

## The Wrath of Grapes

by

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### Introduction:

Surveys show that a staggering 64 percent of Protestant lay persons socially drink alcoholic beverages. Nationally, about 60 percent of the USA population drinks alcohol recreationally (July 2007 Gallup Poll of 18 year-old and above protestant laity in the USA). Methodists were some of the first proponents of complete abstinence in the mid-1700's. Southern Baptists have had a record of abstinence dating back to pro-abstinence resolutions as early as 1896 and as recent as 2006 (**Richard Land and Barrett Duke, "The Christian and Alcohol," *Criswell Theological Review* [Spring 2008, 19-38], p. 20**). Why the sudden change? Broader social acceptance of drinking, a lack of preaching and teaching on the subject, the secularization of the church, and an increase independence among adult church members have all contributed to the toleration of the social use of alcohol consumption among Protestant church members. The societal cost of drinking has risen to \$184 billion per year and is a factor in as many as 105,000 deaths annually in the USA (Land, p. 21). In a recent *USA Today/HBO* poll, 20 percent of Americans said that they "had an immediate relative who at some point had been addicted to alcohol or drugs" (**Rita Rubin, "In Tim Ryan's Family, He is the Addict," *USA Today*, July 20, 2006**). According to the same source, each addict negatively affects at least four to five people on a regular basis. Alcohol is commonly referred in the drug trafficking community as the "gateway drug."

### Understanding the Key Words

#### Key Hebrew Words

יַיִן (yāyin) **wine.**

The word is used 140 times, 12 of these in combination with shēkār (KJV "wine and strong drink"; NIV sometimes "wine and beer"). Its intoxicating properties are mentioned at least twenty times. It is mentioned as a common drink, an element in banquets and as the material used in libation offerings. These are called "drink offerings" in KJV, NASB, NIV, etc., but they were not drunk. The related Hebrew verb (nāsak) means "to pour out." These offerings were poured out on the sacrifices upon the brazen altar (Exo 29:40 and Exo 30:9), but in sarcasm the heathen gods are spoken of as eating the food and drinking the drink offerings given them (Deut 32:38).

Abundance of wine, however, is taken as a symbol of affluence (Gen 49:11-12; 1Chr 12:40; Ezek 27:18). There are places that speak of the lift to the feelings that wine brings (Zech 10:7; 2Sam 13:28; Est 1:10; Ps 104:15; Eccl 9:7-10; Eccl 10:19; Isa 55:1). It may be questioned whether in these verses that wine is commended because of this lift or if the verses use the freedom from inhibition as a symbol of plenty and blessing—cf. Nathan's reference to David's polygamy as a symbol of God's giving him great riches (2 Sam 12:8). Wine is also used in symbolic ways of the Lord's wrath (Jer 25:15; etc.) of Babylon's judgment (Jer 51:7) of violence (Prov 4:17) and of desire (Song 1:2; Song 4:10).

All the wine was light wine, i.e. 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 percent fortified wines were unknown in biblical 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 percent, the yeast cells are killed and fermentation ceases. Probably ancient wines were 7-10 percent alcohol. Drunkenness, therefore, was of course an ancient curse, but alcoholism was not as common or as severe as it is today. And in an agricultural age, its effects were less deadly than now. Still, even then it had its dangers and Proverbs 20:1 and Proverbs 23:29-35 are emphatic in their warnings. To avoid the sin of drunkenness, mingling of wine with water was practiced. This dilution was specified by the Rabbis, for the wine then was customary at Passover. The original Passover did not include wine (Deut 20:6) (**W. Dommershausen, "Yayin," TDOT, vol. 6, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], pp. 64-65).**

### שָׁכַר (shākar) to become drunk

The term means to become drunk, drunken, or *be full* (BDB, p. 1016). The verb is used nineteen times in the OT, twelve of which are in the prophetic books. In the Qal stem (ten times) the verb is intransitive, "be drunk." In the Piel and Hiphil stems (four times each) it is transitive, "make drunk."

With very few exceptions shākar and its derivatives are used in a highly unfavorable and negative context. But the few passages where the root is used in an acceptable sense should be observed. First, "strong drink" was to be used in the drink offering (Num 28:7) which of course was not drunk, but poured out as a libation. Second, the annual tithe to be paid to the Lord, the owner of the soil, might involve strong drink (Deut 14:26). Third, shēkār could be used as a medicinal stimulant—Prov 31:6, "Give strong drink unto him that is about to perish" (and cf. Mt 27:34; Mk 15:23 at the cross). Thus, of the nearly sixty uses of the root shākar, only a few refer to something good and acceptable.

