

Often in defense of the use of alcoholic wine Paul's medical advice to Timothy is quoted, "***No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities***" (1 Tim. 5:23)."

In light of the fact that alcoholic beverages can hardly be considered even today as being good for stomach ailments it is interesting to note the following from the most famous doctor of ancient times, "Hippocrates considered twenty parts water to one of the Thracian wine to be a proper beverage" (ibid., p. 42).

Often Christians, who would not drink alone or to the point of falling down drunkenness, will be enticed into drinking alcoholic beverages because it is the thing to do on social occasions, at university campuses or office parties. Many feel that they must show some affinity in the use of alcohol to those of their peer group in order not to offend. Disciples in the first century faced situations like those, thus Peter by the Spirit wrote, "***For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles --when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries***" (1 Peter 4:3, NKJV).

The earth cries out because of the use of mind altering drugs. Marriages, homes, lives and souls are decimated by the millions across the globe because of the intake of chemicals that destroy the mind and body. No land where alcohol is tolerated as a socially acceptable ingredient in drinks has escaped this scourge. Beverage alcohol is the world's number one drug of addiction, degradation, rape, robbery and violence

The question of drinking alcoholic wine or other beverages contaminated with ethanol is not a matter of situation ethics for the God fearing person. The gospel is the universal standard of ethics, morals and right conduct. The child of God who is committed to Jesus and His message is not going to pretend he can drink vodka in Russia, stout in Australia, beer in Germany, rum in the Caribbean, bourbon in Kentucky or champagne in France and be pleasing to the God of heaven. He does not change his stand on such just because he crosses a state line or an international border. Elders, preachers, Bible class teachers and other Christians must stand firm against the use of alcoholic beverages for the Spirit warned, "***Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper***" (Proverbs 23:31-32)."

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BULLETIN BRIEF

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DOES THE GOSPEL SANCTION THE USE OF-BEVERAGE ALCOHOL IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES ACCORDING TO LOCAL CUSTOM?

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In our approach to the word of God we must not assume that modern definitions of words are those, which are found in the Word of God. Words found in God's Book must be used as they were employed in context in the scriptures at the time they were written. The use of a word in the Bible depends on how it is used in the text, whether from the Old or New Testament.

It is a mistake to take the modern dictionary definition of baptism and try to make the scriptures fit it. Baptism is not sprinkling, pouring or immersion as current dictionaries say. *Baptism is immersion*. Examples and commands make this abundantly clear; e.g. Matt. 3:15-17; Acts 8: 36-38; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12. Another example is the use of *psallo* (Eph. 5:19; James 5:13) as found in the Greek New Testament. Outside the sacred text *psallo* was used to mean "pluck" many things, e.g., the beard, the hair, a bow or other, but in the New Testament it is used as in "making melody (*psallo*) in your heart" (Eph. 5:19). That is a spiritual "plucking" of ones heart. This illustrates that sacred music is acappella.

The modern concept that wine always means an alcoholic beverage cannot be applied consistently in the word of God without serious error. There are a number of words used in the Hebrew that are translated wine, but by far the most prevalent is "*yayin*." In the New Testament "*oinos*" is the general word for wine; Acts 2:15 being the one exception.

A careful review of the Biblical use of the word "wine" shows that it is a generic word with different meanings according to its context and usage.

1) In the Hebrew scriptures, wine (*yayin*) is often spoken of in such a manner that the text and/or the context show clearly that it means alcoholic wine. There are many, but two should suffice: "***Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise***" (Proverbs 20:1 "***Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; Who continue until night, till wine inflames them!***" (Isaiah 5:11).

2) Yet, wine (*yayin*) is also used in such a manner that the text and/or the context show that it means non-alcoholic wine. **“Gladness is taken away, And joy from the plentiful field; In the vineyards there will be no singing, Nor will there be shouting; No treaders will tread out wine in the presses; I have made their shouting cease”** (Isaiah 16:10). **“Joy and gladness are taken from the plentiful field and from the land of Moab; I have caused wine to fail from the winepresses; No one will tread with joyous shouting-- Not joyous shouting!”** (Jeremiah 48:33)

These and other scriptures clearly show that the word “wine” in the Bible is used as a generic word. Biblically speaking “wine” can be a curse or a blessing. It does not always mean a drink contaminated with the lethal drug, ethanol.

Not only can this be seen by the use of the word in various contexts, but the Holy Spirit by the inspired writer has taught us to make a distinction between wine as a blessing and as a curse. First a warning is given, **“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine”** (Proverbs 23:29-30).

Following this point the Holy Spirit gives the reason as to why “wine,” which in other places is considered a blessing (Isaiah 16:10; cf., Proverbs 3:10; Isaiah 65:8), is deemed such a curse. Let us note Proverbs 23:31: **“Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly.”** This text shows that the Lord deemed that there was a time one could look on wine, but when it had gone through the process which we know as vinous fermentation it would bite an individual like a poisonous snake. As He indicated, **“At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: ‘They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?’”** (Proverbs 23:32-35).

