

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON WINE AND ALCOHOL

I. The Preservation of Wine

A. One of the assumptions that modernists, both Christian and non-Christian, make is that the ancient world did not know how to preserve grape juice in order to prevent its fermentation. Therefore, it is reasoned, unfermented grape juice must have been very rare, and whenever the Bible refers to wine it must be fermented wine--wine with an alcoholic content. This line of reasoning assumes only two states of grape juice--unfermented and fermented. However, a third state of grape juice is spoiled, as in sour, acidic, and moldy. Actually, the ancients found it as least as difficult to preserve grape juice in order to allow it to properly ferment as they did to preserve it sweet and unfermented. Spoilage was the natural tendency, not fermentation. ⁽¹⁾

B. The process of fermentation is possible if conditions are just right because of two ingredients within the grape--glucose (ie., natural sugar) and albumen. Albumen is located within the lining of the grape's skin and contains yeast, or ferments. If the temperature is maintained within the moderate range and air is present, then the yeast within the albumen is released and multiplies, unites with other yeast germs in the air, and these yeast germs "eat" the glucose in the juice. This process chemically breaks down the sugar into ethyl alcohol and carbon dioxide; the alcohol provides the intoxicating effect, and the carbon dioxide provides the bubbles. ⁽²⁾ Historical references among ancient works illustrate the great difficulties they had in maintaining the fermentation process without the wine going sour. The use of boiled-down grape juice, salt, seawater, marble dust, lime, crushed iris, and solid pitch were among the ways the ancient world employed to keep the fermented wine from going bad. ⁽³⁾

C. An abundance of historical sources clearly shows that the ancient world did, in fact, know how to preserve grape juice in order to prevent its fermentation into an alcoholic beverage. Since the fermentation process requires a moderate temperature and air, the ancients devised and practiced the following four (4) principle ways to preserve grape juice in an unfermented state:

1. Boiling the juice down to a syrup. The boiling heat killed the natural yeast germs; it also increased the sugar content of the juice. To drink grape juice preserved in this manner, water was added to dilute the syrup back into the required consistency. ⁽⁴⁾

2. Cold Storage. Ancients would pour fresh grape juice into a container and seal the entire container with pitch. Then the container of fresh juice was placed in a cistern or

pool of cool water in order to keep its temperature at or below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. This cold storage method would also prevent the yeast germs from multiplying and chemically producing alcohol.⁽⁵⁾

3. Filtration. By filtering the juice through strainers, the ancients removed the albumen, separating it from the juice. In this way, there were no yeast germs with which the fermentation process could take place.⁽⁶⁾

4. Sulphur Fumigation. The ancients burned sulphur dioxide in the empty space above the line of grape juice in jars. Sulphur dioxide then absorbed the oxygen, which also prevented formation of live yeast germs. The jars of juice would actually be sealed while the sulphur dioxide was still burning in order ensure the absence of oxygen in the jars.⁽⁷⁾

II. The Meaning of Wine and Other Biblical Words

A. Another assumption of modernists is that the word "wine" inherently means the fermented or alcoholic juice of the grape. In any language, the meanings of words tend to change through the centuries as people use them to mean something they did not mean before. This is referred to as the usage meaning of a word. In the English language, the word "wine" originally was used to denote the juice of grapes, whether in a fermented or unfermented state. Long ago, of course, that word has taken on the usage meaning of only grape juice in its fermented state. That's why today we distinguish the two drinks by using the terms "wine" and "grape juice." What has happened, even among professed Christians, is that many have assumed that the Hebrew and Greek words translated as "wine" must have the same meaning that the modern usage meaning of the English word "wine" does. Thus, it is assumed that whenever the Bible speaks of wine or strong drink it must be referring to an alcoholic beverage. And because there are a number of Bible texts which speak positively of the use of these drinks, people assume that the Scriptures do not condemn the use of alcoholic beverages but just the abuse of them. Complicating this picture is the unfortunate fact that many Biblical scholars and lexical authorities have made the same assumptions and have been sloppy in their research as to the linguistics and historical usage meanings of the key words necessary to understand this subject accurately and honestly. Under this section, linguistic and historical evidence is presented on all the original language words used in the Bible with which there is controversy about their meanings. And for the two most commonly used original words, evidence will be presented concerning their usage in Scripture.

B. "Yayin." This is the most common Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to denote wine, as it appears 141 times. According to several authorities, including Jewish and ancient Christian authors, "yayin" is a generic word for wine that can refer to grape juice in either its fermented or unfermented state (just like the original meaning of the English word "wine").⁽⁸⁾

C. "Oinos." This is the most common Greek word used in the New Testament to denote wine, appearing 32 times. According to several authorities, "oinos" is also a generic word for wine that can refer to grape juice in either its fermented or unfermented state.⁽⁹⁾

D. Although "yayin" and "oinos" are easily the most commonly used words in the Bible to denote wine, there are a few other words which are controversially interpreted. A brief summary of information follows:

1. **"Shakar."** This Hebrew word appears 23 times in the Old Testament. It is usually translated in the King James Version as "strong drink," but the word is a common root in many different languages for the word "sugar." It was a sweet drink made from non-grape sources--either dates, other fruits, or even grains mixed with honey.⁽¹⁰⁾ Since it contained a great deal of sugar, a "shakar" could ferment (since yeast "eats" sugar). At the same time, it could have been kept from fermenting, just as grape juice was often preserved. Almost all Biblical references to "shakar," however, are negative ones.