Several instances of intoxication, caused by shēkār, are noted in Scripture: (1) Gen 9:20-27, Noah; (2) 1Sam 25:36, Nabal; (3) 2Sam :28-29, Amnon; (4) 1Kings 16:9, Elah; (5) 1Kings 20:16, Ben-hadad 1. Of special interest are those passages which indicate that God sends drunkenness upon people. Jeremiah 13:13 says, "I am going to fill with drunkenness (kings, prophets, and priests), " or Isaiah 63:6, "I will make them drunk in my fury." The idea is that drunkenness indicates helplessness. Thus, God says to his people (Isa 49:26), "I will make your oppressors eat their flesh and they shall be drunk with their own blood." Here, "to be drunk" means "to be helpless, " "I will reduce your oppressors to a state of total helplessness" (cf. Jer 25:27; Jer 51:39, 57) (**TWOT, vol 2, pp. 926-27).**

שֵׁכָר (shēkār) **strong drink.**

This term means intoxicating drink, strong drink, or beer and is usually condemned (Isa 5:22; 28:7; 28:7; 28:7 56:12; Mi 2:11, Pr 20:1; **BDB, p. 1016**). Most likely it does not mean "liquor" for there is no evidence of distilled liquor in ancient times. It denotes not just barley beer but any alcoholic beverage prepared from either grain or fruit. In all but two of its twenty-three uses in the OT (Num 28:7; Psa 69:12) it appears in connection with yayin "wine," usually following it, once preceding it (Prov 31:6) (*TWOT, vol 2, pp. 926-27*).

Other Hebrew terms for wine are *tirosh* (new wine), *'asis* (sweet wine), *mimsak/mezeg* (mixed wine with herbs), and *shemer* (aged wine) (**A. R. S. Kennedy, "Wine and Strong Drink," *Dictionary of the Bible*, rev. ed. [New York: Scribner's, 1963] pp. 1038-39**).

### Key Greek Words

The key NT words for wine and strong drink are *oinos*, *gleukos*, and *sikera*. *Sikera* (strong drink) is used only once in the NT (Luke 1:15) for a grain-based alcohol or intoxicating beverage made from other sources of fruit. *Oinos* is used more than thirty times in the NT and usually refers to fermented drink. *Gleukos* (new wine or sweet wine) represented wine that was not fully aged or wine that had a higher sugar content (**Wayne House, "Wine" in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988]**). Professor A. C. Schultz points out that "Usually the new wine was left in the vat to undergo the first fermentation which took four to seven days. It was then drawn off. . . . The whole period of fermentation would last from two to four months when the wine would be ready for use ("**Wine and Strong Drink," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5:938**).

In general, the OT and NT terms for wine referred to the fruit of the vine usually in some stage of fermentation. Exceptions could be "sweet new wine," fresh wine from the harvest (Isa 16:10; John 2), and diluted wine. This conclusion is based on the following arguments:

1. Lexical Consensus. The leading Old and New Testament lexicons and etymological dictionaries affirm that the major terms used of wine represent beverage at various stages of fermentation. The most important terms for the debate that are employed in Scripture are *yayin* and *shekar* (Hebrew), *oinos* and *gleukos* (Greek) [**Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 406, 1016. Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 303, 716. BDAG, pp. 201, 701. Joseph H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 564. See "wine" in *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2.3788. See also usage in etymological dictionaries by John M'Clintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, rep. 1969 [1887]). Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, (New York: Elsevier, 1966). Robert K. Barnhart, *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, (Bronx, NY: H. W. Wilson, 1988)].**

2. Translation Consensus. The major English translations of Scripture translate these words by the English equivalent of “wine.” However, it is important to note that Jesus refers to the beverage in the Lord’s Supper as the “fruit of the vine” (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22ff; Luke 22:17ff) and Paul references it as the “cup” (1 Cor 10:16-21; 11:23-28). In time, Biblical principles gradually undermined the consumption of alcohol in much the same way they undermined the practice of slavery. We must remember that the concept of pasteurized grape juice produced centuries later by Thomas Welch was a foreign concept in biblical times. **[Authorized Version (King James); New American Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version; New English Bible; New International Version, English Standard Version]**

3. Lexical Relationship. One of the major words in our discussion is *shekar* (“strong drink,” NASB). It is the noun form of the verb *shakar* which usually means to “become drunk.” This is evidence of the inebriating capacity of *shekar* indicating a commonly undiluted form of alcoholic drink made from dates, apples, pomegranates, honey, barley, rice, and sometimes grapes. “Strong” has reference not only to the alcoholic content, but also to the taste. Prior to and during NT times the Jews differentiated between wine and strong drink as diluted and undiluted.

4. Contextual Usage. Many of the verses that condemn drunkenness make reference to such beverages as *yayin*, *shekar*, and *oinos* (Judges 9:13; 2 Sam. 13:28; Est. 1:10; Ps. 104:14-15; Eccl. 9:7; 10:19; Zech. 9:15; 10:7).

6. Circumspection Requirement. “Strong” Christians are instructed to forgo the use of wine (Rom. 14:21), when there is a likelihood of “destroying” (Rom 14:15) a “weaker brother” (Rom. 14:1; 15:1). The issue here according to Douglas Moo in his commentary on Romans has more to do with the fact that the wine may have been offered in the precinct temples to idols.

