



# Abstaining from Alcohol



## Why “Drinking in Moderation” is a Devilish Deceit

*“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”*  
Proverbs 20:1

*“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.”* Proverbs 23:31,32.

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## Introduction

It is tragic that so many professing Christians have attempted, and continue to attempt, to justify the drinking of alcoholic beverages by saying, “The Bible condemns drunkenness, but it does not forbid the use of alcohol, as long as it’s used in moderation.”

Is this correct? Does the Word of God permit the *moderate* consumption of alcoholic beverages, which have caused such misery to countless numbers of the human race throughout history? Is it really permissible for the saints of God to drink socially? May they sit down after a hard day’s work with a beer in hand, or gather around the family table and sip glasses of wine? And may they also partake of the various other intoxicating beverages?

“Yes!” say the “sipping saints”. “Drunkenness is sinful, but we may drink alcohol in moderation. This is what the Bible says.” Does it really?

Of course the Bible strongly condemns the terrible sin of drunkenness. On this all are agreed, and thus there is no need to prove the point here. Nevertheless, the “social-drinking saints” are in great error, and it is disgraceful that so many, professing to be followers of Christ, just parrot the “drinking in moderation is fine” refrain, with little or no understanding of the Scriptures on this vitally important matter. They love their wine, beer, and other alcoholic drinks, and defend their use indignantly, with a zeal worthy of far higher causes. This in itself is tragic enough – after all, “why does a Christian need alcohol? What is the point? He hasn’t got to take the wretched stuff”.<sup>1</sup> It is solely a choice which he makes. It adds nothing of value to his life. Why then defend its use? Why is it *so important* to so many who profess to be Christians, that they will indignantly insist on their “right” to drink it? Clearly, it is not something they are willing to forsake for the Lord Jesus Christ. Their love for it is just too great to make that sacrifice.

The truth is: *the Bible does not sanction even the “moderate” drinking of alcohol.* Biblically, a Christian *must abstain from alcohol completely.* Total abstinence is the only proper path for the believer in Christ.

## When Does “Moderate” Become “Immoderate”? (Or, How Much is Too Much?)

Professing believers who drink alcohol argue that drinking a *little* alcohol is acceptable; it is only drinking *too much* that is sinful. But this is utterly incorrect, for two very good reasons.

The first is simply that the Bible does not say this! Not at all. There is nothing in all of Scripture to indicate that we are free to drink “just a little”, but “not too much”. This will be shown in this work.

And the second is: *how much is too much?* At what point does drinking “in moderation” become

drinking to excess? What amount of alcohol consumed is a “moderate” amount? And what is an excessive amount?

The Bible *does not say* how much alcohol is a “moderate” amount, and how many drinks one may consume before one is drunk. No formula to work it out is given, no percentage, no upper limit, no guidelines at all! Yet if Christians are permitted to drink “in moderation”, we would certainly need some indication, from the Lord, of what is “moderate” and what is not. The Lord would have told us plainly, in His Word, how much alcohol is “safe” to drink, before the sin of drunkenness is committed. Otherwise how are we to find out? By trial and error? Must we drink a little, and then a little more, and a little more, until a state of inebriation is reached, so that in future when we drink we can say, “Oh, I know that *x* amount is too much for me”? How absurd! As if the Lord would want us to discover our “limit” by first getting drunk!

“Even modern medical authorities who would claim that alcohol taken in moderation can be helpful will readily admit that *in any amount* intoxicating beverages may have undesirable effects. For example, Lolli refers to findings made by scientists who in testing thousands of people have found that with one drink (0.03 percent level of alcohol in the blood) most individuals do not evidence any impairment of basic physical and mental functions. But he continues with this amazing find: ‘A *sizeable minority*, however, can be affected unfavorably by blood alcohol concentrations even below 0.02-0.03 per cent and show signs of impaired attention, judgment, and emotional equilibrium.’”<sup>2</sup>

But how would any individual know if he was in this sizeable minority *unless he experimented*? This is like saying, “First commit the sin of drunkenness, so that you will know how to avoid the sin of drunkenness in the future!”

Experimental scientific tests regarding the effects of alcohol on men have established that even a small drink (5 1/2 oz. of ordinary wine) will normally produce measurable impairment of reasoning skills in mental acuity tests; the same amount (just one drink) decreases one’s ability for self-evaluation of the effect of alcohol, which makes it more difficult for one to discern one’s own need to stop at one drink; and a sizeable minority of people are affected adversely by even one drink to the point where there is definite impairment of judgment and attention, as well as emotional instability.<sup>3</sup>

“Tobacco, heroin, glue-sniffing; you don’t hear people say ‘We want to promote the idea of moderate addiction’. Of course not; we all know that you cannot play around with heroin or solvents. The only answer is to stay away from them and most people do. However the drug, *alcohol*, is responsible for more heartache and horror than all the other drugs put together.... The road to alcoholism and chronic drink problems is strewn with the carnage of broken human beings. Each father or mother or son or daughter all followed the signpost ‘*Moderation*’.”<sup>4</sup>

Prov. 20:1 says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” Note that the *wine itself* is called a mocker, not merely the *quantity* one may drink! If the Lord meant us to drink a *little* alcohol, but *not too much*, He would have told us how much “a little” is; how much is safe. But He did not do so. Clearly, He is silent about what amount is safe and not sinful because the drinking of alcohol in *any* amount is unsafe and sinful.

## **Two Entirely Different Drinks, Both Called “Wine”**

Very importantly, in some places Scripture *commends* the drinking of wine – *as much as one desires*; but in other places it *condemns* the drinking of wine as dangerous, and says it must not be drunk *at all*!

How can this be? If it is sinful, why does it say we may drink as much as we like? And if it is not sinful, why does it say we must not drink it at all? Is the Bible contradicting itself?

No, there is no contradiction. But there is a simple explanation, and one that fits all the facts. “Wine”, in the Bible, refers to *two types of wine; two entirely different drinks*. One that is good, beneficial, refreshing; and another that is dangerous. This is the key to the entire matter. This is why, in some biblical texts, wine is strongly commended; and this is why, in other texts, it is strongly

condemned.

And this is also why the Bible nowhere says that drinking a *little* alcoholic wine is permissible. It tells us in some places not to drink wine at all; and in other places, to drink freely. The reason being that there were (and are) two different types of wine, one alcoholic and the other not. One is condemned and the other is commended. Both are called “wine” in Scripture – whether fermented and intoxicating, or unfermented and unintoxicating.

Alcoholic beverages are artificially produced. It requires technical knowledge, a carefully-controlled environment, and time, to make alcohol. It is erroneous to think that grape juice, if left alone, will eventually turn into alcoholic wine naturally. It will not. A grape on the branch does not naturally become alcoholic; it simply rots. Grape juice left alone just becomes naturally-fermented grape juice – which is *spoiled* grape juice. But it is not alcohol!

Some assume that people in biblical times were unable to preserve pure grape juice without it fermenting, and therefore they made alcohol, because this can be preserved. But this is not correct. The people of ancient times *did* know how to keep pure grape juice from fermenting and thus spoiling. One method they used was to boil it down to a thick syrup, and then, when water was later added, it became a refreshing grape drink. This method kept it sweet, and prevented it from rotting and thus going sour in the hot climate of the Middle East. And in addition to boiling, they used other methods to prevent fermentation as well. The grape juice was sweet, unfermented, and non-alcoholic.

