible can never refer to unfermented grape juice, sound reasoning indicates that Jesus could not have provided the direct means by which people would get drunk in John 2:9-10. Jesus always “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), but getting other people drunk is certainly not “doing good” (Hab. 2:15; Hos. 7:1-5)!

Medicinal Use of “Wine”

The Bible does acknowledge a legitimate medicinal use of alcohol. In the Old Testament, King Lemuel’s mother told him, “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, And remember his misery

no more” (Pr. 31:6-7). Although kings are not to drink intoxicating beverages, “Lest they ... forget the law, And pervert ... justice” (Pr. 31:4-5), there are some situations where intoxicating drinks are useful—all medicinal. “Him who is perishing [ready to perish, KJV]” refers to those who are dying. Since “those who are bitter [heavy, KJV] of heart [bitter distress, ESV]” is parallel with “him who is perishing,” they are two ways of saying the same thing. This does not refer to those who had a rough day at work or those who just broke up with their significant other! Furthermore, Proverbs 31:6-7 does not give everyone a right to be his or her own doctor and pharmacist. Rather, it simply says that under a monarchy, kings have a right to prescribe intoxicating drink in certain situations!

In the New Testament, Paul told Timothy, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23). Note some truths about this passage. First, Timothy would have worshiped weekly when possible by partaking of the Lord’s Supper (cf. Acts 2:42; 20:7), which consists of unleavened bread and “fruit of the vine” (Mt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). Interestingly, the Lord’s Supper drink is *never* referred to in the Bible as “wine” (*oinos*). It is always “fruit of the vine” or “the cup.” Therefore, Timothy was already drinking a small portion of grape juice weekly, but he was still told to drink “a little wine for your stomach’s sake.” In the context here, “wine” would be alcoholic. Second, if Timothy had already been a habitual drinker of alcoholic wine, then Paul would not have had to tell him to drink it. This again does not give approval

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for one to be his own doctor and prescribe a shot of whiskey. While there is a legitimate medicinal use for alcohol, there are better, less addictive medicines available today.


Intoxication Modification

Alcoholic wines of the first century are not comparable in intoxication strength to modern alcoholic wines. Most wines on the store shelves today have a much higher alcohol content than wines that ferment naturally, like the alcoholic wines of the first century. Fermentation takes place as a result of decomposition. The highest alcohol content of naturally fermented wines may reach “12 to 14 percent,” but wines stronger than this “have been fortified by the addition of distilled liquors” (Jeffcoat 19). Even if alcoholic wines were acceptable in Bible times, they do not compare to most wines today. This is why the Bible sometimes speaks in terms of “[a woe upon] Those who linger long [tarry long, KJV] at the wine” (Pr. 23:30) or “[deacons and older women being] not given to much wine” (1 Tim. 3:8; Tit. 2:3). Naturally fermenting fruit juice in a non-refrigerant culture would not always be immediately intoxicating, but would often take long periods of consumption to reach the point of distorted, or blurred, judgment (cf. Est. 1:5-10).

Not For Christians ... Or Anyone Else

Nowhere does the Bible say anything positive about the consumption of intoxicating wine or other intoxicating drinks, except in the realm of medicinal usage! All injunctions for sobriety are injunctions against the non-medicinal use of alcohol. Although different

Greek words are behind the English word “sober,” and some translations may vary as to the English word used, note the times Christians are exhorted to be “sober” (1 Thes. 5:6, 8; Tit. 2:2, 4, 6; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8 cf. 1 Tim. 3:2, 11; Tit. 1:8). How can any faithful Christian think that he or she is exempt from maintaining sobriety?

New Testament teaching does forbid the non-medicinal use of alcohol. Again, this writer has often heard church members say something like this: “Well, I don’t think that Christians should drink, but there is no way you can prove from the New Testament that it is wrong when done in moderation.” To the contrary, read First Peter 2:11, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” What faithful Christian can honestly say that the non-medicinal consumption of alcohol is not fulfilling a “lust of the flesh”? What faithful Christian can honestly say that the non-medicinal use of alcohol does not “war against the soul”? Since Christians do not belong to this world, they should not feel compelled to be so “social” with this world that they have to drink alcoholic beverages to keep in good standing with the world (cf. Pr. 20:1; 23:29-35; Rom. 12:2)! 

Works Cited

- Jeffcoat, W. D. *The Bible And “Social” Drinking*. 1987. Huntsville, AL: Publishing Designs, 2006.
Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1981.