7. Ecclesiastical Requirement. Church officers are required to not linger beside wine, positively to mix it with water for digestive purposes, and not use too much wine when doing so (I Tim. 3:8; Tit. 1:7; cf. 2:3). **[Kenneth Gentry, pastor of Reedy Presbyterian Church, Mauldin, South Carolina, and author of numerous published essays and books, including *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Baker, 1986) currently under the title, *God Gave Wine*, makes a convincing case that wine in the OT and NT is usually fermented. The possible exceptions are dilution or freshness.]**

### **Why Believers Today Should Abstain From Alcohol as a Beverage**

1. Wine in the NT era and wine today are not identical.

*Yayin* and *Oinos* usually refer to wine in some state of fermentation beginning with fresh, sweet juice available immediately after grape harvest (Isa 16:10; Jer 48:33) that quickly starts the fermentation process in the absence of refrigeration or pressurized bottling. Fermentation is a natural process that takes place when the grape juice comes into contact with the yeast released from broken grape skins during the treading of grapes.

"New wine" in Hebrew and Greek respectively (*tirosh / gleukos*) may refer to the juice of the grape that was fresh or in the first year of fermentation. *Mixed Wine* in the OT was wine flavored with herbs and quite intoxicating (Prov 23:30). *Undiluted wine* in the NT era was approximately 7%-10% alcohol and usually not taken as a beverage without proper dilution. On account of extra yeast and controlled heating conditions, some standard table wines today by comparison are as much as 14% alcohol.

Fermented wine in the Greek and NT eras was regularly diluted with water ("**Wine Drinking in New Testament Times**" by **Robert H. Stein, *Christianity Today*, June 20, 1975, pp. 9-11**). The Talmud (200 B.C—200 A.D.) records the Jewish practice of regularly reducing the effects of wine by a 3/1 or 2/1 ratio of water to wine. In the rabbinic period "*Yayin* is to be distinguished from *Shekar* [strong drink]: the former is diluted with water; the latter is undiluted" (***Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1901, vol. 12, p. 533**). The Jewish Mishnah said, "They do not say the Benediction over the wine until water has been added to it" (***The Mishnah, Berakhot 7.5 ed, by Herbert Danby [Oxford Press, 1893]***). The normal mixture for the Jews was three parts water to one part wine (Shabbath 77a). In the Passover ritual during NT times the four cups every Jew was to drink during the ceremony had to be mixed three parts water to one part wine (Pesachim 108b). This practice is reflected as common during the inter-testament period in 2 Maccabees 15:39: "It is harmful to drink wine alone, or again to drink water alone [bacteria issues], while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment" (See "**Wine**" in ***The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder [New York: New York University Press, 2002], pp. 798ff**).

This dilution process reduced the alcoholic content of the wine down to approximately 2.25–2.75%. In contrast to the ancient world, the modern world does not dilute the effects of alcohol. Beer is 3.5% to 4.5% and typically served in 12-16 ounce containers; table wines are as much as 14%; fortified wines are 18-24%; hard liquor is 40% (80 proof).

A *diluted wine* would reduce the risks of drunkenness from that of an undiluted wine. Peter argued that the Christians at Pentecost were not drunk since it was only the third hour (9:00 AM). Normally, one had to linger with the wine or be "beside wine" (1 Timothy 3:3) in order to be intoxicated.

"In NT times the practice of dilution seems to have been usual" (**A. R. S. Kennedy, "Wine and Strong Drink," *Dictionary of the Bible*, rev. ed. [New York: Scribner's, 1963] pp. 1038-39**).

"The wine of classical antiquity was very different from modern wine. They . . . always diluted it with water before consumption . . . Only barbarians drank undiluted wine" (**Maynard A. Amerine, *Collier's Encyclopedia*, 1994, vol. 23, p. 518**).

"In all these countries [Syria, Palestine, Egypt], wine was always diluted with water, a long-standing custom in Mediterranean regions, where pure potable water is not very common" (**R. J. Forbes, Professor of the History of Pure and Applied Sciences in Antiquity, University of Amsterdam, in *Encyclopedia American*, 1989, 29:44-45**).

“At a latter period, however, the Greek use of diluted wines had attained such sway that the writer of 2 Maccabees speaks (15:39) of undiluted wine as ‘distasteful.’ This dilution is so normal in the following centuries that the Mishcan take it for granted and, indeed, Rabbi Eliezer even forbade saying the table-blessing over undiluted wine. The proportion of water was large, only one-third or one-fourth of the total mixture being wine. Note—The wine of the Last Supper, accordingly, may be described in modern terms as a sweet, red, fermented wine, *rather highly diluted* [emphasis mine]” (**Burton S. Easton, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1984, vol. 5, p. 3087**). The reference in Isaiah 1:22 to diluted wine as bad should not be taken as a proof that Jews did not dilute wine, but as a metaphor of spiritual adulteration (cf. Isa 1:21).