2. **"Chemer" (or "Khemer").** This Hebrew word appears just 9 times in the Old Testament. It is usually translated as "wine" (or "red wine;" "pure"). It is from a root which means "to boil up." Thus, it may refer to the foaming appearance of grape juice during fermentation or to the foam of newly pressed grape juice.⁽¹¹⁾ In three of its nine appearances "chemer" is spoken of approvingly.⁽¹²⁾

3. **"Tirosh."** This Hebrew word appears 38 times in the Old Testament. It is translated by the King James Version as wine 26 times, as new wine 11 times, and as sweet wine one time.⁽¹³⁾ The precise meaning of the word is in question, with some authorities saying it refers to the solid fruit (the grape itself), others to fresh grape juice, and still other authorities maintain that "tirosh" can even sometimes refer to fermented wine.⁽¹⁴⁾ Actually, the word is obviously used in a generic sense because sometimes the Biblical reference is to solid fruit (as in Micah 6:15) and sometimes it is definitely to fresh grape juice (as in Isaiah 65:8). The use of words by ancient peoples to refer to several things was not unusual. However, the position that "tirosh" can also refer to fermented grape juice is dependent upon a specific interpretation of one single text--Hosea 4:11.

Hosea 4:11 reads as follows: "Whoredom and wine [yayin] and new wine [tirosh] take away the heart" (KJV). Some argue that new wine (tirosh) is really newly fermented wine in this passage. By the time of the Talmud (the Jewish commentary on the Old Testament), "tirosh" was being used to denote fermented wine. But it is highly unlikely that such was the case when Hosea wrote his book in the 8th century B.C. since scholars generally recognize the fact that in the Old Testament the word is associated with the fresh natural product of the vine.⁽¹⁵⁾ And indeed, the context in Hosea precludes any possibility of interpreting "tirosh" as fermented wine. First, the only thing that connects whoredom, wine, and new wine together is spiritual apostasy, which fits the context of

the entire book. Besides, fornication does not literally intoxicate; so these words do not have meanings parallel to each other. In Hosea 2:8, wine ("tirosh") was given to Hosea's wife (a symbol of Israel in the entire book), who did not know it was a blessing from God; thus, she used it to worship Baal instead. This is interestingly paralleled by the prophecy of Deuteronomy 32:14-16, in which Israel's prosperity was used by her to spiritually fornicate. Since whoredom is not equal to "yayin," then "yayin" is not equal to "tirosh" either. The proper conclusion to be drawn from the context of Hosea is that Israel's idolatry (Baal, 2:8), spiritual drunkenness (represented by "yayin"), and even God's blessings of prosperity (represented by "tirosh") took her heart from God. The phrase "take away the heart," then, does not refer to being intoxicated, but to a spiritual departure from God.

Therefore, it is clear that when "tirosh" does not refer to the actual solid fruit of the vine, it always denotes sweet, unfermented grape juice. It is noteworthy that in 36 of the 38 occurrences in the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX--Greek translation of the Old Testament) translates "tirosh" with the Greek word "oinos." And "oinos" is usually the word the LXX translates from "yayin." This is further proof that both "yayin" and "oinos" indeed are sometimes used to denote unfermented grape juice.

4. The few remaining Hebrew words translated "wine" in the Old Testament either unquestionably refer to fresh grape juice (as does "asis") or there are no positive language associated with them that would make them part of the controversy over whether alcoholic beverages are acceptable or not.

5. "Gleukos." Nearly all authorities agree that this Greek word, which occurs only once in the New Testament (Acts 2:13), means sweet, fresh grape juice.⁽¹⁶⁾ That a few scholars attempt to see its use in Acts 2:13 as a reference to newly fermented wine is not warranted (see section "V.A." for a discussion of that passage). In Job 32:19, the LXX translates "yayin" with the word "gleukos." The context there makes "yayin" refer to fermented wine. Either the LXX mistranslated "yayin" in that text, or perhaps "gleukos" did not yet have the exclusive meaning of fresh grape juice during the intertestamental period, when the LXX was translated. In any case, the Jewish historian Josephus is quite emphatic that "gleukos" referred only to fresh grape juice.⁽¹⁷⁾

E. As already stated, "yayin" is the most commonly used Hebrew word in the Old Testament for wine. Since we have established that it has a generic meaning, the immediate context must be the determining factor in a Biblical passage as to whether it is referring to a fermented or an unfermented wine. Because the Bible authors generally were not overly concerned about defining the precise nuance of their words, the context often fails to provide conclusive evidence to make that determination. However, a careful reading of the context of several of the 141 passages does make it abundantly clear that the Biblical usage of "yayin" is consistent with the secular authorities. In other words, "yayin" in the Bible does indeed sometimes refer to fermented wine and sometimes to

unfermented grape juice.

1. Fermented Wine. See Genesis 9:20-21; 19:32-33; I Samuel 25:36-37; II Samuel 13:28; Esther 1:10; Proverbs 20:1; Isaiah 5:11-12; 28:7; Habakkuk 2:5; and Hosea 7:5.

2. Unfermented Grape Juice. See Genesis 49:11; Nehemiah 13:15; Song of Solomon 1:2, 4; 4:10 (compare the same author's condemnation of "yayin" in Proverbs 20:1; assuming he was consistent in his teaching, this proves that "yayin" is used to denote both kinds of wine); Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 40:10-12; and Lamentations 2:12.

F. The same point made in "E" (immediately above) is valid for the Greek word "oinos." Its 32 appearances in the New Testament are accompanied by less contextual evidence as to whether fermented or unfermented wine is meant. Nevertheless, in harmony with the language authorities discussed above, there is sufficient evidence in the New Testament usage of "oinos" to demonstrate its consistency with that secular testimony.

1. Fermented Wine. See Ephesians 5:18; Revelation 14:10; 16:19; and 17:1-2.

2. Unfermented Grape Juice. See Revelation 6:6. In symbolic language a famine is described in that passage. Just as wheat and barley in the same verse are natural products, so the oil and wine represent the natural products of the olive and the vine. Fermented wine is not a natural product, but pure, fresh grape juice certainly is.