And this non-alcoholic grape juice *was called* “wine”! Democritus, in the fourth century BC, and Palladius, a Greek physician, called the boiled juice of the grape “wine”. Aristotle, in the fourth century BC, stated: “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.” He also said of sweet wine that it would not intoxicate. Horace, in the first century BC, stated of a particular wine that “there was no wine sweeter... it was perfectly harmless, and would not produce intoxication.” Columella, in the first century AD, wrote: “Gather the grapes and expose them for three days to the sun; on the fourth, at midday, tread them; take the mustum lixivium; that is, the juice which flows into the lake before you use the press, and, when it has settled, add one ounce of powdered iris; strain the wine from its faeces, and pour it into a vessel. This wine will be sweet, firm or durable, and healthy to the body.” According to Leverett’s Lexicon, the “mustum lixivium” was “must, which flows spontaneously from grapes before they are pressed.”<sup>5</sup>

Pliny, in the first century AD, wrote of a Spanish wine in his day, which was called “inerticulum”, from “iners”, meaning inert, without force or spirit, because it would not intoxicate. It was more properly called “justicus sobriani”, meaning sober wine. Nicander, in the second century BC, wrote: “And Aeneas, having squeezed the juice into hollow cups, called it wine.” Columella said that the Greeks called this unintoxicating wine “Amethyston”, which meant a wine which would not intoxicate. He said it was a harmless, good wine. Hippocrates, in the fifth century BC, said that sweet kinds of wines do not make the head heavy.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear, then, that in ancient times there were two very different kinds of drinks, both called “wine”. How, then, are we to know which type of wine is being referred to, in any given text of Scripture? We have to examine the *context*.

## **Words for “Wine” and “Strong Drink” in the Bible**

The Bible was written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). We will examine the main words used in the Scriptures. Knowing what these words are, and how they are used, is extremely helpful.

### ***yayin***

In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the most common word for wine is *yayin*. It is a generic word,

which means it is not specific, but broad, in meaning. And broadly, *yayin* means every type of wine made from grapes, whether old or new, fermented or unfermented, intoxicating or non-intoxicating. Thus *yayin* can mean alcoholic wine; but it can also mean non-alcoholic grape juice.

Sadly, most lexicons omit any mention of “grape juice” as being one of the meanings of *yayin* (or of its Greek equivalent, *oinos*). But the authors of lexicons, like all other books, are not divinely inspired. Here are some biblical examples of *yayin* referring to *non-intoxicating grape juice*:

“And gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage shouting to cease” (Isa.16:10). When the treaders tread on the grapes, is alcoholic wine squeezed out? Of course not – alcohol has to be manufactured, it is not natural in the grapes. The treaders tread out *fresh, unfermented, non-alcoholic grape juice*. And yet this fresh grape juice is called “wine.” The Hebrew word here is *yayin*, which plainly shows that it refers to fresh grape juice in this place. Likewise, the English word “wine” is applicable not only to alcoholic wine, but to fresh grape juice as well.

“Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes” (Gen.49:11). The same thing is said twice, which is very common in the Hebrew Scriptures: “wine” and the “blood of grapes” mean the same thing. It is very evident here that the blood of grapes means *fresh grape juice* (as can also be seen by comparing this with Isa.63:1-3). And yet the Hebrew word for “wine” here is *yayin*. Again, then, in this context *yayin* means unfermented, non-intoxicating grape juice.

“[T]he children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine?” (Lam.2:11,12). The Hebrew word is *yayin*. In a time of famine, little children beg their mothers for nourishment. But since when do young children ask their mothers for alcohol, expecting to be given it? Do mothers normally give alcoholic beverages to children, let alone in a time of famine? Of course not! The meaning is that the children would ask for their *normal food*, which was corn and grape juice (which is very nourishing).

### ***shakar***

This Hebrew word is translated, in our King James Version, as “strong drink.” Unfortunately, when we hear the words, “strong drink”, we immediately think of hard liquor – drinks with a very high alcoholic content. But more careful study is required:

*Shakar* was a drink made from dates, barley, apples, millet, and other things. These were dried, then their essence was extracted by boiling, and this was mixed with honey, aromatics, etc., to make the drink. But *shakar* is a generic word. It can refer to an intoxicating drink; but it can also refer to a non-intoxicating one. Again, then, we have to examine the context to know which type of “strong drink” is being referred to.

In most places in the Old Testament it is condemned, which tells us that in those places an alcoholic drink is meant. For example, Prov. 20:1 says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” Here, “strong drink” (like “wine”) refers to something intoxicating.

But it is *not* condemned in every place where it is used, which tells us that in such places, a non-alcoholic drink is meant. For example, Deut.14:26 says, “And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.” Plainly, neither the “wine” nor the “strong drink” in this verse refers to intoxicating liquors, for they could be partaken of with rejoicing in the very presence of the Lord God. To do so, one has to be sober. In Lev. 10:9 the Lord forbids intoxicating drink to the priests serving Him; He would certainly not, then, command His worshippers to consume intoxicating drinks in the very presence of those priests!

Also, in Deut. 14:23 – a few verses earlier – which tells the worshippers to eat and drink before the Lord, the Hebrew word used is *tirosh*, which only ever refers to fresh grape juice.

### ***tirosh***

This is a very specific Hebrew word, and refers to a type of wine. The Jewish targums defined *tirosh* as “juice; must; wine.” And in Scripture it is translated either as “wine”, “new wine”, or “sweet wine.” It was *non-alcoholic*. It was the natural produce of the vine. In the Old Testament the word means the *harvest grape juice*.

In almost every single case in Scripture its use is good, and it is recommended. For example, Prov.3:10 says, “So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” What comes forth from the winepresses is not alcoholic wine, which takes time and technical know-how to create: the new wine that issues from the presses is fresh grape juice. And in Neh.10:39 it says, “For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary”. Just as the corn would be fresh and the oil would be fresh, so too would the new wine be fresh.

There is only one exception where the meaning is not a good one, and this is Hosea 4:11: “Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.” But even though *tirosh* (“new wine”) is condemned here, it does not mean it was alcoholic:

Three things are condemned in this verse. And in Hebrew, this verse would read as follows: “Whoredom and *yayin* and *tirosh* take away the heart.” *Yayin* is translated (correctly) as “wine” here, and *tirosh* (correctly) as “new wine.” Hosea is condemning three things which lead the heart astray. Whoredom is the first; *alcoholic wine* is the second, the word being *yayin*; and *grape juice* is the third, the word being *tirosh*. If both *yayin* and *tirosh* refer to alcoholic wine in this verse, then this verse would make no sense, for it would read as follows: “whoredom and intoxicating wine and intoxicating wine take away the heart.” This would be condemning the same thing twice in the same verse.

The fact is, two different Hebrew words were used here, by divine inspiration, deliberately. This was done because two different drinks are meant. Alcoholic wine is one of them, and that is the word *yayin* which is translated as “wine”; and grape juice is the other, which is the word *tirosh* and is translated as “new wine.”

But *why* is grape juice condemned here?

It is condemned because it represents luxury, abundance, an excess of what the world calls “the good things of life”, which had become a snare to the people. There is nothing wrong with drinking it; but even good things can become sinful, if they become idols and “take away the heart”. Especially considering that the new wine (*tirosh*) was part of the tithes the Israelites paid, if they dealt dishonestly in this matter and did not give what they should, it was an indication of a heart which had been led astray by *tirosh*.

### ***oinos***

The New Testament was written in Greek; and the common Greek word for “wine” is *oinos*. It corresponds to the Hebrew *yayin*. *Oinos*, like *yayin*, is a generic word; and as such, it refers to both alcoholic wine and non-alcoholic, fresh grape juice. For example, Eph. 5:18 says, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” – where the word clearly refers to intoxicating wine. But Jn. 2:10 says, “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” – where the word clearly refers to grape juice, not to intoxicating wine, as will be explained below.

To find out the meaning of words, we study the ways in which they were used by the people who spoke and wrote in those languages. From the writings of men such as Aristotle, Pliny, Nicander, Anacreon, Homer and others, it is clear that the word *oinos* could refer to both intoxicating and unintoxicating wine.

*Oinos*, being a generic word, is sometimes *condemned* in the New Testament, and sometimes it is *commended*. There were two types of wine in the New Testament, just as in the Old Testament:

alcoholic wine, and pure grape juice.

And this means that when our English word “wine” is used to translate the Greek word *oinos*, then the word “wine” in our English Bible refers not only to intoxicating wine, but to non-fermented, unintoxicating grape juice as well!