“The use of wine at the paschal feast . . . had become an established custom at all events in the post-Babylonian period. The wine was mixed with warm water on these occasions . . . . Hence in the early Christian Church it was usual to mix the sacramental wine with water” (**Merrill Unger, “Wine,” *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., [Chicago: Moody Press, 1981], p. 1169**).

“He, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength [“akratou” from “akratos” meaning “undiluted”] into the cup of his wrath” (Rev 14:10a)

The Greeks practiced dilution and it eventually spread throughout the Roman world including Palestine. Pliney's work entitled "Natural History" mentions an 8 to 1 ratio of water to wine. Other Classical Greek writers mention similar ratios: Hesiod--3 to 1, Alexis--4 to 1, Diocles -- 2 to 1. Mnesitheus of Athens said: “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 . . . . 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” (Stein, “Wine Drinking,” p. 9).

According to Stein, dilution was practiced in the early centuries of the church. Justin Martyr (150 A.D.) described the Lord's Supper as "Bread is brought, wine and water, and the elder sends up prayers and thanksgiving" (*Apology*, I, 67, 5). Cyprian (250 A.D.) said, "Thus, therefore, in considering the cup of the Lord, water alone cannot be offered, even as wine alone cannot be offered. For if anyone offers wine only, the blood of Christ is dissociated from us; but if the water be alone, the people are dissociated from Christ. . . . Thus the cup of the Lord is not indeed water alone nor wine alone, unless each be mingled with the other" (*Epistle*, LXII, 2, 11 and 13). Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd century) said, "It is best for the wine to be mixed with as much water as possible. . . . For both are works of God and the mixing of the two, both of water and wine produce health. . . . To the necessary element, the water, which is in the greatest quantity, there is to be mixed in some of the useful element" (***Instructor*, in James Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicence Fathers* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans] vol. 2, 2.2**).

It appears that Paul sets the standard for the early church in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 of "not beside wine," not "much wine," and not drinking water exclusively but using a little wine for one's stomach. "Strong drink" (*sikera*) seems to be completely off limits in the NT; it is only mentioned once in the NT in reference to the abstinence of John the Baptist. John was a Nazirite, a term which comes from a Hebrew verb which means to "separate" or "abstain." Amos chastised Israel for their treatment of the Nazirites in forcing them to drink wine (Amos 2:12). On the other hand, God commended the Rechabites for their abstinence and held this tribe in high regard for their faithfulness (Jer 35:1-19) (**See John MacArthur's excellent treatment of wine and strong drink in his NT *Ephesians* commentary [5:18a], pp. 229-244.**)

2. The use of diluted wine is no longer necessary today in modern society.

In the NT era there was little else to drink. It would have been quite difficult not to drink wine in those times and under those conditions. The alcohol content made wine one of the safest liquids to drink, because the water supplies were often contaminated. Alcohol had a medicinal effect in that case. With modern purification of water and a host of alternatives that are completely safe, it is not necessary today to drink diluted wine for one's health. The American Heart Association does not normally recommend alcoholic beverages as a treatment for heart conditions. Whatever minimal health benefits are offered by a moderate drinking of wine can be obtained by the use of pasteurized grape juice.

3. Drunkenness is clearly forbidden as it has the potential to replace the influence of the Spirit in a believer's life (Eph 5:18-20).

Christians are not to associate with so-called Christians who get drunk (1 Cor 5:11). Drunkards will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9ff; Gal 5:19ff). Many NT passages call Christians to sobriety (*napho*; 1 Thess 5:1-11; 2 Tim 4:5; 1 Pet 1:13, 4:7, 5:8) and temperance (*naphalios*; **1 Tim 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2; Otto Bauernfeind, *TDNT*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964] 5:165**), argues that both these terms include a literal as well as a figurative sobriety).

4. In the NT era Christians used diluted wine.

1 Timothy 5:22-23 says, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (NIV; cf. Luke 10:33ff). Timothy was avoiding the use of diluted wine perhaps out of motivation to be pure (1 Tim 5:22a). It is clear here that diluted wine had a necessary medicinal value to Timothy for his digestive system. God's people could use it as such. In vs. 22 *hudropoteo* means "to drink water without wine mixed in" (**Gordon Fee, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, p. 92**). Paul commands Timothy to drink diluted wine as a medical necessity and to stop drinking plain water. For this reason pastors and deacons were not to be "beside wine" or partakers of "much wine." These men could drink diluted wine as long as it did not impair their judgment.

### Excursus on 1 Timothy 3:3

KJV "not given to wine"; NIV "not given to drunkenness"; NASB "not addicted to wine"; NKJV "not given to wine"; ESV "not a drunkard"; HCSB "not addicted to wine"

#### Definitions of *Paroinos*

BDAG – “drunken, addicted to wines”

Thayers– “given to wine, drunken”;

Strongs– “From G3844 and G3631; staying *near wine*, that is, *tippling* (a *toper*): given to wine.”

However, Greek word study scholars give references to ancient documents on this word that may indicate a metaphorical meaning.

