

THE BEER IS IN THE FRIDGE

By Phillip Patton

Are your eyes rolling? Have you noticed the title of this article and already begun with condescending thoughts of “oh, not this again?” A number of works have been done in the past that have pointed out the dangers and woes of imbibing in alcohol and other mind altering drugs, yes drugs. Those who have spent the time in research and development of those works are to be commended when they have worked diligently to find the truth. So, dear reader, I ask you now. Are you interested in the truth? If you are not, if you are only interested in finding what makes you feel all warm and fuzzy inside then by all means find some other way to spend your time. But, if you are interested in what the Bible has to say regarding the woes of alcohol then stay tuned. With this work we are not interested in the wheres and whys of what alcohol does to the human body. This is not intended to induce fear for what you may do to yourself or someone else. Frankly, I have seen first hand what alcohol does to the body in its destructive process and many do not have the stomach to handle the factual accounts of my experience. No, this work will not focus on the physical dangers of alcohol consumption but rather on the Bible's doctrine of the use of alcohol and the associated spiritual dangers.

The Bible does have a doctrine relating to alcohol. Many will try to say the Bible teaches that alcohol can be used in moderation, or that the Bible condones the use of alcohol. The same proponents will boldly say that the wine in the Bible is alcoholic wine so it is ok, as long as it is in moderation since the Bible condemns drunkenness. If that is your stance then let us take a little journey through time and see what the Book of books reveals regarding use in moderation of alcohol.

A LOOK AT THE TERMS

As with all languages words tend to alter in their meanings over time. Sometimes this occurs as words are introduced as slang terms and eventually the word then becomes the slang. The word “wine” is used in the Bible in many places. But what is meant by “wine?” Dictionary.com defines wine thus:

- 1) The fermented juice of grapes, made in many varieties, such as red, white, sweet, dry, still, and sparkling, for use as a beverage, in cooking, in religious rites, etc., and usually having an alcoholic content of 14 percent or less.
- 2) A particular variety of such fermented grape juice: port and sherry wines.
- 3) The juice, fermented or unfermented, of various other fruits or plants, used as a beverage, sauce, etc.: gooseberry wine; currant wine.
- 4) A dark reddish color, as of red wines.

This depicts very clearly the modern usage of the word “wine” to mean alcoholic and nothing else. Classically this word had a dual meaning. As recently as 1955 Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language reads: “The fermented juice of the grape: in loose language the juice of the grape whether fermented or not.” Going a little further back in English history the 1828 rendition of Webster’s Dictionary defines “must” as “new wine- wine pressed from the grape but not fermented.” In 1748 the Lingua Britannica Reformata or A New English Dictionary reads wine: “1. The juice of the grape. 2. A liquor extracted from other fruits besides the grape. 3. The vapors of wine, as wind disturbs his reason.” The English language has evolved to a point where this word has lost its dual meaning into that of a singular where the word means only an intoxicating alcoholic liquid. The translators of the King James Version in 1611 understood the word “wine” to mean fermented or unfermented. So the question remains then, what use of the word was implemented in the Scriptures. If the word universally meant alcoholic wine then we all have the potential to go out get drunk and enjoy a mind numbing good time of having no recollection what so ever of the previous nights events. On the contrary, if there is a difference in the term being used to represent alcoholic in one instance and non-alcoholic in another then the responsibility falls to you and I to figure out which is used and where.

APPROVAL/DISAPPROVAL

On first glance, concerning this question, the Bible may seem to contradict itself. Like any other study of historical documents the one in study must keep in mind the context of the document. Proven over and over again is the possibility of making a document say what a reader wants it to say because they refuse to examine the context of the material from the which the study was conducted. So, to answer the question of which term is used, we will examine the context of some passages. At this juncture let us make this assertion. When Bible speaks of wine it does so in regard to the “quality” not the “quantity.”

APPROVAL

The Bible does approve of unfermented wine. It has its importance in the vineyard used numerous times in conjunction with a way of life. Notice, though, in the vineyard it is still in the fruit, the grape. Found in its natural state, the state in which God created it and designed its perpetual reproduction, the wine is NOT alcoholic. No one has ever gotten drunk from eating grapes. Not only is wine seen as a way of life but as a blessing, “Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine” (Gen 27:28). The words used for “grain and wine” denote not the finished product of the labor. Otherwise the terms would have been “bread and wine” but rather the condition of the produce as it grows in the field. The same evidence is available in “And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil” (Deut 11:13–14). Unfermented wine is also seen in mercy, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Is 55:1). God’s mercy is being shown through three “NATURAL” products. Water is the fluid of life, milk is a natural occurring nourishment that vitally feeds the young and old alike, wine then, in the context, is in its natural state. The

natural state in which God created it, non-alcoholic. Notice, for wine to become alcoholic it has to go through a process of decaying. Decayed water (stagnant) can take your life, decayed milk does not nourish but rather will make one ill, decayed wine (alcoholic) removes soundness of mind. This same matter of context meaning is seen in the use of “wine” in Psalm 4:7, 104:14-15, Numbers 18:27, Deuteronomy 14:23, etc...