As noted earlier “wine” as found in the Bible must be defined by its context, not by modern man’s assumption that “wine” always means an alcoholic beverage. The record of the marriage feast in Cana, where wine was served to many, affords a good text to illustrate such. Before we look in on that scene, however, let us first see what the Spirit (including Jesus –the Word- prior to His incarnation) said about giving alcoholic beverages to another, **“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to your bottle, even to make him drunk, that you may look on his nakedness!”** (Habakkuk 2:15).

Here is the story of the marriage which our Lord and His apostles attended: **“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and**

His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it.’ Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the water pots with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, ‘Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.’ And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, ‘Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!’ This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him” (John 2:1-11).

The quantity in these stone pots would have been one hundred and twenty gallons or more, thus the statement by the master of the feast makes it clear that the Lord made sweet non-alcoholic wine of the grape not “wine” (alcoholic) as is commonly used by modern man. The man said, **“Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!”** (John 2:10).

From the context we realize that there was a very large crowd and that they had already “well drunk” of the common drink served at Jewish weddings. This makes it obvious that they were drinking non-alcoholic wine. This is true because if they had “well drunk” of alcoholic wine they would have been in violation of the numerous scriptures that condemned drunkenness (e.g., Proverbs 20:1; Isaiah 5:11; 28:10). Thus our Lord would not have added to their inebriation by making for them another one hundred and twenty gallons of the same intoxicating beverage. Had He done so he would have violated His own injunction in Habakkuk 2:15 (see above). As the sinless Son of God He would never have done such. Instead He would have reproved the crowd at Cana like the prophet, who had said long before, **“But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way; The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, they are swallowed up by wine, they are out of the way through intoxicating drink; They err in vision, they stumble in judgment”** (Isaiah 28:7).

One of the major reasons that modern man cannot accept the fact that non-alcoholic wine was available in ancient times is the erroneous belief that there was no way to preserve the juice in those days. Yet, careful research reveals that there were four ways that the juice of grapes was preserved fresh from the press in ancient times (*Bible Wines*, **William Patton, 1871)

These were 1) filtration, 2) immersion in cold water as in a spring, 3) fumigation and by 4) boiling (ibid, pp. 21-35). The latter was by far the most prevalent way the juice was preserved sweet and without alcohol. The boiling process was done at the vineyard to preserve the juice in its fresh sweet condition and to prevent it from going sour. It was boiled down to thick syrup just as juice from sorghum or sugar cane is boiled today to make molasses.

Patton from his extensive research has listed numerous quotes from ancient and other sources concerning the practice of boiling grape juice fresh from the vineyard in order that it might not spoil, which was a very real problem in the hot climate of Palestine and the other parts of the Mediterranean. For example he says, “Adams’ Roman Antiquities, first published in Edinburgh, 1791, on the authority of Pliny (known as the greatest of the Roman historians, 57-116 AD) and Virgil (celebrated writer of ancient Greece), says, ‘In order to make wine keep, they used to boil (*deconquere*) the must (juice freshly pressed out) down to one-half, when it was called *defrutum*, to one-third *supa*’” (ibid., p.26).

Again Patton writes, “W. G. Brown, who traveled extensively in Africa, Egypt and Syria from AD 1792 – 1798, ‘states that the wines of Syria are most of them prepared by boiling them immediately after they are expressed from the grape, till they are considerably reduced in quantity, when they were put into jars or large (goat skin) bottles and preserved for use.’ Brown expressed his judgment ‘that this mode of boiling was a general practice among the ancients’” (ibid, p.25). And, “Cyrus Redding, in his *History of Modern Wines*, says ‘On Mount Lebanon, at Kesroan, good wines are made, but they are for the most part *vins cuit* (boiled wine). The wine is preserved in jars.’ Kitto, ii. 956” (ibid., p.26).

While today France is known almost exclusively for its large assortment of alcoholic wines that has not always been the case. As Patton noted, “Mr. Robert Alsop, a minister among the society of Friends, in a letter to Dr. F. R. Lees in 1861, says: ‘The syrup of grape-juice is an article of domestic manufacture in most every house in the vine districts of the south of France. It is simply the juice of the grape boiled down to the consistency of treacle (molasses).’ *Bible Commentary*, p. xxxiv” (ibid., p.27). In the boiled state as grape syrup or grape molasses the wine would remain sweet for years. When it was served in homes or shops the thick syrup was reconstituted as non-alcoholic wine (Greek, *oinos*, Latin, *vino*) by the adding of four, five or more parts of water. Often it would cake in the jars or bottles as is noted in this quote from one of the best known philosophers of ancient times, “Aristotle, born 384 BC, says, ‘The wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was contained, and to dissolve the scrapings in water. *Bible Commentary*, p. 295, Nott, London Edition, p. 80.’ (ibid., p. 24).