*Vincent’s Word Studies*: “Only here and Titus 1:7. The verb means to behave ill at wine, to treat with drunken violence, is found in Xenophon, Aeschines, Aristophanes, and Aristotle. Once in LXX, Isaiah 41:12. Rev. renders brawler, which is not definite enough. Better, quarrelsome over wine.”

Wuest in his *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* has some interesting comments. For our purposes here, he references *Expositors* as saying, “The word means ‘violent temper,’ *not specially* excited by over-indulgence in strong drink.”

Jamieson Fawcett Brown: “1 Timothy 3:3 - Not given to wine--The Greek includes besides this, not indulging in the brawling, violent conduct towards others, which proceeds from being given to wine.”

#### Exegetical thoughts

The definitions of *paroinos* offer a few exegetical possibilities:

This word may tell us that a man is not qualified for the office of a overseer if he is beside wine (This of course is the simplest rendering of the word.).

This word may also tell us that a man is not qualified for the office of a overseer if he *spends time beside wine* (regularly drinking alcohol as a beverage).

This word may also tell us that a man is not qualified for the office of a overseer if he exhibits the *behavior of those that spend time beside wine* (violence and brawling). The leadership of the OT (kings – Proverbs 31:4, and priests– Leviticus 10:9) were supposed to abstain while performing the duties of their office.



### **Application thoughts**

It is clear that leadership of God's people ought to be extremely careful as to what they consume so that they are not impaired from doing their office.

It is strongly encouraged that any man who is to be qualified for ministry be able to demonstrate that he is not one that is "given to wine." One very good way to do this is to have a commitment to abstain from all alcoholic beverages which is easily accomplished in our modern world.

#### 5. Christians should act responsibly concerning their personal testimony and influence.

a. Alcoholic beverages today are much stronger than those of the biblical era and thereby much more likely to produce impairment of judgment and drunkenness. Today, 5 ounces of wine equals 12 ounces of beer which equals 1.5 ounces of whiskey, approximately three times the alcohol contained in an 8-ounce cup of diluted wine in NT times.

b. Alcoholic beverages today provide no spiritual benefit but have the realistic potential for harm. Paul cites the Corinthian motto, "Everything is permissible," and then counters, "but all things are not beneficial" (1 Cor 10:23-24). Paul is condemning libertarianism and advocating that we do that which is spiritually beneficial, constructive, and good. As a matter of Christian witness we should not do anything that could seriously jeopardize our witness to others. Many lost people expect that Christians should not drink. Others who have been victimized by alcohol-related crimes are extremely sensitive to this issue. They might conclude that social drinking Christians are callous and out of touch with the real world. Our concept of freedom should not allow us to participate in activity that has been so injurious to millions of people in the world. Also, our own lifestyles will influence others both outside our home and particularly inside our home. Children will likely follow the example of their parents in alcohol related matters. People have to eat, but they do not have to drink in modern society. Social-drinking is purely a choice and not a compulsion. It is a choice that is offensive to some and deadly to many.

c. Alcoholic beverages today could lead to sinful slavery. 1 Corinthians 6:12 says, "but I will not be mastered by anything." Modern alcoholic beverages are extremely addictive. The easiest way for believers to obey this verse is to abstain unless medical necessity compels it.

d. Alcoholic beverages today will more than likely cause others to spiritually stumble (Phil 2:4; Rom 14:19-21). "It is better not to ... drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."

e. Alcoholic beverages today have greater potential of drunkenness and thus are more closely associated with the unsaved life (1 Cor 6:9ff; Gal 5:19ff). The mind is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, not alcohol (Eph 5:18).

f. We should appropriately treat the human body as the temple of God (1 Cor 6:19-20). Our bodies our God's workmanship. Alcohol consumption subjects God's temple to unnecessary risks which far outweigh the benefits (**Centers for Disease Control**, <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm>). One can receive the benefits of grapes by grape juice today or special vitamins which capture in concentrated form the benefits of large amounts of wine (20/20 ABC News, April 2008, Barbara Walters, "Long Life").

g. Alcoholic beverages today are easily and regularly abused and lead to other forms of wickedness. "And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink . . . They are confused by wine . . . They totter when rendering judgment" (Isa 28:7). Alcohol abuse is a causal factor in 70% of drownings/chokings, 50% of "freak accidents," 27,000 deaths per year *via* liver disease, 30% of suicides, 20% of airplane crashes, 50% of fire deaths, and alcohol contributes to 500,000 injuries per year. Alcoholics outnumber all other addicts. Approximately 77% of all high schoolers use alcohol and nearly 30% drink heavily. Amazingly, over 40% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders drink. About one in ten of all drinkers will become alcoholics. In addition, 45% of all homeless people in America are alcoholics (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism). According to national surveys, alcohol is a contributing factor in 65% of all murders in the USA, 40% of assaults, 35% of rapes, 55% of domestic violence, 60% of child abuse, 60% of traffic fatalities (Scott Williquette, "The Christian and Alcohol," *Sola*). Interestingly, during Prohibition (1920-1933) many social ills in America decreased such as cirrhosis (66% drop), disorderly conduct (50% drop), and the rate of increase in homicide was actually higher before Prohibition than during it (**US Government "Wickersham Commission Report"** at [www.druglibrary.org](http://www.druglibrary.org)). In addition to all of this, regular consumption of alcohol increases one's chance of heart attacks, cancer, birth defects, insanity, impotence and sterility. In light of the above I don't believe drinking modern alcoholic beverages as a beverage is an option for Christians except when in circumstances similar to those encountered by NT Christians in the early church era. Even then the same precautions should be taken now as were taken then.