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(863) 683-4043

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9:00 "First Century Times" or "End Times"? Brian R. Kenyon
9:40 "End Times" Preaching in Acts Daniel Stearsman
10:20 BREAK
10:50 Intertestamental Expectations David Dixon
11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Living for the "Then," Not the "Now"

1:30 Your Life Matters Now and Forever Ty Rhymes
2:00 Esau: Living for "Now" (Heb. 12:16) Forest Antemesaris
2:30 Moses: Living for "Then" (Heb. 11:26) Hiram Kemp
3:00 BREAK
3:30 Questions And Answers On Forum Topic
4:30 DINNER
6:30 Congregational Singing
7:00 Parable of the Virgins Thomas Wise
7:45 Jesus' Authority to Judge Sam Jones

TUESDAY

9:00 "End Times" Teaching in Mt. 24 T. Brownlow-Dindy, Sr.
9:40 Daniel's "Seventy Weeks" Emmanuel B. Daugherty
10:20 BREAK
10:50 "End Times" in the Book of Hebrews Stephen Atnip
11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Which "End" Is What?

1:30 Is the "Shortened Time" (1 Cor. 7:29) the End? E. Edwards
2:00 When Does the OT End and the NT Begin? George Beals
2:30 Knowing the "AD 70 Doctrine" David Hester
3:00 BREAK
3:30 Questions And Answers On Forum Topic
4:30 DINNER
6:30 Congregational Singing
7:00 Parable of the Talents Bryon R. Schulz
7:45 Judgment Scene in Revelation 20:11-15 Jimmy Clark

WEDNESDAY

9:00 "End Times" Teaching in Luke 21:5-36 Bruce Daugherty
9:40 Daniel's Final Revelations Emmanuel B. Daugherty
10:20 BREAK
10:50 "End Times" in Second Thessalonians Jimmy Clark
11:30 LUNCH

Forum: "End Times" Fables of False Religion

1:30 Islam Trent Wheeler
2:00 Mormonism Nathan Franson
2:30 Jehovah's Witness Charles Broyles
3:00 BREAK
3:30 Questions And Answers On Forum Topic
4:30 DINNER
6:30 Congregational Singing
7:00 Parable of the Dragnet David Stearsman
7:45 In View of What Is to Come Bill Davis

THURSDAY

9:00 "End Times" Teaching in First Corinthians Earl Edwards
9:40 Premillennialism and Its Variations Walt Person
10:20 BREAK
10:50 The Living and the Dead at His Coming Melvin Otey
11:30 LUNCH

Forum: End Times and the Book of Revelation

1:30 Political Leaders, "Mark of the Beast," Etc. Bob Bauer
2:00 The 1,000 Year Reign and Premillennialism Daniel Cates
2:30 The Holy City John Saw Coming Down Sam Hester
3:00 BREAK
3:30 Questions And Answers On Forum Topic
4:30 DINNER
6:30 Congregational Singing
7:00 Parable of the Tares Hiram Kemp
7:45 Being Children of the Day Melvin L. Otey

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Continuous Gospel Preaching Requires Continuous Preacher Training

Paul told Timothy, “And the things that you have heard from me ... commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Later, he commanded, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). As long as souls continue to inhabit the earth, sin will be a prob-

lem (Rom. 3:10, 23), and the only solution to sin is the Gospel (Mk. 16:15-16). Thus, the need for preachers exists from now until Jesus returns! Paul’s words supply a pattern for training preachers. What must be preached? *God’s word* (2 Tim. 4:2a). No other message has the power to save (cf. Rom. 1:16). When must the word be preached? *Any time* is appropriate (2 Tim. 4:2b). “Be ready [instant, KJV]” implies urgency (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1, 3). “In season” means when the time is right; convenient (cf. Mk.14:11b). “Out of season” means when the time is not right; untimely. What must the preached word do (2 Tim. 4:2c)? “Convince [reprove, KJV]” means to show someone his error (Jn.8:46). “Rebuke” means to command; scold (Mt. 16:22). “Exhort” means to encourage, console, or comfort (Tit. 2:15). What must accompany the preaching of the word (2 Tim. 4:2d)? “Longsuffering [complete patience, ESV],” which involves great patience (2 Tim. 3:10) and “teaching [doctrine, KJV],” which involves instruction in the entire Gospel (Tit. 1:9). Thanks for your fellowship and support in training men to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel!” —*Brian*



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