### ***gleukos***

This is another Greek word, which is used only once in the New Testament, in Acts 2:13, where it is translated as “new wine”. *Gleukos* refers to *new, unfermented, non-alcoholic sweet wine*. It was grape juice, or what is called “must.” When it was boiled down it created a thick syrup, and when this was diluted with water it became a grape drink. The Greek philosopher Aristotle said that although it was called “wine”, it was actually a sweet grape drink, which did not taste like alcoholic wine, and did not intoxicate.

In Acts 2:13, when the apostles miraculously spoke with other tongues on the day of Pentecost, declaring the wonderful works of God, some of the people who heard them mockingly said, “These men are full of new wine.” But if this drink did not make a person drunk, why then did those mockers say the apostles were full of *gleukos*? They were saying that the apostles were drunk – but on grape juice. It was a very silly statement. But they said it! It was just as foolish to say that men who were drunk could speak intelligently in languages they had never learned before. A drunk man talks nonsense. Sometimes he cannot even talk at all. He “babbles” (see Prov. 23:29). And yet these mockers not only said the apostles were drunk on non-alcoholic grape juice, but that they spoke intelligently in other languages even though they were drunk! Why did they say such absurd things?

In v.15, Peter said in reply, “For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.” This was 9.00 AM, the Jews did not eat or drink until after that hour, and then they drank *new* wine. The ones who wanted to drink alcohol and get drunk generally did so at night, just as the Scripture says: “they that be drunken are drunken in the night” (1 Thess.5:7). These mockers, however, wanted to accuse the apostles of being drunk early in the morning; so they sarcastically said they were drunk on new wine. In other words, they were implying that the apostles had indeed been drinking alcohol, but that they would try to hide behind the fact that at that hour of the day, only new wine was drunk. They were being sarcastic: “Oh, sure – these men are drunk on new wine!” In effect they were saying, “These men are definitely drunk; but as it’s so early in the morning, they must be drunk on new wine!” It was a mocking statement, full of sarcasm and disbelief.

### ***Summary:***

Some texts tell us that wine is bad; others tell us that it is good. There are no contradictions in Holy Scripture. It is impossible, in fact, for God’s Word to contradict itself. If wine is bad, it cannot also be good at the same time! Therefore, the *only explanation* – the only one that fits with *all* the evidence – is that the Bible speaks about *two types* of wine. And this is in fact the case, as is evident from the Hebrew and Greek words themselves, and from the way the word “wine” is used, even in our English Bibles.

And the fact that some Hebrew and Greek words actually refer to two different types of wine is not at all unusual. The same is true with regards to the *English* word, “wine.” This word, just like *yayin* and *oinos*, used to be a generic word as well, but today it has come to have a more restricted meaning, so that most people immediately assume it means alcohol. Even modern dictionaries frequently limit its meaning to alcoholic wine. But in an older, unabridged English dictionary – Webster’s Dictionary of 1896 – the word “wine” was defined as follows: “the expressed juice of grapes, especially when fermented”; “a beverage... prepared from grapes by squeezing out their juice, and (usually) allowing it to ferment.”

Thus “wine” once had a more generic meaning in English; but unfortunately with the passing of time, people took one meaning of the word and made it the *only* meaning.

There are other English words like this. “Water”, for example, can mean different types of water: tap



water; iced water; mountain stream water; sea water; etc. Yet all of these are called “water.”

“Cider” is another example. “A familiar illustration and confirmation may be had from the expressed juice of the apple. If the fresh unfermented apple-juice is not cider, what is it? Every boy, straw in hand, knows that it is cider – so does every farmer and housewife. After it has fermented, it is also called cider. It is a generic word, applicable to the juice of the apple in all its stages, just as *yayin* in the Hebrew, *oinos* in the Greek, *vinum* in the Latin, and *wine* in the English are generic words, and denote the juice of the grape in all conditions.”<sup>7</sup>

The King James Version, then, is certainly not in error when it uses the word “wine” to render *yayin* and *oinos*, regardless of whether the alcoholic or non-alcoholic drink is meant.

## **Old Testament Texts Where “Wine” is Commended (Used by Those Who Justify Drinking Alcohol)**

We must examine various Old Testament texts where wine is praised and commended, for these are used by many to justify the drinking of alcohol. When we do so, it will be seen that in truth these have nothing to do with alcohol at all.

**Gen.27:27,28:** “And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed: therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine”.

In blessing Jacob, did Isaac mean alcoholic wine, or pure grape juice? He definitely meant grape juice! But how may we be sure?

Firstly, the blessing was for *plenty* of corn and wine. Yet Scripture tells us to have *nothing to do* with alcoholic wine, in Prov. 20:1 and Prov. 23:29-35.

Secondly: in this verse and in the context, wine is listed with the blessings of life: the fatness of the earth, corn, and wine. But the words, “the fatness of the earth, and corn”, show us that the blessing was on the actual *growth*, the *produce*, of the field; on what the earth produced. And as this was the case for corn, it was also the case for wine. The meaning is the natural product of the field: *grapes*, and the juice that is extracted from them.

Alcohol is an artificial, man-made beverage. But just as corn grows in the field, and is harvested and eaten, so grapes grow in the field, and are harvested, and the juice is drunk. The entire context is about the blessings of the field: the natural produce of the earth.

Thirdly: the Hebrew word for “wine”, here, is *tirosh*. As we have seen, this is a very specific word, and means *grape juice*; the natural produce of the vine; the *harvest* grape juice, to be even more specific.

For example, Deut.11:4 says, “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.” The word is *tirosh*, and it is connected with corn and oil. Just as corn is gathered in from the field, and just as the olives are gathered in from the field and oil is extracted from them, so grapes are gathered in from the field and the juice is extracted from them. Making an alcoholic drink takes time and is done artificially; but this is speaking of the *natural product*. The context determines it. See also Deut.33:28.

Another example is Prov.3:9,10: “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” Again the word is *tirosh*, and again the context shows us plainly that this wine was not alcoholic. This “new wine” meant pure, unfermented grape juice. For just as the barns would be filled with plenty (of corn), so the presses would be filled with grapes – “new wine” being made from pressed grapes.

A further example of the blessing of pure grape juice is Joel 2:23,24: “Be glad, then, ye children of

Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.” Wheat, wine and oil are all put together as the blessings of the Lord upon the fields. Just as pure oil is extracted from the olives, so pure grape juice is extracted from the grapes. And an *abundance* of all three things is promised.

**Gen.49:11,12: “Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.”**

What kind of “wine” would Judah wash his garments in, according to Jacob’s prophecy? The Hebrew word here is *yayin*, which can refer to either alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine. And yet without any doubt whatsoever, *non-alcoholic wine* (fresh, pure grape juice) is meant. Let us examine the evidence:

In typical Hebrew fashion, the same thing is essentially said twice: “he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.” “Wine” thus means “the blood of grapes.” And it is easy to understand that “the blood of grapes” means *pure grape juice* – the juice squeezed out of the grapes, unfermented, unintoxicating.

Isa.63:2,3 throws further light on this: “Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me... and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.” This is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it says His garments are dyed red, like a man who treads in the winefat. Well, when a man does this, he treads on the grapes to squeeze out the juice. At this stage it is natural, non-alcoholic grape juice. And this throws light on Gen.49:11: when a man treads in the winepress, making grape juice, his clothes get stained with the juice. Thus in Gen.49:11, “wine” means fresh grape juice – not alcoholic wine.

Further light can be shed on this from Isa.16:10: “the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage shouting to cease.” Although the word is *yayin*, it very obviously refers to pure grape juice in this context, because the liquid the treaders tread out is grape juice.

Then there is Jer.48:33: “I have caused wine to fail from the winepresses”. *Even while still in the winepresses*, the juice is called “wine”!

And note the *abundance* of the wine being spoken of in Gen.49:11, and the implication being that this would be the blessing of God. Yet alcohol is a poison, the serpent’s own brew, a dangerous drug, against which there are very strong warnings issued in God’s Word; would a great abundance of alcoholic wine really then be a blessing to Judah (or to anyone)? Absolutely not.

Also, v.12 speaks of the blessing of abundant wine, connected with the blessing of abundant milk. Just as milk is a natural product, so is the wine here. Milk comes from goats or cows, and grape juice from grapes. Milk is not an artificial, man-made drink, and neither is grape juice (but alcoholic wine certainly is!).