6. Abstention from using alcohol as a beverage is not legalism.

The Apostle Paul refuted legalism when he said, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1; cf. 15:5, 24). He also said, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law . . . ?" (Gal 3:2). Legalism is the belief that one can gain God's favor by keeping divine or human laws, whether for justification or sanctification—the belief that grace can be merited by good works (see Rom 4:5; Titus 3:5-7). In general God forbids "strong drink," and modern

alcoholic beverages today qualify as strong drink. Applying Scriptural principles to our culture which is significantly different than ancient cultures is not legalistic either. We do so out of our love for God and our fellow man.

### **Conclusion**

Philippians 2:4 tells us, “Do not merely look out for your own interests but also for the interests of others.” 1 Corinthians 10:31 also reminds us, “Whether, therefore, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” There is no glory to God in the willful pursuit of pleasure that has no regard for one’s influence or effect upon others. “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (1 Cor 10:34). How many of you would fly if you knew that there was a 1 in 10 chance the plane would crash? The chances that the moderate drinker will become an alcoholic is 1 in 10; the chance that the moderate drinker will become a problem drinker is 1 in 3 (“**A Plea for Total Abstinence,**” *The Evangelical Beacon*, Nov. 13, 1979. p. 2).

Furthermore, if you abstain from alcohol as a social beverage, you can encourage others to forsake illegal stimulants such as marijuana, heroin, or cocaine without fear of inconsistency. Our joy need not come from an alcoholic stimulant. On the contrary, “in Thy presence is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever” (Ps 16:11). God wants His children to have peace without unnecessarily risking that we go to pieces. The liberated mind-set of the Corinthians did not help their church, nor will it help ours. Mark Twain once commented regarding gambling that the best toss of the dice was to toss the dice away. Practically speaking, in order to avoid temptation, tossing liquor, strong drink, and modern alcoholic beverages down the drain would only have positive results in the world we live in today.

“Certain neighbors of mine laugh at me for being a teetotaler, and I might well laugh at them for being drunk, only I feel more inclined to cry that they should be such fools” (**Charles H. Spurgeon, *John Ploughman’s Pictures*, p. 42, [Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, rep. 1974]; also see *C. H. Spurgeon* by Arnold Dallimore (Moody Press, 1984), pp. 181-83, which details the turning of young Spurgeon from alcohol to total abstinence).**

## Scriptural Warnings & Prohibitions for Wine and Strong Drink

1. The first drunkenness and the attendant improper behavior. --Gen. 9:20-26
2. Drinking results in Lot's debauchery of his own daughters. --Gen. 19:30-38
3. Isaac was drinking when he mistakenly blessed Jacob. --Gen. 27:25
4. An express command for the Levitical priesthood not to drink while performing their service. --Lev. 10:9
5. The vow of the Nazarite. --Num. 6:3
6. Drinking leads to stubbornness, rebellion, and brings dishonor to parents.--Deut. 21:20
7. Abstinence was essential for Israel in the wilderness wanderings. --Deut. 29:2-6
8. Samson's mother was commanded not to drink.--Judg. 13:4, 7, 14
9. Hannah, an example of motherhood, was a total abstainer. --I Sam. 1:14-15
10. Nabal, died after a drunken spree, after he already lost his wife's respect.--I Sam. 25:33; 36:38
11. Only by strong drink could David lead Uriah into a fatal trap. --II Sam. 11:13
12. Amon, in a drunken brawl, was murdered by his brother Absalom. --II Sam. 13:28-29
13. While a king was "drinking himself drunk," one of his captains slew him. 1Kings 16:8-10
14. While Ben Hadad and 32 other Kings were drinking in their pavilions, a small band of Israel's men fell upon them and put them to flight. --I Kings 20:13-21
15. King Ahasuerus drunkenly tried to subject his queen to the gaze of inebriated nobles, causing the wreck of home and separation of the husband and wife. Esther 1:5-22
16. Violence results from drinking. --Pr. 4:17
17. No wise men will indulge. --Pr. 20:1
18. Drink leads to poverty. --Pr. 21:17, 23:21
19. The body rebels after drinking. --Pr. 23:7-8
20. Strong drink produces sorrow, contentions, wounds without cause, babblings, redness of eyes. --Pr. 23:29-30
21. Do not be tempted by intoxicants. --Pr. 23:31
22. God's Word warns that alcohol eventually harms those who drink. --Pr. 23:32
23. It produces a willfulness and prevents reformation. --Pr. 22:23
24. It fills men's minds with adulterous and impure thoughts. --Pr. 23:33
25. It brings on insecurity. --Pr. 23:34
26. Insensibility follows drinking --Pr. 23:35
27. Habit forming. One drink tends to call for another. --Pr. 23:35
28. Kings and all other rulers or officials with the weight of human lives in their control should not imbibe while in the capacity of service. --Pr. 31:4-5
29. The sanctions for the use of strong drink were as a medicine or anesthetic for the dying. --Pr. 31:6-7
30. Blessings are promised to the temperate nations. --Eccl. 10:17
31. More woes to them who drink. --Isa. 5:22
32. Drinking and carnality go together. Leaves men hopeless. --Isa. 22:13