III. Old Testament Approval and Disapproval of Wine

As stated above, there does not exist a large number of New Testament passages in which the context is clear as to the meaning of the wine. There are a few passages there that do recommend wine ("oinos"), directly or indirectly. Several of these are discussed in sections IV and V below. Since the Old Testament provides the greater portion by far of the "wine" texts in the Bible, this section will demonstrate that it both approves and disapproves of wine. A resolution of this apparent problem is provided after the various lists are given.

A. Wine is approved. In Numbers 18:12-27 and Deuteronomy 12:17-18 and 14:23, wine ("tirosh") is part of the tithe that the people are permitted to drink before the Lord. Evidence provided above established that "tirosh" refers to the natural product of the grape, and the context in these passages here do not conflict with that linguistic conclusion.

The following passages use "yayin" to denote the drink offering or libation which the priests poured on the burning sacrifice as a sweet aroma to the Lord: Exodus 29:40; Leviticus 23:13; Numbers 15:5, 7, 10; 28:14; Deuteronomy 32:38; I Chronicles 9:29; and

Hosea 9:4 and 14:7. Since the wine ("tirosh") used as tithe and drunk by the people was unfermented grape juice, there would be no reason to assume that the "yayin" used for the drink offerings was not unfermented also. Leviticus 2:11 forbids the use and burning of leaven. Yeast is a leaven, and thus the fermentation process is a leavening process. The animals, flour, and oil also used for various offerings were all natural products. And fermented wine is not a natural product. Therefore, the "yayin" of all drink offerings must also have been unfermented grape juice.

The following non-sanctuary texts alluding to wine all approve of its use by God's people: Genesis 27:28 ("tirosh"); 49:10-11 ("yayin"); Deuteronomy 7:9-13 ("tirosh"); 11:13-14 ("tirosh"); 33:28 ("tirosh"); Judges 9:13 ("tirosh"); Psalm 4:7 ("tirosh"); 104:14-15 ("yayin"); Song of Solomon 5:1 ("yayin"); Isaiah 55:1 ("yayin"); 65:8 ("tirosh"); Jeremiah 31:10-12 ("tirosh"); Hosea 2:8 ("tirosh"); Joel 2:18-19 ("tirosh"); and Amos 9:13-14 (1st word = "asis;" 2nd word = "yayin").

Sometimes people argue that God permitted His people to drink alcoholic beverages during times of ignorance, but since modern man knows the scientific facts about the effects of alcohol we should abstain from it today. There certainly is a Biblical principle that God sometimes permits behavior that He does not really endorse. However, that argument cannot be used in this case. Besides the fact that some of the "yayin" texts cited above inform us that God instructed its use in drink offerings, the following 11 of the 15 non-sanctuary references to wine cited above show not divine concession but an absolutely positive commandment of divine blessing associated with wine: Genesis 27:28 ("tirosh"); Deuteronomy 7:9-13 ("tirosh"); 11:14 ("tirosh"); 33:28 ("tirosh"); Psalm 104:14-15 ("yayin"); Isaiah 55:1 ("yayin"); 65:8 ("tirosh"); Jeremiah 31:10-12 ("tirosh"); Hosea 2:8 ("tirosh"); Joel 2:18-19 ("tirosh"); and Amos 9:13-14 ("yayin").

B. Wine is disapproved. The following Old Testament texts show God's disapproval of wine, as "yayin:" Genesis 9:21; 19:32; Leviticus 10:9-11; Deuteronomy 32:33; Psalm 60:3; Proverbs 4:17; 20:1; 23:20, 29-35; 31:4-5; Isaiah 5:11-12; 28:7; Ezekiel 44:21; and Hosea 7:5.

People often argue that the Bible only condemns the abuse of alcohol, not the use of it per se. But that is clearly not the case because the following 3 of the above 13 references to "yayin" clearly identify wine itself as an evil that is condemned:

1. Leviticus 10:9-11--The context in the preceding verses of this chapter is the story of Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron's sons, who obtained fire from a source other than the altar of burnt offering and offered it to the Lord in the sanctuary. It is obvious from vv. 9-11 that alcohol affected their judgment and led to their careless disregard of God's instructions. Therefore, God told Aaron that the priests were not to touch alcohol in order that they may make a difference between holy and unholy and clean and unclean, and that they may properly teach God's law. Some argue that this prohibition of alcohol only applies to priests, pastors, and rabbis, and only when they go into the house of the Lord.

However, that argument says too much by saying, in effect, that it is alright for church leaders to impair their judgment as long as they do so when they are not going to be immediately officiating in the church. Thus, this logic would allow Bible teachers and leaders to conduct religious seminars and Bible studies in private homes and non-church buildings after just having indulged in some alcoholic beverage. But the distinction between holy and unholy or clean and unclean is obviously important outside the worship building context because all of God's people are called to be holy. God used this particular occasion to command the abstinence of alcohol by His priests. But that fact doesn't mean that it only applies to them and only under special circumstances at that. It is not logical to conclude that whatever behavior God prohibits for some He automatically approves in others. Although directed to the priests because of the event which had just occurred, God is clearly establishing the principle that alcohol (its use, not just abuse--He forbid it altogether, remember) impairs spiritual judgment (at least) so that people cannot know right from wrong and therefore, they have a strong tendency to disobey Him when they drink it at all. And this principle clearly applies to everyone, leaders and followers alike.

2. Proverbs 20:1--First, note that Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote this book. Then notice that he declares wine itself--not the person who drank too much--to be "a mocker," "strong drink" as "raging," and both as a source of deception. This context obviously makes the references to "wine" and "strong drink" to be alcoholic beverages. In other words, it is alcohol's very nature that is condemned by the Lord through Solomon. That means its use, not merely abuse, is condemned.