Note that it says in v.12, “his eyes shall be red with wine”; yet Prov.23:29 says, “who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine”. We know that alcoholic wine is meant in Prov.23. But here in v.12 it is not referring to a *drunkard’s* eyes, because the context clearly teaches us that pure, unintoxicating grape juice is meant, and also because God’s Word does not contradict itself: if Prov.23 condemns the redness caused by alcoholic wine, then certainly Gen.49:12 is not contradicting that. It refers to something else. It refers to unintoxicating grape juice. And it speaks of the *abundance* of this red drink, in a figurative manner: just as teeth are not really made white by milk, so eyes are not really made red by grape juice. Both simply refer to the abundance of these good things.

**Num.18:12,13: “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. And whatsoever**



**is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it.”**

How may we be certain that this was grape juice, and not alcoholic wine?

It was the “firstfruits”; “first ripe.” Quite obviously, it refers to wine in its natural state – that which today we would call grape juice. This wine, along with the wheat, was a firstfruits offering to the Lord. It was wine as it came from the vine: freshly picked grapes, freshly squeezed to make grape juice. Unfermented and pure – the only fit offering to be offered unto the Lord! Just as the very best of the oil and the wheat were offered to the Lord, so the very best of the wine was as well. Alcohol is a poison, an artificially created thing, which is *not* the best, and is *not* a fit offering to be given to the Lord.

And also: the word for “wine” here is *tiros*: unfermented, harvested grape juice, not alcohol. This is why it is so strongly commended here as something good and pure, an offering unto the Lord.

This is even clearer from another portion of Scripture: Neh.10:37,39 says, “And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God.... For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister...” Again, the word is *tiros*. Clearly from the context (in addition to the Hebrew word), “wine” means the fruit of the vine – the firstfruits, squeezed from the grapes. Just as the fruit of the olive tree is brought, so the fruit of the vine: in both it means the extract of these fruits. And just as the corn and oil are pure and natural, so with the new wine, fresh grape juice, the only fit offering to bring to the Lord.

Then there is Neh.13:5,12: “the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil.... Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries.” “New wine” – freshly squeezed grape juice. As the Jews tithed their corn and oil unto the Lord, so they tithed their new wine. And as the corn and the oil were natural and pure, so was the wine. It was new; it was the firstfruits offering; it was the *best* wine, and thus the best offering unto the Lord.

**Judges 9:13: “And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?”**

This is a clear example, once again, of “wine” meaning unfermented, pure grape juice. The Hebrew word is *tiros*, but even without knowing the word, the context itself reveals that non-alcoholic grape juice is meant.

For one thing, this wine is said to “cheer God and man.” It is impossible to claim that alcohol is a joy to *God*! It has caused such woe and misery in countless homes, such crime, immorality, debauchery and murder. But certainly, God may be said to be “cheered” (not that God, who is a pure Spirit, is ever in truth unhappy, but the meaning is that He takes delight in it) by pure grape juice, which is the product of His power and goodness, and which was also offered as a sweet savour to the Lord, which was very acceptable to Him (Num. 15:7). And truly, this natural and delicious drink cheers the heart of *man*. It is tasty, refreshing, pleasurable.

For another thing, the *vine itself* is said to have “wine” in it. This is very instructive. The only things on a vine are grapes. Therefore, the juice *in* them is called “wine”! An alcoholic beverage is not created on the vine; and if a grape is left on the vine, it will simply rot. Grape juice, then, *is* wine, in Scripture.

**Psa.104:14,15: “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.”**

The word is *yayin*, so the only way we can determine exactly which type of wine is meant is by the context. And this is certainly plain enough! The “wine” here is definitely commended: “wine that maketh glad the heart of man”. And this wine is a blessing from God. If it is a blessing and strongly

commended, then we know it is grape juice, because nowhere in His Word does the Lord commend alcohol.

And if we compare Scripture with Scripture, and allow Scripture to interpret itself, we find that this verse is very similar to Judges 9:13, which we have seen refers to pure grape juice; and therefore the same is true of this verse.

Furthermore, in the context, *natural* things are being praised here: grass for the cattle; herbs for the service of man; oil to make his face shine; bread which strengthens his heart; in other words, the produce of the earth, for his good. And in the midst of all these things – wine. Quite obviously the wine refers to what is made of the natural grapes that grow on the vine, and are the produce of the earth: grapes squeezed out and made into a refreshing fruit drink, that gladdens the heart of man. It is a wonderful blessing from God, just as herbs, wheat, corn and oil are.

This wine which gladdens the heart of man is *not* that wine which does so because it makes him drunk! It is not that kind of “gladness” of which the psalmist is speaking. *That* wine is called in Scripture a mocker, a serpent, an adder (Prov. 20:1; 23:32). It can hardly be the same wine as this, which is said to gladden man’s heart in the same pure, nourishing, good way that bread, oil, and herbs do.

**Prov.31:4-7: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.”**

This is a very interesting portion of Scripture; for in verses 4 and 5 wine and strong drink are strongly condemned as being unsuitable for kings; and yet in verses 6 and 7 it *seems* (at first glance) that they are recommended for certain other people.

It is very evident that alcohol, not grape juice, is meant here, because it causes one to forget, etc. But it cannot be that alcohol is *really* being recommended as a good and useful drink, for this would contradict everything else that God’s Word says about it – even just a few chapters earlier in this very book of Proverbs (chapters 20 and 23)!

It is very true that alcoholic wine and strong drink are not suitable for kings and princes to drink. They need to be sober, sound in judgment; but alcohol numbs the senses, dulls the brain, affects the memory, affects morality, etc. And the New Testament declares that true Christians are spiritual “kings and priests unto God”! These two verses, then, teach Christians *not* to drink alcoholic beverages. They should be total abstainers.

But what about verses 6 and 7?

As always, they must be read in context. And when this is done, it becomes evident that these verses are *not*, in fact, giving anyone permission to drink alcohol. This same book of Proverbs, after all, so strongly condemns alcohol in chapters 20 and 23, where we are plainly commanded not to drink it, and not to be deceived by it. Why, here in chapter 31, would there be a complete about-face?

In addition, kings have just been told not to drink it, as it is dangerous; and, “Since the context of verse 6 clearly indicates that wine is a dangerous drink which should not be utilized, it is not consistent to take this verse as a command to actually drink it. The intent of the verses is irony; thus, in reality, the verse states that the only possible benefit would be for those who are dying in misery.”<sup>8</sup> These verses are *not* recommending alcohol as a social drink. The context itself, and all the rest of Scripture, is against such an interpretation.

And this is an appropriate place to consider the use of alcohol for medicinal purposes. Is this permissible, for the believer?

Alcohol is the basis for many medicines. Yes, we rightly call alcoholic beverages “demon drink.” But when we say such a thing, we mean alcohol as a drink for pleasure. As a *drink*, it is deadly; but not necessarily as a *medicine*. After all, there are many things which are fine for medicinal purposes, in very small amounts, but which would be totally unsuitable, even dangerous, as drinks.

Alcohol, when used as one ingredient in modern medicines, and taken in very small doses as such, is acceptable. As such it is being used as a medicinal chemical, just as other chemicals are used.

***Song of Solomon 5:1: “I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”***

The wine and milk are symbolical of spiritual blessings. Now would the Lord have used alcoholic wine to symbolise these? The answer is self-evident.

It also says, “drink *abundantly*”. Even those who claim that Christians may drink alcohol say that it should only be drunk in moderation; never abundantly! Would the Lord use something that supposedly (according to them) should only be taken in small amounts to illustrate spiritual things which should be enjoyed in *abundance*? Would He illustrate His abundant spiritual blessings with the symbol of abundant alcohol – that mocker, that stinging, biting snake’s venom? Absolutely not.

***Song of Solomon 1:2,4; 4:10: “thy love is better than wine”; “we will remember thy love more than wine”; “how much better is thy love than wine!”***

In these verses the Hebrew is *yayin*. And although Solomon is writing figuratively here, he cannot have alcoholic wine in mind, because he was the one who also wrote those words in Prov.20 and 23, which so strongly condemn alcohol. In addition, alcohol is entirely inappropriate to equate with love!