33. Drink is bitter to them that drink it. --Isa. 24:9
34. Woe to the drunkards of Ephraim. --Isa. 28:1
35. The pride of drunkards will be trodden down. --Isa. 28:3
36. Prophets and priests erred through drink. --Isa. 28:7
37. Those who drink are set aside as useless. --Isa. 28:7
38. Prophets and priests finally swallowed up by drink. --Isa. 28:7
39. Drinking brings on spiritual blindness. --Isa. 28:7
40. Rebuke to drinking watchmen. --Isa. 56:9-12
41. Total abstinence of the Rechabites cited as example of obedience on the part of God's people. --Jer. 35:5, 6, 8, 14
42. Priests are not to drink wine in their service to God. --Ezek. 44:21
43. God honored Daniel because he abstained from the King's wine which had been offered to idols. --Dan. 1:5, 8, 16; 10:3
44. Belshazar was an example of a foolish leader who drank and taught his people to drink. --Dan. 5:1-28
45. Hosea's wife was induced by drink. --Hos. 3:1
46. Strong drink and immorality are closely associated. --Hos. 4:11
47. Kings and people reprov'd because of drinking. --Hos. 7:5
48. Young virtue sold for the price of drink. --Joel 3:3
49. Sinful men use drink to pollute the innocent. --Amos 2:12
50. Dissolute women, oppressors of the poor, demand their intoxicants. --Amos 4:1
51. Self-indulgent drinkers not concerned about God nor the welfare of others. -- Amos 6:6
52. Drunkards to be destroyed. --Nah. 1:10
52. Arrogance inflamed by drink. --Hab. 2:5
53. Wrong to give one's neighbor drink so they are drunk. --Hab. 2:15
54. Drink leads to shame and humiliation. --Hab. 2:16
55. Drunkards warned about the return of Christ and judgment. --Matt. 24:48-51
56. Greatness of John the Baptist in part is linked with his total abstinence. --Luke 1:15
57. Christ warns against being enmeshed in drink. --Luke 12:45
58. Warning against drunkenness and the cares of this life, keeping one occupied to the exclusion of the Spirit. --Luke 21:34
59. All are admonished to walk honestly, not in rioting and drunkenness. --Rom. 13:13
60. Drinking wine may cause a brother to stumble. Importance of example. --Rom. 14:21
61. No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God. --I Cor. 6:10
62. The Lord's Supper does not demand intoxicating wine. The word "wine" is not used. Instead all accounts say "the cup or "fruit of the vine." God severely chastised those who abused wine at the Lord's Table. --I Cor. 11:25
63. Revelers in drunkenness shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. --Gal. 5:21
64. Direct command that sanctification shall be of the Spirit and not by wine. --Eph. 5:18
65. Church officers must not be "beside wine" (*paroinos*). --I Tim. 3:3, 8, 11, 12

## Scriptural Affirmations

1. Wine is a part of the blessing Isaac gave to Jacob. --Gen. 27:25
2. Wine (and strong drink) commanded to be used in sacrifices as a drink offering poured out and in the sacrificial meal. -- Ex. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:5,10; 28:7,14; Deut. 14:22-26. Though the OT usually condemns strong drink, it could be used for medicinal purposes or possibly be diluted for consumption purposes. Here, it is more likely part of one's offering unto God and subsequently used as a libation offering.
3. Wine "makes glad the heart of man." --Ps. 104:14-15. Wine as opposed to plain water or warm milk caused one to rejoice. It was viewed as God's blessing. However, this is not a reference to the inebriating effects of alcohol. It may be questioned whether in these verses wine is commended because of this lift or if the verses use the freedom from inhibition as a symbol of plenty and blessing--cf. Nathan's reference to David's polygamy as a symbol of God's giving him great riches (2Sam 12:8). Technically, God gave grapes. Man makes wine from the grapes and strong drink from other fruits and grains.
4. Wine & strong drink are medically useful for healing wounds, digestive disorders, exhaustion in the desert, the heavy hearted & those "ready to perish." – Luke 10:34; 1 Tim 5:23; 2 Sam 16:2, Prov. 31:6-7
5. Wine is a part of the future feasting in Christ's Kingdom. --Isa. 25:6-9; Jer. 31:12-14; Matt. 26:29 (During the millennium the earth will be in a semi-Edenic state which may affect the process of fermentation.)
6. The Lord Jesus Christ miraculously created wine for a marriage feast. This wine was deemed "good" by the headmaster of the feast (John 2:10). Christ commanded the containers to first be filled with water thus eliminating any possibility of the concept of an undiluted wine. Second, the wine was fresh. (cf. John. MacArthur's rather thorough treatment in his *Ephesians* commentary [5:18a])