3. Proverbs 23:31-35--Again, the very nature of fermented wine is categorically condemned as a "serpent" and an "adder" that bites and stings. While verse 30 refers to those who "tarry long at the wine," verse 31 commands us not to even look at it in its fermented, or alcoholic, state.

C. This section examined Old Testament passages about the approval and disapproval of wine because the New Testament does not provide sufficient context to easily discern God's will on this matter. Sections IV and V discuss several New Testament passages which are used by many Christians to justify moderate drinking. But it is only the Old Testament that provides us with both a set of superficially contradicting statements on alcohol and the resolution to that apparent contradiction. And in that resolution is found the Bible's teaching about whether God's people should or may drink fermented wine or other alcoholic drinks. It is very significant that, with only one exception, there is no text which the context clearly proves is discussing alcoholic beverages in which the Scriptures speak positively, approvingly, or commandingly. But there are dozens of texts which the context clearly proves are discussing unfermented wine, or grape juice, in which the Scriptures speak positively, approvingly, or even commandingly. Every student of the Bible knows that one should interpret the unclear texts by the light of the clear texts. Therefore, although the contexts of many "wine" and related texts do not provide conclusive contextual evidence of the precise nature of the drink, the several that do

provide such clear evidence gives the objective Bible student sufficient data by which to draw an accurate conclusion. And that conclusion must be that the Bible condemns the use itself of all alcoholic beverages and highly recommends unfermented grape juice!

The only exception to this consistent rule in Scripture is Proverbs 31: 6-7, which commands that alcoholic beverages be given to those who are dying. Verses 4-5 had just stated that wine and strong drink should not be touched by kings and princes. Therefore, verses 6-7 is a contrast to show who only is permitted to drink alcoholic drinks--namely, those who are dying and in great pain. (By the way, to anyone who believes that the very last part of verse 6 means that the depressed should drink alcohol, remember that even modern, secular science has classified alcohol as a depressant. Giving a depressed person alcohol is very bad advice because it will only aggravate his depression. And by faith, how can a Christian say that the Bible gives bad advice?) In Biblical times, alcohol and certain herbal narcotics were the only pain medications for the very ill and dying. In lieu of modern pain medications, a prescription of alcohol to one who is dying is hardly a striking endorsement of even moderate, social drinking. Actually, the fact that this passage of Scripture uses contrast to state that only the dying and those in severe pain should drink an alcoholic beverage makes it a fourth clear Biblical passage that forbids the very use of alcohol in any normal type of circumstance.

IV. Jesus and Wine

Most Christians do not read or study the Old Testament references to wine. Nor do they have readily available to them accurate historical references which could assist them in reaching the accurate conclusions. It is the New Testament that is most often quoted in alleged support of the view that it is alright to drink alcoholic beverages as long as you do not get drunk. As we look at the five most quoted passages about Jesus and wine, please remember a few important facts already established in this paper: (1) "oinos," the Greek word for wine, is a generic word that applies to both fermented and unfermented wine; (2) the context must therefore be the key to correctly understanding the meaning of the New Testament passages; and (3) since the Old Testament established the principle of abstinence, the burden of proof that the New Testament approves and/or commands the use of alcoholic wine is upon those who allege that it does.

A. John 2:1-10--This passage contains the story of Jesus' first miracle--the turning of water into wine. Here it is alleged that Jesus made wine; therefore, Christians may certainly drink it in moderation. The following assumptions are made by those who use this text to justify moderate drinking: (1) that "oinos" means fermented wine; (2) that the best wine is always fermented wine; and (3) that the words "well drunk" indicate that it was fermented wine. As already demonstrated earlier, "oinos" is a generic word that was used to describe both fermented and unfermented wine. As to the best wine, ancient secular sources give ample evidence that unfermented wine was considered the best wine

by the ancients.⁽¹⁸⁾ And the word used twice in v. 10 for "good" wine is a Greek word which refers to something or someone morally excellent or intrinsically good rather than the normal word for "good." This confirms the historical testimony that the best wine was unfermented grape juice. While the Greek for "well drunk" usually was used to describe the effects of intoxicating beverages, it also was occasionally used to simply describe the concept of "satiation"--of eating or drinking freely.⁽¹⁹⁾ In other words, in John 2, it could simply be a reference to the fact that a lot of wine was drunk, without identifying the nature of that wine. That the words "well drunk" must have this latter meaning is demonstrated by two sound reasonings: (1) if the wine possessed an alcoholic content, then the taste buds of the guests would have been dulled, and they could not have clearly tasted Jesus' wine in order to identify it as the best; and (2) if Jesus made fermented wine, then the fact that the guests had become "well drunk" would have meant that Jesus endorsed excessive drinking. Therefore, either Jesus endorsed excessive drinking of alcohol or the wine was unfermented grape juice! Obviously, then, the wine that Jesus made was unfermented grape juice.

B. Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; and Luke 5:37-38--The context of these passages shows that Jesus and His disciples are eating with a group of "publicans and sinners." (Note that the "sat" of Matthew 9:10 introduces the meal context, which is not over until the "arose" of verse 19.) During this meal, He is questioned about why he eats with sinners and doesn't fast more often. In part of His reply, Jesus gives a brief illustration about people not putting "new wine" ("oinos neos") into old wineskins. Those who argue for the moderate use of alcohol allege that the new wine is a reference to newly fermented wine. Thus, they allege that Jesus commended wine. However, that cannot be the correct conclusion because no wineskin can withstand the pressure created from the fermentation-produced gas.⁽²⁰⁾ Old skins would contain yeast particles from part of the grape, so that even grape juice would eventually be triggered into fermenting and burst the old skin. Therefore, only unfermented wine could be safely stored in new skins, and the "new wine" in these passages could not refer to newly fermented wine. In its Biblical context, Jesus was using old wineskins to represent the Pharisees and new wine to represent His own gospel. And He was saying that the Pharisees cannot accept the gospel, but they would ferment it and destroy it. In a figurative way, Jesus was thereby saying that fermentation ruins good wine, making these passages an indirect criticism of alcoholic beverages.