Wine as an offering is seen in Scripture, but, to what kind of wine did the author refer. As a tithe offering wine was to be unfermented, “All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee” (Num 18:12). As noted above, when coupled with other elements, the elements must be in the same state. Also, in this passage, is given a description, Divine commentary, on the type of wine when Moses recorded “first fruits.” In order for wine to become alcoholic, again, it must undergo a process, hence, removing it from the element of “first fruits.” This is further clarified with “And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress” (Num 18:27). Clearly stated the wine was to be fresh from the winepress, there again, removing any indication of this being alcoholic wine. “No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the Lord, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the Lord made by fire” (Lev 2:11). As part of the burnt offering the wine was to be poured out upon the offering (Exo 29:40, Lev 23:13, Num 15:5, 7, 10, 28:14, 1Chron 9:29, Hos 9:4, 14:7, Deu 32:38) and at the same time no leaven was to be burnt (Lev 2:11). So then, in offering, wine was not to be alcoholic as some sort of leavening agent must be involved to ferment the juice.

DISAPPROVAL

The Scriptures also clearly state that in some instances wine is a blessing, in others a medicine, and still yet others commanded to use in worship. What then is the Biblical standpoint on the use of alcoholic, fermented, wine? The best

depiction that could be given is found in the inspired pen of Solomon when he recorded the 23rd Proverb.

“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again” (Prov 23:29–35)

So much are the dangers of the drink that this wisest man to ever live exhorted to not even look at it. Observing the temptation is the first step to taking part in the sin. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psa 1:1). The psalmist here describes the process of sin. When one observes, or ponders the participation of, sin the desires begin to mount up and build until one finds himself standing in the same place as the sin until finally he begins to fully take part in the sin. For this example imagine a man walking by a bar day after day. As he walks by he observes the people coming and going and notices them laughing and joking and being loud and unruly. One day as he observes he begins to wonder what that must be like. He wonders just exactly what is going on in that bar that is so much fun. Finally the temptation becomes overwhelming until he enters the bar, then “standing” there, he sees this fulfillment being poured out in every glass and he then partakes of the serpent and becomes loud and unruly

himself. So, the wise man says “dont even look at it.” This admonition to steer clear does not stop there. “But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment” (Is 28:7). Clearly the depiction of fermented wine is one of danger, and loss of control. Notice the position of two priests.

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” (Lev 10:1–2)

Has curiosity ever mounted as to why these two priests would go beyond that which God had given them instruction? Notice what Aaron was told immediately following this event.

“And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;” (Lev 10:8–10)

It seems evident that for this correction to come at this juncture that intoxication may have played a roll in the demise of these two priests. Is it any wonder that God said to bring no leaven into the offering. The leaven begins the corruption process in the juice and in the soul. The obvious answer to the question “does the

Bible approve the use of alcohol” is a resounding “NO,” and in fact emphatically warns against its use in any form.

ARGUMENTS

With every subject of the Biblical standard to which someone does not want to comply comes the accusations of contradiction, implied meaning, inference etc... The subject of alcoholic use of wine is no different. The most likely candidate for accusation is the account recorded of the wedding feast in John 2. “And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10). Because Jesus turned the water to wine and the master of the feast called it “good wine” and because there is a six month period of time to pass from the harvest to the Spring Passover that for the wine to be “good” it had time to ferment and obtain a high concentration of alcohol (Wine In The Bible an abridged edition, Samuele Bacchiocchi, p. 41). One problem with this accusation is that it is assumption. It assumes that the wine fermented, that the people did not have technology adequate enough to preserve unfermented wine for an extended period of time. Dear reader, if that is your position, think again. Numerous historical documents are available of multiple ways to preserve grape juice unfermented and, in fact, many recommend that the wine being preserved unfermented is a “better” product than the fermented form (for further information refer to Wine In The Bible an abridged edition, Samuele Bacchiocchi, p. 30-39). Pliny said that wines are most beneficial when their potency has been removed by the strainer (ibid. Bacchiocchi, p.42). Jewish documents, such as the Talmud, forbid the use of alcohol at festivities such as weddings and that fermentation to them is a symbol of corruption (ibid., Bacchiocchi, p. 42). To answer this accusation, if the Jews were not allowed to have alcohol at a wedding feast, fermented wine was a symbol of corruption, and Jesus lived a sinless life, how then could He have provided something that would cause men to sin. This would have put Jesus in direct violation of the Scriptures, “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also” (Hab 2:15 KJV). Jesus did not turn water into alcoholic wine. If He had, He

would have put men in danger, as there are those who cannot partake of alcohol for health reasons. If He had, He would have caused men to be tempted, as God (John 1:1-3) He does not tempt any man to sin (James 1:13). If He had, He would have provided a dangerous alcoholic drink for the children attending the feast, as these were family oriented events, and alcohol has proven lethal for young children. With all of this in mind, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15 KJV). To be "without sin" the idea that Jesus would have provided alcohol to men is ludicrous and blasphemous.