But there is still more: it says of Christ that His love is better than wine. We have seen from Psa.104:15 that pure grape juice makes glad the heart of man. And in an even greater way, the Lord’s love for His elect makes their hearts glad. It revives them, cheers them, and is of great and everlasting good to them. Grape juice is an appropriate symbol here. Alcohol is not.

***Isa.55:1: “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.”***

The Hebrew word is *yayin*; so if we are to understand what kind of wine is meant, we have to look at the context. The Lord calls men to buy wine, like milk. This is a wonderful prophetic text, in which the wine and the milk are emblems of the Gospel of Christ. Would the Lord use intoxicating wine, which His own Word describes as stinging like an adder, a mocker, a dangerous thing, to symbolise His blessed Gospel of grace? Assuredly not. But the pure, refreshing blood of the grape – that is certainly a fitting symbol!

The wine is connected with milk. Milk is a nourishing, refreshing drink, a food in itself, a good and pure thing; and as such it is certainly a fit symbol of spiritual blessings. And the same is true of wine, provided it is pure, unintoxicating grape juice! It is as fitting a symbol as milk, for like milk, it too is refreshing, nourishing, pure and good, a blessing from God.

***Isa.65:8: “Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all.”***

The word rendered as “new wine” is *tirosh*. And this is so important: this new wine is found *in* the cluster of grapes! Now if it is still in the cluster, then it is certainly not alcoholic wine, which is created by a long process under certain ideal conditions. It is most definitely grape juice. Once again, then, we see that there are two types of wine in Holy Scripture.

And of this wine it says “a blessing is in it.” A blessing from God! Yet further proof that this new wine is grape juice and not alcohol – for alcohol is a *cursed* thing, not a blessing. And this description of new wine ties in with those places where it says wine cheers and makes glad the heart of man.

***Zech.9:17: “For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.”***

The word is *tirosh*; and we are told this new wine cheers people, just as corn does. Just as corn is natural, so is this new wine. It is not the man-made poison of alcohol, produced by a lengthy process under certain conditions. Corn is gathered straight from the field, and so is wine, in the form of grapes.

## **New Testament Texts Where “Wine” is Commended (Used by Those Who Justify Drinking Alcohol)**

We have looked at various Old Testament texts where wine is praised and commended, and now we must do the same with New Testament texts, for (as with the Old Testament ones) many attempt to use these to justify the drinking of alcohol.

***Matt.9:17: “Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.”***

Jesus does not condemn drinking this wine; in fact, it is clear from His words that He sees nothing wrong with doing so. In reality He commends it, by explaining how it should be preserved. But what type of wine is He referring to?

These “bottles” were not glass or ceramic bottles; they were made of goatskins. And Jesus knew He was saying something which all His hearers understood perfectly well: new wine could not be put into old wineskins. These were not suitable containers for new wine, for the old wineskins would burst when new wine was put into them. But why?

The new wine was unfermented, unintoxicating grape juice. As stated previously, there were various methods for preserving grape juice from fermenting. One was to boil it down to a thick syrup, to which water was added when they wanted the grape drink.

The old wineskins were ones which had been used before, and therefore had yeast adhering to the insides. Also, because they had been opened, they had absorbed oxygen; and this combination of yeast and oxygen would have become active fermenting matter, which would have been passed on to the new grape juice – the new wine – if it had been poured into those old skins. The wine would then burst the wineskins, because of the force of the fermentation process.

But new wine put into new skins would be preserved, because the containers were sealed against the air, and did not have any yeast residue in them, ensuring that the new wine would remain unfermented.

Thus the “new wine” which Jesus was referring to, and indirectly commending as something good, was pure, fresh grape juice. He was speaking about how fresh grape juice could be kept from fermenting.

***Matt.11:18,19: “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”***

Jesus Himself drank some type of wine. And many say, “Do you see? Jesus Himself drank alcohol!” But *was the Lord referring to alcohol at all?*

The text certainly does not say so! In fact, it does not say *what* kind of wine He was drinking. His enemies accused Him of being a winebibber, which means a drunkard, and one only gets drunk on alcoholic wine – but their mere accusation does not prove that He was drinking alcoholic wine. After all, they accused Him of other things as well, which were false. They accused Him of being a glutton. Gluttony is condemned in Prov.23:1,2 – the very same chapter in which alcohol is so strongly condemned. Their accusation that the Lord was a glutton was an outright and deliberate lie. The Lord, who inspired the Scriptures which condemn gluttony, was certainly not a glutton Himself. But His enemies were trying to destroy His work by smearing His character and blackening His name with false accusations. They were not concerned about telling the truth! They were quite willing to lie if they thought it would ruin His reputation.

They also accused Him of being possessed with a devil, in Jn.8:48: yet another deliberate lie.

Therefore, if the accusation that He was a glutton was false, and if the accusation that He was demon-possessed was false, the accusation (by the same men) that He was a winebibber was false as well!

And the fact that it says John did not drink whatever Christ drank, in no way proves that Christ drank alcoholic wine either. Lk.1:15 states that John would drink neither wine nor strong drink, for this was part of His particular, special calling and mission; but these words are applicable not only to alcoholic beverages, but to non-alcoholic beverages as well. John did not drink *any* product of the vine, whether alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine.

This text is not comparing the fact that John did not drink alcohol with the fact that Jesus did drink alcohol. It is comparing the fact that John did not drink any beverage made from grapes with the fact that Jesus did drink something made from grapes. But the text itself does not tell us what kind of wine Jesus drank. It is thus a mere assumption to say He drank alcohol. We do not want assumptions, we want proof. And it can be proved, beyond all shadow of doubt, that the Lord only drank non-alcoholic wine (grape juice), because, comparing Scripture with Scripture, we find that throughout His Word this good and beneficial drink is praised and commended, and alcohol is strongly condemned!

He who is the Lord God Almighty moved Solomon to write what he did about alcohol in Prov.23, and He moved others to write against it elsewhere: how could He then do the *very opposite* of what He commanded in His own Word? How could He drink alcohol, when He inspired Solomon to write: "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red"? How could He freely drink alcohol, when He by His Spirit had branded it an adder's sting, a mocker, a deceiver?

It is impossible! The Lord never sinned. He perfectly kept the Word of God in every point. He did *not* drink alcohol, but He did drink that cheering beverage which He Himself, by His Spirit, spoke of so highly in His Word.

**Matt.26:27-29: "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."**

We know that wine was in this cup, for it was the fruit of the vine; and we know that it symbolised His blood. But the question is: which type of wine was it?

Without any doubt whatsoever, it was non-alcoholic grape juice. And there are at least *ten reasons* why we may be certain of this:

1. We have already seen how strongly God's Word condemns the drinking of alcohol. It therefore simply cannot be that at the institution of the Lord's supper, Jesus contradicted His own Word and used alcohol.
2. It says that the Lord Jesus gave thanks for the cup. Jesus would *never* have given thanks to His Father for that wine which is called a mocker that deceives, a drink like a serpent and an adder! To do so would have been to contradict His own Word. He thanked His Father for the cup because it was something nourishing, good, refreshing, pure and cheering.
3. Jesus called it "the fruit of the vine." Alcoholic wine cannot properly be called this, because the production of alcohol is a process, involving chemical changes. The fruit of the vine is the *grape*, and the *juice inside* the grape, in its natural state. It is not the end product of a long manufacturing process. The fruit of the vine means grapes squeezed out to make grape juice.
4. Jesus also said that He would not again drink of the fruit of the vine until, in the Father's kingdom, He would drink it *new* with His disciples. New wine, as we have seen, is the natural fruit of the vine.
5. The main Greek word for wine is *oinos*. Significantly, in this passage Jesus never once used the word *oinos*, for as this word is generic and can mean either alcoholic wine or grape juice, He was very specific, and *told* us what it was: "the fruit of the vine."