C. Luke 5:39--This text in Luke is the last part of Jesus' comments reviewed in "B" (just above), in which Jesus states the following: "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better." The proponents of the moderate use of alcohol agree that the old wine is fermented wine and the "new" is unfermented. Then they conclude that Jesus again commends wine by His statement of the obvious--that old (ie., fermented) wine is better. The interesting thing about this argument is the inconsistency in their interpretation of "new wine," for in verses 38-39 (the very same context) they maintain that "new wine" is newly fermented wine but here in verse 39 they

acknowledge that the "new" is unfermented. Regardless of their inconsistency, the point is not that Jesus Himself believed the old (ie., fermented) wine was better, but that the person who is used to the fermented wine does not immediately desire grape juice. But again, in the context, Jesus uses His references to the different wines to illustrate a spiritual truth--that old religion seems better to those who are used to it. (That's why they are hostile to new truths.)

D. Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34--In these passages, Jesus' critics compare Him unfavorably with John the Baptist by declaring that John neither eats bread nor drinks wine, while Jesus eats and drinks. In fact, Jesus is accused of being both "gluttonous" and a "winebibber." Modern advocates of moderate drinking teach that this proves that Jesus Himself drank fermented wine. There was certainly a grain of truth in what Jesus' critics said in that He and John the Baptist lived totally different lifestyles. John ate primitively and alone in the wilderness while Jesus ate socially with the people. John's specific mission was to preach repentance and reformation by rebuking the excesses of his day; his simpler, wilderness lifestyle provided a good context for such a mission. Jesus' primary mission in His ministry was to bring the good news of the gospel directly to the people; to do this, He had to mingle freely with them, including the worst of sinners at times. As a Nazarite (see Numbers 6:1-4), John abstained from all products of the vine, including wine in any state and the grapes themselves. Jesus was not a Nazarite. And remember that it was Jesus' critics who accused Him of being a drunkard. That doesn't mean He drank fermented wine any more than His eating bread made Him a glutton.

E. Matthew 26:27-29; Mark 14:23-25; and Luke 22:18, 20--These are the passages which record the events of the Last Supper. There Jesus instituted the ordinance of communion as the Christian replacement for the Passover, part of which involves the drinking of the cup. Despite the fact that the word for "wine" is not even present in any of these passages, those who favor the moderate use of alcohol declare that through this service Jesus commanded His followers to drink fermented wine. Actually, Jesus is consistently recorded as having called the content of the communion cup the "fruit of the vine." According to the usage of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, the "fruit of the vine" refers to fresh grape juice; Josephus also calls it "gleukos" (see "II D 5" above), which was another term for unfermented wine.⁽²¹⁾ In addition to the testimony of Josephus, the very expression "fruit of the vine" suggests a natural product of the vine, which the fermented wine is not. Jewish rabbinical testimony about whether the Passover wine was fermented or unfermented is conflicting and inconclusive because both views on the nature of that wine were held among ancient Jewish scholars.⁽²²⁾ Since the Scriptures should be the final authority for Christians, and Jesus, not any group of Jewish rabbis, is to be our Example, we must let Scripture speak for itself. Exodus 12:15 and 13:7 forbid the very presence of "leaven" anywhere in the homes during Passover. The New Testament--in Matthew 16:12 and ICorinthians 5:7-8--provide the explanation by declaring that leaven is a symbol of evil. Leaven is a yeast, so the leavening process is parallel to the process of fermentation. In the light of these facts, plus Jesus' statement in

the disputed passages that the "fruit of the vine" represented His own saving blood, we must surely conclude that the communion cup did, and should always, contain unfermented (ie., uncorrupted) grape juice.

V. The Apostles and Wine

There are a number of New Testament references to wine made after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Several of these are misinterpreted by advocates of moderate drinking as at least condoning such a use of alcoholic wine. In this section, the six most common such passages are examined. The data already given in this paper will help the reader to avoid misleading conclusions and to allow the words in their own context to provide the answers to the question at hand. If we do this, we find that the Scriptures are remarkably consistent and a reliable guide as to the consumption of alcohol by the believer, as well as on other subjects.

A. Acts 2:13--This passage is part of the record in the chapter concerning the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, shortly after the ascension of Jesus to heaven. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that day gave the apostles the gift of tongues in order for them to instantaneously speak an unlearned language to the many foreign visitors who came to Jerusalem for that occasion. In the middle of this speaking in tongues, critics interrupted and mocked the speakers, saying that "These men are full of new wine." The Greek word there is "gleukos," which we already demonstrated was universally acknowledged by ancient authorities to refer only to fresh, grape juice (See II D 5 of this paper). The use of "gleukos" rather than "oinos" illustrates the "mocking" attitude of these critics in that they mockingly or laughingly alleged that the apostles were drunk on grape juice. The fact that Peter responded in v. 15 by declaring that it was too early in the day for people to get drunk is taken by advocates of moderate drinking to prove that Christians must have at least touched alcohol (or else Peter would have denied they ever drank it in any amount). Actually, Peter responded in much the same way as we would when someone accuses us of something obviously ridiculous or impossible. Furthermore, if he had denied that they drank "gleukos," that would have meant that Christians never drank fresh grape juice, which certainly would not have been true. Indirectly, the fact that the mockers referred to "gleukos" as the supposed source of intoxication suggests that they knew the apostles never touched fermented wine!