THE POINT

What brings this up? Proven above is that the Bible teaches against consumption of alcohol (or any intoxicating substance) of any kind. This would include illicit drug use or any other drug use no matter what government has declared it to be legal. A number of years ago a man that I worked with was trying to defend his use of the "brew." He was well known by others we worked with and those that knew him outside of work for one that loved to drink his beer. One day we were discussing how the Bible teaches that one should not drink alcohol. His response to this was a complete and total shock. He knew that I was (and still am) a member of the Lord's church and he saw an opportunity to say "see, you are wrong." His example was his father in law. I did not know him but was familiar with the church which he attended. This man told me that his father in law served as a deacon in that congregation. He also shared with me that his father in law had no problem coming over, as he lived next door, and drinking a cold beer with him after a hard day. He would not keep it in his fridge lest someone come over and see it but had no problem drinking beer with his son in law. I fell into complete disbelief as I saw any opportunity of this conversation being productive flying out the window and every ounce of influence with this man lost. Why is it that during certain times of year, holidays, birthdays, etc... that one can walk into the house of a "Christian" and find the beer in the fridge. Everyone that knows this person knows that they are Christian, or at least they claim to be. Their families have most likely been taught by them their whole lives that drinking is sinful and you should not do it,

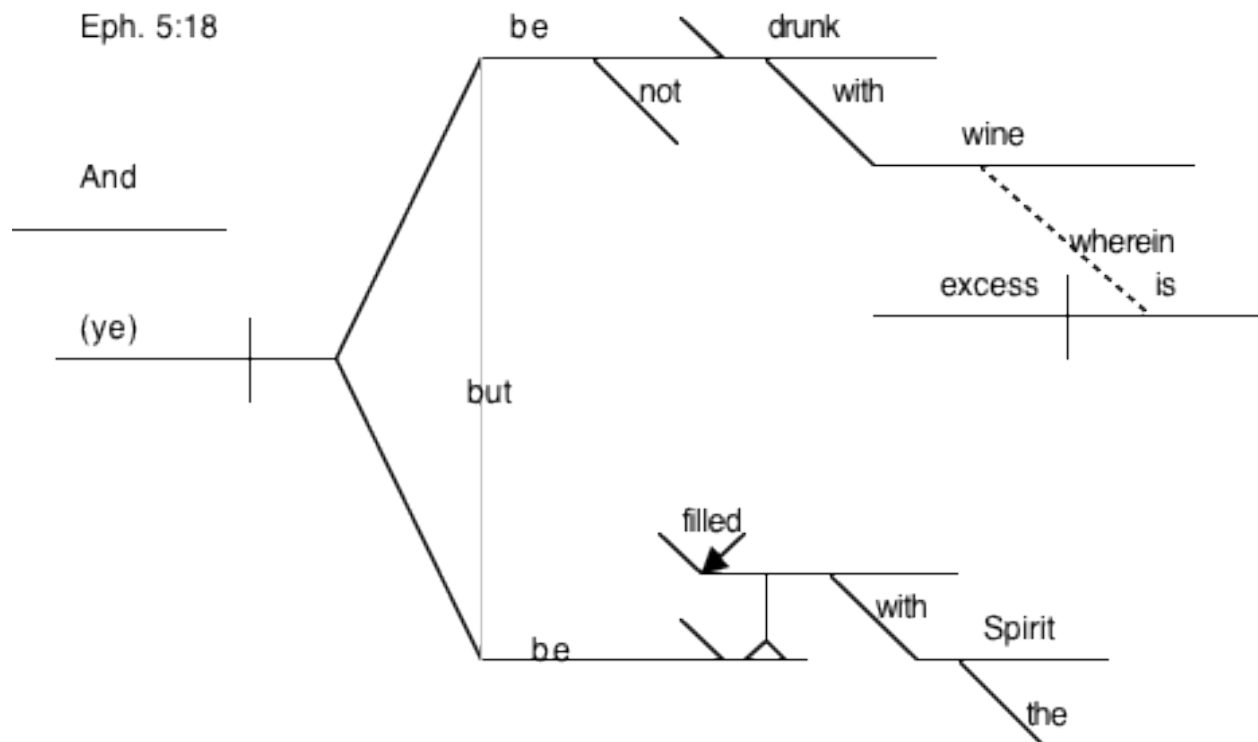
only to find that one day there is beer in the fridge. Every ounce of influence, everything that man/woman has ever told their family/friends has just been destroyed.