6. The drink in the cup represents the new testament (or covenant) in the blood of Christ. What would be the only fitting symbol of this *new* covenant? *New* wine! Alcoholic wine is not new, it is old: it is fermented and aged. Hardly a fit symbol of the new covenant in the blood of the Lord Christ!

7. The blood of Jesus Christ our Lord was shed for the remission of sins. He who by faith drinks this blood, has eternal life, and dwells in Christ, and Christ in him (see John 6). But alcohol is the cause of death, not life! Alcohol causes death, misery, woe, sorrow, and a thousand and one terrible things. It is a poison, a mocker that deceives, a serpent that bites. It has brought vast misery to the human race.

How, then, can alcohol be a fit symbol for the life-giving blood of Jesus? The blood which washes away sin, cleanses whiter than snow, and brings such joy and peace? It is impossible! It would be a horrible emblem of these things. But the Lord used the pure, cheering juice of the grape.

8. In Matt.6:13 Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Would He then, in the ordinance of the Lord’s supper, command His people to drink alcohol in remembrance of His blood shed for them? This would be leading them into temptation! It would be putting a cup of temptation right in front of believers’ faces regularly, at the Lord’s table. It would be a contradiction of His own words. No-one can deny that alcohol has led millions and millions of people down the road to hell; it has ruined lives, ruined families, caused countless deaths, and filled the regions of the damned!

9. Exod.12:19,20 teaches that leaven (yeast) was forbidden at the feast of the Passover. It symbolised corruption, impurity, hypocrisy. And it excites fermentation in wine-making. The bread of the Jews had to be unleavened – the very bread which Jesus used at the last supper (which was a Passover meal) – and the wine would have been unleavened wine, so to speak, as well: unfermented grape juice.

10. In 1 Cor.10:16, writing about the same cup used in the ordinance of the Lord’s table to symbolise the communion of the blood of Christ, Paul calls it “the cup of *blessing*.” Yet if alcohol is a raging mocker that deceives, a serpent that bites and an adder that stings, and causes a person to see strange things, to hallucinate – then it is a *curse*, not a blessing. How, then, can alcohol be the drink within the cup at the Lord’s table, which is used to symbolise spiritual blessing?

But grape juice is a different matter. As we have seen, the Old Testament declares of it, “a blessing is in it”; and certainly this is a very fit drink for symbolising the spiritual blessings which are the believer’s because of the blood of Christ.

**Lk.10:7: “And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.”**

This was said by the Lord Jesus when He commissioned the 70 disciples to go out and preach the Gospel. He told them that when they were invited into a house they were to eat and drink such things as the host would set before them. And those who want to justify the drinking of alcohol say, “Do you see? If a host puts wine before you, or some other alcoholic drink, you can drink it. You must accept his hospitality. It would be offensive not to do so.”

But the verse says nothing at all about alcoholic drinks! And after all, do hosts only offer alcoholic drinks? Are there not other drinks which they may offer, such as water, milk, or various fruit juices? And have they not always done so, throughout the ages?

Jesus was simply teaching His disciples to accept the common hospitality of their hosts while they were on their missionary journey. The labourer is worthy of his hire, and they were out preaching the Gospel and did not have to feel embarrassed about receiving the hospitality of the ones to whom they were preaching. As they were feeding them with spiritual food, it was right and proper that they received the physical food offered to them.

But this does *not* mean we must partake of everything offered, regardless of what it is! Would one drink a cup of poison if one’s host offered it? Of course not. What if, say, a tribal chief offered a missionary human flesh to eat – would he turn it down? Of course he would. It would be sinful to



accept. And yet the Scripture says “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused [for food]” (1 Tim. 4:4). Clearly the word “every” must be limited to that which would not be sinful to eat. What if a missionary was in a place where human blood was drunk; would he drink it? He certainly would not. Not every drink that someone may offer a Christian would be acceptable! Obviously the Lord’s words in this verse have a limitation to them. And if the Christian is offered an alcoholic drink, he is to refuse it, because the Bible is very clear on the sinfulness of drinking it.

**Lk.10:33,34: “But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine”.**

Anyone trying to use *this* text to justify the drinking of alcohol is acting very foolishly, and not reading properly. The oil and wine were not poured into the man’s mouth, they were poured into his wounds! The wine was used as an external medication here, not as a drink.

Besides, this wine was probably non-alcoholic anyway. For the peoples of ancient times considered oil and sweet wine (which was unfermented) to be excellent as an ointment.

**Jn.2:1-11: Jesus’ first miracle, the changing of water into wine at a wedding.**

When the wine was finished, the Lord miraculously changed water into wine – and He made *a lot* of it (vv. 6,7), showing that He wanted the guests to enjoy it. But once again, the all-important question is: what kind of wine was it?

The Greek word is the generic *oinos*, and therefore, to know which wine was made, we have to look at the context, and compare Scripture with Scripture. Certainly it cannot simply be *assumed* that this was alcoholic wine. Again, we do not want assumptions, we want proof. And beyond all doubt, it can be *proved*, from Scripture itself, that this wine was the pure juice of the grape.

First: in v.10 it says that the wine Jesus made miraculously was *good* wine. Yet His own Word describes alcohol as something evil, not good: a drink that causes woe, sorrow, contentions, wounds and hallucinations; a drink that is compared with serpents. But the Scripture says of the pure juice of the grape that it makes glad the heart of man; that it cheers God and man; and that a blessing is in it! Truly, good wine would be *this* wine!

Second: by comparing v.3 with v.10, it is clear that the wine ran out as a result of the wedding guests drinking it all up. And yet, in vss.6-8, we find Jesus miraculously turning six very large waterpots, full to the brim, into wine. Each pot held two or three firkins of water. A firkin was equal to about 9 gallons, which means that each of these waterpots contained somewhere between 18 and 27 gallons each – and there were six of them. Jesus made a lot of wine!

If (solely for argument’s sake) it is assumed that the Lord made alcoholic wine, this means that although all the wine was already finished (and we all know how much wine can be consumed at a wedding, and the state of people after drinking so much), Jesus made many gallons more for the guests to drink. Would the Lord have made so much alcohol, and moreover for guests who had already drunk all the alcohol that was available? This would have made them even more drunk than they were!

No: the truth, based on all that His Word says, and upon the very character of the Son of God, can only be that the Lord did *not* make alcoholic wine. He, being God, knew the untold misery that drunkenness had already caused in the world, and would yet cause through the centuries; and we can be certain that He did not make alcohol at this wedding. The Lord moved holy men of old to warn of the terrible dangers of alcohol in Scripture. He describes drunkenness as a sin, in His Word. For Him to have given a great abundance of alcohol to men, and moreover to have done so after they had already drunk a large amount, would have been a sin on His part! And the Lord was perfectly sinless.

Hab.2:15 says that when a man gives drink to his neighbour in order to intoxicate him, this is a great sin. And yet, in effect, this is what Jesus would have done, if He had given those wedding guests all that alcohol. It is simply impossible.

“To suggest that the holy Son of God brought into being a supply of intoxicating liquor of such proportions, to be freely available to all who were at the wedding, *after* existing supplies had been exhausted, is beyond the bounds of sanctified reason, for it would have turned the celebrations which form part of the Divine institution of marriage into a drunken orgy. To bring this incident forward in support of intoxicating liquor is to besmirch the name of the Mediator. It is impossible to think of Him deliberately creating anything which would harm, or would in any way encourage drunkenness. Does not John 2:11 state that this first miracle of Jesus was performed in order to “*manifest His glory*”. Let it be asked, What glory would have accrued to Christ in producing well over one hundred gallons of alcohol for men and women to partake of it at will? The thought borders on blasphemy. That intoxicating liquor finds a place at Christian weddings and family celebrations cannot be substantiated by reference to John 2. Christians who shut their eyes to the evils of drink, who provide it in their homes and who drink socially, are playing with fire as well as setting a deplorable *example* to the family and others.”<sup>9</sup>

**Rom.14:21: “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.”**

One would think that, even applying the word “wine” here to alcoholic wine, this would be a strong case for abstaining completely, as alcohol certainly does cause many to stumble, be offended, and made weak. But amazingly, those who try to biblically justify drinking alcohol point to this verse and say, “Alcohol is permitted, as long as it’s not a stumbling-block to someone. If it is, then we must abstain.” And they point to 1 Cor.10:23: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” They argue like this: “It’s lawful to drink alcohol, but not always expedient.”