B. Romans 14:21--In this verse the apostle Paul declares that "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine ["oinos"], nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." (KJV). The argument used by the proponents of moderate drinking is that since v. 20 states that "All things are pure," Paul is only telling Christians not to eat or drink certain things in the company of weaker brethren. Otherwise, the believer can eat or drink whatever he desires (presumably as long as he does not become a glutton or a drunkard). Since it is assumed that unfermented grape juice would never offend anyone, then Paul must be referring to fermented wine. Bible scholars have long

debated the exact problem that the apostle was addressing in Romans 14. Many have suggested that the association of "days" (vv. 5-6) in the same context of food and drink indicates that the church at Rome contained some who advocated certain specific days for fasting. Others have suggested a possible connection to the influence of the Essene Jewish community, which held certain taboos and lived an ascetic (or spartan) lifestyle--thus, the reference to vegetarianism and a probable abstinence from all grape products (the latter like the Nazarites).

It may be forever impossible to determine the exact nature of the dispute, but one thing is certain: verse 1's reference to "doubtful disputations" (ie., people's own opinions) means that the controversy that Paul was addressing had nothing to do with the prohibitions or other teachings of Scripture. Therefore, v. 20's statement that "All things are pure" cannot accurately be used to negate the Old Testament teaching about "unclean" foods. (Besides, the Greek word for "unclean" in Romans 14 is a different word with a different meaning from the Greek word translated from the Hebrew in the Septuagint of Leviticus 11.) Neither, therefore, can it negate the Old Testament teaching on alcohol. In another place (I Corinthians 6:12), the apostle Paul declared that "All things are lawful" just after he had listed several detestable, sinful practices. Obviously, "all" must be defined by the context; here in Romans 14, the statement that "All things are pure" means that among those practices in dispute at the church in Rome, no one was teaching or practicing anything that was intrinsically wrong or sinful, but that certain practices were wrong if done in a context which might offend or further weaken an already weak brother (or sister) in the church. Whether the "weak" brethren in Rome were advocating vegetarianism and total abstinence from grape products or abstinence from certain foods and drinks on specific fast days, Paul was counseling the stronger brethren not to argue with them or offend them by their actions which would otherwise be consistent with Scripture. Therefore, Romans 14:21 cannot be used to infer that there is nothing inherently wrong about drinking alcoholic beverages under ordinary circumstances.

C. I Corinthians 11:21--The King James Version of this verse states that some believers in Corinth were sometimes "drunken" when eating and drinking with other believers in the church. Advocates of moderate drinking see this as evidence that alcoholic beverages were even served at church fellowship meals, and that what was wrong was that some actually became intoxicated. The context in this chapter strongly implies that the reference to a meal at church was an Agape, or Love, Feast eaten in connection with the Lord's Supper. This, then, is taken to mean by some scholars that fermented wine was used in the communion service of the early church.

The Greek word translated "is drunken" by the King James Version is "methuo," a word which sometimes simply means "satiation" or "fully satisfied" (as in John 2). The use of the word for "hungry" in the same connection with "is drunken" ("one is hungry, and another is drunken") makes the meaning of "satiation" mandatory here. (Two persons or groups of persons compared or contrasted with each other would not be indicated with "hungry" versus "drunken." Rather, this would be shown with the words "hungry" versus

"gluttoness" or "sober" versus "drunken.") Thus, the meaning of "methuo" in this context must refer to those who were selfishly being gluttonous while other church members had not even eaten. (Note v. 22's reference to "shame them that have not".) The problem was selfishness in eating; the reference is to the food at the Love Feast and not to drink of any kind at all. Therefore, there is no evidence in this passage that Christians drank alcoholic beverages during ordinary meals or in the Lord's Supper.

D. Ephesians 5:18--This passage contrasts two statements in its command--"be not drunk with wine" versus "be filled with the Spirit." Those who favor the moderate use of alcoholic beverages claim that the emphasis is on the word "drunk" rather than "wine," and that therefore, the abuse rather than the use of fermented wine is here condemned by the apostle. Otherwise, they maintain, Paul would have said something like, "Drink no wine at all."

Actually, the above interpretation cannot be the correct one because the verse clearly does not contrast moderation with excessive drinking, but the fullness of wine with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This contrast places the emphasis of the verse on wine and the Holy Spirit as sources for the very different fillings. And since you obviously have no room for anything else if you are "filled" with the Holy Spirit, then fermented wine is in fact prohibited by this verse. Critics argue that the relative pronoun (translated as "wherein" by the KJV) really points back to "be not drunk with wine," with the emphasis on "drunk." The Greek construction here would allow for the antecedent of "wherein" to be either "drunk" or "wine," but the positioning of the word "wine" between "drunk" and "wherein" (in the Greek as well as the KJV) strongly suggests that the intent of the writer was to make "wine" the antecedent of "wherein." This is also more consistent with the apostle's obvious focus on the contrast between the two sources of fillings. The word translated "excess" literally means "unsavableness," which, according to the text, is the result of being filled with wine. Indeed the structure of the entire text adds further proof to the thesis that the author really condemns wine (obviously fermented wine in this context) as the source of placing one in a potentially unsavable condition:

Statement: "And be not drunk with wine,"

Result: "wherein is excess; (ie., "unsavableness")

Contrasting Statement: "but be filled with the Spirit;"

Contrasting Result: "psalms," "hymns," "spiritual songs," "thanks," etc. (See vv. 19- 20).

One Bible scholar has paraphrased Ephesians 5:18-19 in the following accurate manner:

" 'Do not get drunk with wine, because the use of wine places a person in a state of *asotia* [literally, "unsavableness"], 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."⁽²³⁾

E. I Timothy 3:8--This passage states that church deacons must be "not given to much wine." Those who allege that the Bible permits Christians to indulge moderately in alcoholic beverages emphasize that since the apostle Paul said "much wine," he must have meant that only an excess of fermented wine was prohibited.