Friends, the Bible teaches absolute abstinence from alcohol. In 1 Timothy 3 Paul exhorted the young preacher, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim 3:1). He is telling him that a Christian man should desire this office. This should be what he works toward. Not climbing the corporate ladder but desiring to be the best Christian he possibly can in order that he might be the needed example for others to follow. In doing this he can work toward the office of the bishop/elder. In desiring this office he desires a "good work." Paul would then go on to describe what kind of man is required to fill this roll, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous" (1 Tim 3:2-3). Translations sometimes lose the true meaning. In v.2 the KJV uses the word vigilant, some translations use temperate, for the Greek word *nephalios*. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines this word (#3524) as sober, temperate, abstaining from wine either entirely or at least its immoderate use. The irony in this statement is that no matter how immoderate vs. moderate one wants to be, one drink is one drink drunk and one drink removed from sober. The idea is total abstinence. Further proof is found in v.3. "Not given to wine" is a translation of *me paroinos*. This is a compound word that joins "wine" (*oinos*) with the preposition beside or near (*para*) and given the qualification of "not" (*me*). There is no way one could say that Paul was telling a bishop to abstain on one hand but that moderate use was ok. No, he is saying abstain from wine completely and "not even go near the wine." There is no other way to understand this than complete abstinence and avoid even the appearance of going near it. In other words, it has no place in the fridge of Christian.

Understood in this sense, *me paroinos* does not weaken *nephalios*. On the contrary, it strengthens it. What Paul

is saying is that a bishop must be not only abstinent, but he must also withhold his presence and sanction from places and associations which could tempt his abstinence or that of others. This fits well with Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 5:11 "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." (Bacchiocchi, p.62)

If any further question remains as to the Biblical doctrine of abstinence in the realm of alcohol, then notice, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). The word translated "excess" is *asotia*. Specifically this means debauchery, reckless living. Dictionary.com defines debauchery as "excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures; intemperance," and describes it as, "living like a pirate. A life of wine, women and song is close. But a life of being drunk, sleeping around and always being rowdy would lift it to living a life of debauchery." Sounds like a real wholesome and holy way to live does it not? The question has been asked "to what is Paul calling debauchery in this verse?" The moderation crowd wants to jump up and down and say that the debauchery is in the drunkenness. If I were to try to defend drinking in moderation I would be privy to twist the Scriptures and make it say what I want it to say so that I can get that warm fuzzy feeling inside and feel comfortable in my sin and make every one around me feel comfortable in their sin too. That would be the easy way out, but then we would not have come to the meaning of the text. Let us observe the sentence structure. What do we know by looking at this verse? One, Paul is referring to alcoholic wine because he likens it to drunk and debauchery. The reference is to intoxication, but, is the debauchery in the intoxication or in the product which induces the intoxication. Sentence diagramming is a very useful tool. When diagrammed properly there is no doubt as to the meaning of the text. Observe:



Remember, this is the KJV. Excess = debauchery. The diagram correctly points out that the debauchery is in the alcohol containing wine. The condemnation then, is in the use of the alcoholic wine.

A host of other passages attest to the Biblical doctrine of abstinence. Now is the call to action. What example are we leaving for those who will come after us. If the beer is in the fridge, then, we are damaging the future of the church. Knowing that the Bible teaches against even looking at it, how can we expect our children to grow up thinking that the Bible is wrong on this point if mom and dad or grandma and grandpa keep the beer in the fridge. The things we do here will be the testament which tells of our eternal destination (2Cor 5:10). Remember this admonition, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, **DENYING UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY LUSTS**, we should live **SOBERLY**, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that **HE MIGHT REDEEM US FROM ALL INIQUITY**, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good

works” (Titus 2:11–14). Brethren and friends, in that great day what will your answer be? Will it be “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7), or, “I just wanted to keep my beer in the fridge?”

For Christians who believe in the certainty and imminence of Christ’s return, the apostolic admonitions to abstain from intoxicating beverages assumes added significance: they represent a tangible response to God’s invitation to make concrete preparation for the second coming of Christ... The practical implication of this conclusion can also be stated in one sentence: when we accept the Biblical teaching that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically harmful but also morally wrong, we will feel compelled not only to abstain ourselves from intoxicating substances, but also to help others do likewise. (Bacchiocchi, p.62, 63)

In order to do that, alcohol must be avoided at all costs. No matter its origin, how can we help others to steer clear of intoxicants for moral sanctity if we appear to be supporting them by our actions? “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye **PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY, ACCEPTABLE UNTO GOD**, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:1–2).