However, in answer to this:

For one thing, we know from other places in Scripture that alcohol is *forbidden*; so the principle of expediency does not apply here. Sinful things are never lawful; only indifferent things are.

For another thing, alcohol is *always* a stumbling-block to many people.

And finally, the “wine” mentioned here refers to grape juice anyway. How do we know? Well, just as flesh is good and beneficial, so is wine: Paul is writing about good things, things innocent in themselves, so he must be meaning non-alcoholic wine. He is saying that Christians must even abstain from such good and innocent things as meat and grape juice, if for some reason they cause a brother to stumble or to be offended.

**1 Cor.11:20-22: “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.”**

Was the wine they were using alcoholic? Those who want to justify drinking alcohol say, “If the Corinthians were sinning at the Lord’s supper and getting drunk, then they were using alcoholic wine. So then, even though *they* were abusing it, the fact is that alcoholic wine *should* be used at the Lord’s table, but only in moderation.”

There are three important points to be made here. The first is that we must keep in mind what we have already learned about the Lord’s supper: that when Jesus instituted it, He did not use alcoholic wine, but the pure fruit of the vine; and that only pure grape juice *should* be used. Nothing in this present passage can be a contradiction of what we know the Bible teaches about the Lord’s supper.

The second point is this: “*Methuei*, drunken, being used as antithetical to *peina*, hungry, requires to be understood in the generic sense of *satiated*, and not in the restricted and emphatic sense of intoxicated.”<sup>10</sup> The same author quotes Greek linguists on the use of the Greek word as follows: “The word *methuei* does not necessarily denote drunkenness. The word may denote abundance without

excess”; “It is rightly remarked by the ancient commentators that the *ration oppositi* requires the word to be interpreted only of *satiety* in both drinking and eating. We need not suppose any *drunkenness* or *gluttony*. The fault with which they are charged is *sensuality* and *selfishness* at a meal united with the eucharistical feast.”<sup>11</sup>

In fact, in the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which was in use among the Jews at the time of Christ, and with which Paul was certainly very familiar, the very same Greek word is used in a number of places, and with this meaning of being “satiated”; for example, Psa.23:5, Jer.31:14, and Song.5:1. And although it is a different word, the meaning is similar to what we read in Lk. 17:8, where the master says to the servant, “Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken”: this does not mean, “till I am intoxicated”, but simply, “till I have drunk my fill.”

Therefore, in 1 Cor.11:21, the meaning is, “one is hungry, and another has drunk abundantly and is satiated.” It does not have to refer to being intoxicated at all; it can simply mean they had drunk abundantly, to the point of being satiated.

Furthermore, they had drunk *grape juice* to the point of being satiated. For in the local church at Corinth, the members were actually eating their own meals at the services, and mixing this up with the ordinance of the Lord’s supper. They were having a feast. The richer members were bringing plenty of food and drink, but consuming it all themselves; which meant that the poorer members of the church went hungry, while the richer ones were “drunken” – they were satiated with grape juice, and did not share it with those who had none. This was their sin.

But now for a third point: solely for argument’s sake, let us take the word “drunken”, as used here, to mean drunken with alcoholic wine. *Even if* some members of this church actually *were* bringing alcoholic wine to the Lord’s supper, and then getting drunk there, this tells us nothing about the proper beverage to use at the Lord’s supper – only about what at least some members of *this particular* local church were doing!

We have seen from other Scriptures that the only correct way to observe the Lord’s supper is with unintoxicating grape juice. Therefore, the fact that some may have been using alcohol does not mean this was acceptable or right. It only shows what *they* were doing (and wrongly)!

The fact that it says “one is hungry and another is drunken” implies plainly that *not all* were drunken; which shows us that some were corrupting the Lord’s supper, but not all. And in this chapter Paul is seeking to restore the ordinance to what it should be. We cannot use what some may have been doing, who had corrupted the ordinance, as a basis for using alcohol in the ordinance.

### **1 Tim.5:23: “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.”**

Timothy had a stomach complaint, and Paul recommended that he drink a little wine for it. Obviously, then, wine is commended here. But must we assume he was commending the drinking of alcoholic wine for pleasure? Certainly not!

The fact is, non-alcoholic grape juice can be *good* for a stomach complaint. Ancient writers, such as Pliny and Philo, knew this, and wrote that non-alcoholic wine was good for sickness. But these same ancient writers stated that many alcoholic wines in those days *caused* stomach complaints and headaches.<sup>12</sup> What good would they have done, then, for Timothy’s stomach? He already had a stomach complaint – he did not need to aggravate it!

Furthermore: Gospel ministers are very specifically commanded *not* to drink wine, in 1 Tim. 3:2,3: “A bishop then must be blameless... not given to wine” (we will examine this text a little later). Timothy was a Gospel minister – and yet in the very same epistle where Paul had stated that ministers are not to drink wine, he now says to this young minister, “use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake”! Paul would never have written that ministers are not to drink alcoholic wine at all, and yet, just a little later in the same epistle, told Timothy to go ahead and drink alcoholic wine. And note also: we would again be faced with the problem of how much wine is a *little* wine. Paul does not say. Did he mean a cup? Two cups, maybe? We are not told. Now if this was alcoholic wine, this kind of vagueness

could have very serious consequences, for Timothy could very easily have committed the sin of drunkenness thanks to Paul's vague instruction about using "a little wine". But if this were non-alcoholic grape juice, the lack of specific instructions on how much is "a little" would have had no such consequences.

## **Other New Testament Texts (Used by Those Who Justify Drinking Alcohol)**

There are a few other New Testament texts which we must examine, used by those who argue that Christians may drink "in moderation".

**1 Cor.6:9,10: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."**

Those professing Christians who call themselves "moderate drinkers" of alcohol say that this passage only condemns those who are drunkards, not those who drink alcohol "in moderation."

But when is a person drunk? At what point does a person pass the boundary dividing what men call "drinking in moderation" from drunkenness? *And how will the person know?*

Drunkenness is strongly condemned in Scripture. But nowhere in Scripture are we told at what point drunkenness has been reached. This is because drunkenness begins with the very first drink. From the moment one has the first drink, one is less sober than one was before that drink. And the only true way to avoid drunkenness is *not to drink at all*. There can be no such thing as "drinking in moderation" because there are absolutely no guidelines for what is "drinking in moderation" and what is not.

The same passage condemns those who are fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, sodomites, thieves, etc. Now if "moderate drinking" is permissible (although, as we have seen, there is no boundary between "moderate drinking" and drunkenness), then so is "moderate fornication", "moderate idolatry", or "moderate stealing"! How absurd!

**1 Cor.9:25: "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible."**

The word "temperate" means self-restrained; self-controlled. And those who say Christians may "drink in moderation" claim that as long as they control themselves, drinking alcohol is permissible. But this is wrong. There is only one way to be self-controlled when it comes to sinful things, and that is to abstain totally! A so-called "moderate drinker" is in fact *not* self-controlled. Alcohol numbs the senses, and makes it increasingly difficult for a person to control himself.

Paul was referring here to athletes, who used to *abstain* in order to obtain a corruptible crown. And believers have a vastly more important reason to abstain than those athletes ever did.

**Gal.5:22, 23: "temperance".**

Temperance is one of the fruit of the Spirit. But temperance is self-control *from* the use of sinful or harmful things, not *in* the use of them. See above under 1 Cor. 9:25.

**Phil.4:5: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."**

The "drinkers in moderation" (as they are termed, and as they term themselves) are very fond of this verse. But they have misunderstood its meaning. It does *not* mean "drink in moderation"! It means moderation that lies in gentleness, mildness, patience.

Besides, the reason for moderation, as given in the verse, is that the Lord is at hand. It would be very strange if the verse was saying, "Drink in moderation, because the Lord is at hand"! But as they were suffering persecution, they were exhorted to be patient, gentle and mild in their response.