Stephen Reynolds, Ph.D. (Princeton University), who served on the translation team for the New International Version of the Bible and is the author of *The Biblical Approach to Alcohol* (Intern. Society of Good Templars, 1989) and *Alcohol and the Bible* (Challenge Press, 1983), argues the prohibitionist position as follows:

### **Reynolds: Scripture Prohibits the Drinking of Alcoholic Beverages**

“A careful study of Proverbs 23 in the original freed me forever from my bondage to the moderationist theory. This chapter contains a number of prohibitions addressed to all humanity in the second person singular as are some of the Ten Commandments. They forbid us, each and every human being addressed as an individual, to do certain things such as removing old landmarks (stealing land), withholding correction from a child, envying sinners, being among winebibbers, despising our own mother when she is old and looking at a drink which in Hebrew transliterated is *yayin ki yith’addam*. The word *yayin* is generally translated wine in English Bibles. In this passage it is correctly translated wine. It is a beverage we must not look at lustfully. It is alcoholic wine. *Yith’addam* cannot (being *hithpa’el*) mean simply “when it is red.” The following words are no doubt put in Holy Writ to distinguish the forbidden *yayin* from other *yayin* which is not forbidden.

This prohibition of looking at this sort of *yayin* establishes a principle, one to which all the rest of the Bible must conform if the Bible is in harmony with itself, which it certainly is. We can no more look to other passages in the Bible, put our own interpretation on them, and say they negate Proverbs 23:31 than we can find some passage which we can twist to mean that we can despise our mothers when they are old and say that this negates verse 22 of the same chapter.

Someone who objects to taking Proverbs 23:31 in its plain sense has suggested that the entire book of Proverbs is given to us to make us think and contains no firm commands to be obeyed, but this is against II Timothy 3:16. If Proverbs gives a command, that command must be obeyed.

Another who objects to taking Prov. 23:31 as a command to all persons as individuals says it applies only to drunkards. His reason for doing that is that drunkards are mentioned, but drunkards and the ill effects of drinking are there to make clear what sort of *yayin* is prohibited, as there was nonalcoholic *yayin* as well as alcoholic. The idea of this objector is a very improper reason for seeking to avoid a clear command of God, which by reason of its place in the Bible is to be obeyed by all, not merely by drunkards.

That *yayin* in the Bible need not refer to an alcoholic drink is proved by Isaiah 16:10 and Jeremiah 48:33. Here the immediate product of treading grapes is called *yayin*, and yet everyone knows that the immediate product of treading grapes is called in modern (but not 17<sup>th</sup> century) English: grape juice. This is all the evidence needed to affirm that wherever *yayin* is praised in the Bible it should be translated “grape juice,” as for example when it is said that little children not fully weaned cry for it (Lam. 2:12) or when, in what may be the description of a harvest festival, fresh grape juice is being enjoyed by the happy harvesters and their friends and is called a gift of God from the earth to make glad the heart of man (Ps. 104:15).

It is therefore certain that *yayin* in the Old Testament may be nonalcoholic, as incidentally it can be in modern Hebrew. God used a special phrase, *yayin ki yith'addam* to name the alcoholic kind. Furthermore, to make sure no one misses the point, He described what it does to the user. It bites like a serpent, stings like an adder, affects the vision and the heart badly, causes a condition like seasickness, insensitivity to pain and is habit forming.

The fact which most scholars choose to ignore is that *oinos* in Koine Greek could be understood as grape juice. The Septuagint translates the word *yayin* as *oinos* in Isaiah 16:10 where a substance that could not possibly be alcoholic is mentioned. The Greek of the Septuagint is practically the same as that of the New Testament. This establishes beyond doubt that *oinos* may be unfermented grape juice in the New Testament. Jesus would not tempt people to commit the sin of drunkenness. Therefore, since *oinos* may be grape juice fresh from the press, what Jesus made must have been such a drink.

Of course *oinos* may be alcoholic. The fact that the same word may denote either an alcoholic or a nonalcoholic drink should not be considered incredible. Our English word cider may be either. The English word “wine” in the seventeenth century had both meanings. When the evil nature of the drink (a mocker, poison) is clear, we should understand it as alcoholic. Where it is approved we should understand it to be nonalcoholic. Where the context does not make the distinction apparent, a Bible translator and teacher must use care.”

#### **Additional Sources**

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The outline for this lecture was taken in part from Pastor Scott Williquette’s excellent article on the *Christian and Alcohol* in his church newsletter entitled, *Sola*.