In verse 3 of the same chapter, the apostle admonished bishops to be "not given to wine" at all; the Greek there literally means "not near wine." Then in verse 8, the author begins with the word "Likewise," implying that the advice he is about to give to deacons is in essence the same as already given to bishops. That would suggest that deacons should not touch fermented wine either. It is also interesting to note that the same author in the same book (chapter 5, verse 23) urged Timothy to take a "little" wine for his stomach's sake, etc., obviously prescribing it for a limited medicinal use and not for pleasure. (See "F" below for a complete discussion of that text and the nature of the wine there.) Thirdly, what is wrong in excess is not necessarily right in moderation. For example, IPeter 4:4 says that believers no longer run to "excess of riot" (KJV) as the heathen do; that doesn't mean that believers riot moderately! What is even more interesting is that three verses later (IPeter 4:7) believers are urged to "watch"--from a Greek word whose primary meaning is to "abstain from wine." Thus, the "excess of wine" (IPeter 4:3) is not all that is condemned by that chapter. Therefore, in ITimothy 3:8, the apostle Paul is simply saying that deacons should not be drinkers of fermented wine. (That does not mean that only church leaders should abstain while other believers may indulge in moderation, for otherwise, in context, the passage would be giving them permission to be frivolous, double-tongued, and greedy of filthy lucre.)

F. I Timothy 5:23--In this passage, the apostle Paul encourages Timothy to "use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." Evidently, Timothy suffered repeatedly from some type of intestinal problems. When the apostle said just before that Timothy should "Drink no longer water" (also v. 23), he obviously meant not only water, implying that Timothy had avoided all products of the grape like the Nazarites did. In any case, the text makes it clear that the wine advocated by Paul was "a little" and for medicinal purposes, not pleasure. (Note the same context in Proverbs 31:6-7, discussed in III C above.) Even the verb "use" is fully consistent with prescription language. The testimony of historical sources is that, while fermented wine was sometimes used, unfermented wine was preferred for stomach ailments by the ancients.⁽²⁴⁾ Even if fermented wine were meant by Paul in I Timothy 5:23, it was for medicinal purposes only and explicitly given just to Timothy. The immediate context here suggests that probably unfermented grape juice is the subject, but in any case, this text clearly cannot be used to justify moderate social drinking.

VI. Summary

1. The assumption is usually made by proponents of the moderate use of alcoholic beverages that the ancient peoples did not know how to preserve the juice of the grape in an unfermented state, and that therefore, virtually every instance of wine mentioned in the Bible must be to fermented wine. This assumption is totally false as the ancient historical records are abundantly clear that there were several major methods of preserving grape juice in its natural, unfermented state.
2. Most modern Christians assume that the very words translated as "wine" or "strong drink" in the Bible must have the same meaning they have to modern users of the English language. Such an assumption ignores the obvious fact that many words in nearly all languages change in usage meaning through the centuries. Even in the English language, the word "wine" originally referred to any drink from the vine, whether fermented or unfermented.
3. The most common words by far used in Scripture to refer to wine are "yayin" (Hebrew Old Testament) and "oinos" (Greek New Testament). Both secular sources and the Bible itself (in context) make it very clear that they were each generic words used to describe the juice of the grape in both its fermented and unfermented state. The immediate context, if sufficiently clear (and it often is not), is the determining factor in interpreting these words as referring to fermented or unfermented wine.
4. There are definitely a sufficient number of times in Scripture in which the immediate context does make clear which form of wine is meant that a consistent pattern exists. Never in Scripture when the context makes it clear that fermented wine is the subject does that Scripture speak approvingly or commendingly of that wine, with the exception of Proverbs 31:6-7, which was for medicinal purposes to the dying who were in great pain (and remember the lack of modern pain medications). And when the context is clearly referring to unfermented wine, the Scripture always speaks of it in an approving manner; in fact, unfermented wine was used as a symbol of God's blessing to His people in the Old Testament. This pattern establishes the Bible teaching on wine, and by extension, its teaching on all alcoholic beverages. And that teaching is that fermented wine is prohibited to those who believe in the true God.
5. Most modern Christians argue that the Bible only condemns the abuse, not the use, of alcoholic drinks. The Bible is not a systematic theology textbook; it usually does not attempt to prove its teachings. But the careful student will note that in a few key places, the Scriptures clearly teach that the very nature of alcoholic beverages is that which brings spiritual apostasy and otherwise affects the mind (and body too) of whomever drinks it. In other words, it is not excessive drinking only that the Bible condemns, but the beverage itself and its consumption in any amount.
6. Many modern conservative Christians maintain total abstinence from intoxicating

beverages on the basis that we know from medical science the dangers and subtle negative effects on our health or mental alertness of even the moderate use of alcohol. Their view is that God excused the ignorance of His people in Biblical times and allowed them to drink alcoholic beverages then. While such a position comes to the right conclusion about the present behavior in this area expected from a Christian today, it is based on a superficial study of the Bible. Many times in the Old Testament, God spoke not the language of divine concession but of divine commending and commanding of wine as a positive blessing from Him designed to be enjoyed. The accurate interpretation comes when one realizes that some of the same words translated "wine" or "strong drink" there were generic words that could also be used to describe grape juice in its natural, unfermented state. Although even most Bible scholars are in error on this matter, a deeper study of the lexical evidence reveals this to be an obvious fact.

(It always amazes sincere Christians that Bible scholars could be in error, but the truth is that we are all human, and there is a human tendency in all of us that gives us a bias in a given area. The problem is that many, even among theologians, do not work to identify their built-in assumptions and/or do not analyze them in the light of Scripture and other sources to see if they are really valid. And no matter who you are, if you begin your theological study from one or more false assumptions, all the other evidence in the world will not correct your final conclusion of the matter; you are bound to end up with the wrong answer. So it really isn't that difficult to understand how even brilliant minds are sometimes wrong about theological matters.)

7. Since most Christians do not study the Old Testament today--a shame because it is so rich in revealing the character of man and God--they superficially look at New Testament passages which seem to justify their moderate drinking habit. But a careful examination of the statements of Jesus and His apostles reveals that none of them sanction even the moderate use of alcoholic beverages.

8. Although it is abundantly clear that the Bible condemns the use of alcohol in any amounts, it is only that clear to those who dig deeply for its truths. However, when all that is said and done, how in God's name (literal use intended) can modern Christians justify the touching of such beverages? Romans 12:1-2, and many other New Testament passages, make it clear that believers are in a life-and-death struggle for our eternal destiny. And that struggle is centered in the mind. Medical science is unmistakable in its acknowledgment that the first place in the brain affected by even small amounts of alcohol is the frontal lobe area. And that is known to be the center of judgment and the will in human beings. It should go without saying that a Christian should never touch any substance that even in small amounts begins to break down the moral inhibitions even though it may not be obvious to the external observer! Let God be every man's judge, but it is difficult not to conclude that even many professed Christians are simply rationalizing what they want to do regardless of the facts or the consequences to their spiritual, or physical, natures. May God have mercy on their souls!

ENDNOTES

1. Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 26. See also Bacchiocchi, Samuele, *Wine in the Bible, Biblical Perspective*, 1989, pp. 110-114, 127.
2. Albion Roy King, *Basic Information on Alcohol* (Washington, D.C., 1964), pp. 22-24. See also Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1989), p. 115.
3. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 20, 1; 12, 19, 3; 12, 20, 5-6; 12, 25, 1; 12, 25, 4; 12, 23, 2-3. See also Marcus Cato, *On Agriculture* 148, 23, 107, 109-110 trans. William Davis Hooper, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960). Also Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1989), pp. 110-114.
4. Virgil, *Georgics* 1, 295-296; Columella, *On Agriculture*, 12, 20, 8, 12, 26, 1; Athenaeus, *Banquet* 1, 25; John Kitto, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 ed., s.v. "Passover," vol 2, p. 477.
5. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 29; 12, 30, 1; Pliny, *Natural History* 14,11; Marcus Cato, *On Agriculture* 120, 1, trans. William Davis Hooper, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960).
6. Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24; 14, 28; Plutarch, *Symposiacs* 8, 7.
7. John Kitto, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 ed., s.v. "Wine," vol 2, p. 956.
8. William Patton, *Bible Wines or Laws of Fermentation and Wines of the Ancients* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, n.d., originally published in 1871), pp. 56-57. Patton cites John Kitto's *Kitto's Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, under "wine;" the London edition of E. Nott's *Lectures*, 1863, p. 68; and the *Bible Commentary*, Appendix B, p. 412.

See also *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906 ed., s.v. "Wine," vol. 12, p. 533; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971 ed., s.v. "Wine," vol. 16, p. 538; and a citing by Louis Ginzberg, "A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies," *American Jewish Year Book* 1923, p. 408.
9. Aristotle, *Metereologica* 384. a. 4-5; also 388. b. 9-13; Athenaeus, *Banquet* 1, 54; 2, 24; 6, 89; 2. 35; a citing by Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5, 33, 3-4, trans. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York, 1950), p. 263; and Nicander, *Georgica* fragment 86, cited by Robert P. Teachout, "The Use of 'Wine' in the Old Testament," Ph.D. dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979, (n. 25), p. 370.

10. William Patton, *Bible Wines*, n.d., p. 58; see also *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, ed. J. Payne Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press), under "Shakar;" *Young's Concordance*, p. 273 ("satiates" = "fully satisfies" or "intoxicates"); *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia and Scriptural Dictionary*, 1909 ed., s.v. "Strong Drink," p. 546; *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1933 ed.; *Webster's New International Dictionary*, 1959 ed.; *Kitto's Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, vol 2, s.v. "Wine," p. 953; and *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol 2, p. 927.
11. William Patton, *Bible Wines*, n.d., p. 60; Patton also cites F.R. Lee, *Biblical Commentary*, Appendix B, pp. 415-418, Liebig, *Chemistry of Agriculture*, 3rd ed., and *Bible Commentary*, Prelim. xvi. note.
12. Ezra 6:9; 7:22, and Isaiah 27:2.
13. William Patton, *Bible Wines*, n.d., p. 59.
14. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1989), p. 237.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
16. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1968 edition, s.v. "Gleukos;" James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. "Gleukos;" Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "Gleukos," etc.
17. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2, 5, 2, trans. William Whiston in *Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1947), p. 48.
18. Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24, trans. W.H.S. Jones, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961); also, Plutarch, *Symposium* 8, 7; and John Kitto, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 1845 ed., s.v. "Wine," vol. 2, p. 951.
19. Herbert Preisker, "Methe, Methuo, Methuskomai," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1967), vol. 4, p. 547; also, John Parkhurst, *A Greek and English Lexicon to the New Testament*, 7th edition (London, 1817), s.v. "Methuo."
20. *Encyclopedia Biblica*, eds. T.K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, 1903 ed., s.v. "Wine and Strong Drink," vol. 4, p. 5315; also, Alexander Balman Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels in The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 500; and see Job 32:19.
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Used in Jewish Ceremonies," *American Jewish Year Book 1923* (New York, 1922), pp. 414, 418; see also *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 8th ed., 1859, s.v. "Passover."

23. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages*. (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1989), p. 195.

24. Aristotle, *Metereologica* 387.b.9-13; see also Athenaeus, *Banquet* 2, 24 and Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24.

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