**Col.2:16: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days”.**

If anyone attempts to use this verse to justify consuming alcohol, they have a problem: Paul is writing of those meats and drinks which were declared to be either ceremonially clean or unclean during the period of the Mosaic law. Those Old Testament ceremonial laws are now abrogated; and *this* is what Paul is writing about. He is not giving Christians permission to drink alcohol here. This verse has nothing to do with that.

**1 Tim. 3:2,3,8: “A bishop then must be blameless... not given to wine”; “Likewise must the deacons be... not given to much wine”.**

Although it says a bishop (pastor; elder) must not be given to wine, it goes on to say that deacons must not to be given to *much* wine. And this has caused some to say that although the pastors must be total abstainers, deacons and other Christians may drink “in moderation.” They must not be given to *much* wine, but they may drink a *little* wine – so the argument goes.

But this is an erroneous interpretation of these verses! And there are two very good reasons whereby we may be certain of this:

The first reason: Heb.13:7 says that Christians are to follow the faith, the example, of the pastors. Therefore, if the pastor must be a total abstainer from alcohol, then so must all believers! If it is wrong for the pastor to drink any wine, then it is also wrong for any other Christian to do so.

After all, in verses 2 and 3 it is commanded that the pastor be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, patient, not a brawler, not covetous, and ruling his own house well. Of the ministerial qualifications given in this passage, the only one that does not apply to other believers is the one which says, “apt to teach”. But it can be shown, from many Scriptures, that *all* Christians are to be blameless, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, etc. And likewise, they are not to be given to wine! For the pastor sets the example which they are to follow. The pastors are to be total abstainers, as are the flocks under their care.

And the second reason: in biblical times, the heathen used to drink large quantities of *unintoxicating* wine at their feasts. In fact, they often actually *preferred non-alcoholic wine*, because that way they could drink much more, without getting drunk. They committed gluttony, even though they did not get drunk. Therefore, in v.8, when Paul addresses the deacons and says they are not to be given to “much wine”, he is condemning gluttony, not drunkenness. Yes, drunkenness is a great sin, and is condemned in many parts of God’s Word, but in this verse he is commanding deacons not to commit the sin of gluttony. The meaning is, “not *devoted* to much wine.” Not *addicted* to it. Even if the foods and drinks one consumes are good in themselves, eating or drinking to excess is a sin. Excessive (gluttonous) drinking of non-alcoholic grape juice was a prevalent sin in those days, just as excessive eating was, and the deacons were to set an example, even in the use of a good thing like the juice of the grape.

This becomes even clearer when we compare this verse with other portions of Holy Scripture:

Prov.24:13 says, “My son, eat thou honey, because it is good”; but Prov.25:27 says, “It is not good to eat much honey”. Honey is very good and beneficial; but *too much* honey is not good. And it is precisely the same with non-alcoholic wine, or grape juice: it is very good and healthy, but too much of it is not so, and in fact it is gluttonous to have too much.

Also, Prov. 23:1,2 says, “When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.” Food is good and necessary, and a blessing from the Lord (Psa. 104:15), when eaten in the right amount for one; but *too much* food is sinful, for this is gluttony. And it is the same with grape juice. In 1 Tim. 3:8 Paul is condemning the gluttonous use of grape juice.

And in answer to those who might argue that as Scripture does not say how much food is too much before gluttony is committed, and that therefore “drinking in moderation” is acceptable as well for

Scripture does not say how much alcohol is too much, the following is an excellent rebuttal of this argument:

“It is true that God does not give any hint in Scripture as to how much food would make one become a glutton; therefore, some might affirm that it is only to be expected that God would also not give any hints regarding how much wine it would take before one becomes drunk. However... the sin of gluttony will merely damage one’s reputation (slightly) and be a gradual contribution to obesity. Yet, drunkenness is an act of obvious *immorality* with *immediate* effect, and it will momentarily deprive the individual of his judgment, his intellectual capability, his inhibitions, etc. Furthermore, no matter what physical condition a person is in, or what age, the amount of alcohol needed to affect the brain (at least to some extent) is less than one glass. By contrast, excessive food intake is almost impossible of generalization. An energetic young 19 year old who exercises frequently may be able to eat vast amounts of food with no impairment of energy, no gaining of weight and *no* evidence of gluttony whereas another person may eat a very small amount of food and show obvious symptoms of gluttony. Therefore, it is evident why no specific amount is suggested in Scripture for either of these two sins – gluttony and drunkenness. No amount is mentioned for gluttony because any effective generalization is impossible (and because only *repeated* gluttony will have any real effect on a person; only then is the sin evident to all). On the other hand, no amount is mentioned for drunkenness because (although a generalization is possible – ‘avoid more than one drink!’) none is desirable. Any amount of alcohol is harmful and sinful. Excess in this area is one of kind (alcohol) rather than of amount. Therefore, the reason that there is no hint in the Old Testament regarding how much wine may be safely imbibed is that God never considered *any* amount of wine to be wholesome or ‘safe.’ The beverage which he wholeheartedly approves of is grape juice.”<sup>13</sup>

To the above it can be added that the Scripture says, “Wine is a mocker” (Prov. 20:1). All agree that this refers to alcoholic wine. But it is called a mocker, *not* merely because if used to excess it is harmful. When meat is eaten excessively it is harmful, and gluttony is committed, but meat cannot, with any propriety, be called a mocker. No, the reason wine is called a mocker is because of its *inherent quality*: its *alcoholic content*. This is what makes it a mocker and a deceiver.

There are also those who claim that 1 Tim. 3:3 – “not given to wine” – means the same as 1 Tim. 3:8 – “not given to much wine”; and that therefore pastors, deacons, and every other believer may drink alcohol, as long as it is “in moderation”. But since verse 8 does not refer to drunkenness, but to gluttony, if they choose to interpret verse 3 in the light of verse 8 then by their own interpretation verse 3 *also* refers only to gluttony!

The bottom line: these verses do not condone the drinking of alcohol.

**1 Tim. 4:4,5: “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”**

Christians are free to eat any food they like. The Old Testament ceremonial laws, which forbade the Israelites from eating certain foods, are abolished. New Covenant believers may eat any food. And some make the claim that this means alcohol is permitted as well. But this is not so at all:

The text is speaking about foods (v.3); and alcohol is not a food. It is not nutritious. In fact, the body treats alcohol as an intruder and a poison. It passes out of the body, being rejected by it: 1 Sam.25:37.

And alcohol is *not* a good creation of God (v.4)! It is a creation of men, and a dangerous drug that has brought untold suffering and misery to mankind.

**1 Pet.4:3-5: “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.”**

If this passage means merely that alcohol is only harmful when used to excess, we may legitimately ask: so what? *Everything* is harmful when used to excess. Even such good things as milk and meat are



harmful if consumed excessively. And yet these things are not condemned, or said to be evil. Quite plainly, wine is condemned because of its *inherent evil quality*, which is alcohol. Wine, drunk *at all*, is wine drunk to excess! And this is shown by the fact that although the word is correctly translated as “excess of wine” in the King James Version, it can also be correctly translated as “drunkenness”, or even simply as “wine-drinking”. In all three cases the meaning is the same. Now if “wine-drinking” is the same as “excess of wine”, then drinking of alcoholic wine *at all* is drinking to excess.

However, because v.3 is translated as “excess of wine” in the King James Version, those who advocate “drinking in moderation” often say, “Yes, excess is forbidden, but not a moderate amount.” But as further evidence that the word means “wine-drinking”, v.4 speaks of “excess of riot.” Are we to argue from this and say, “Yes, excessive rioting is forbidden, but not moderate rioting”? Can one ever “riot in moderation”? Of course not! Yet if “moderate drinking” is fine for believers because this text condemns “excess of wine”, then “moderate rioting” is fine too, because the text condemns “excess of riot”!

The meaning, therefore, of “excess of wine” is simply wine-drinking, the drinking of which in any amount is drinking too much; just as the meaning of “excess of riot” is simply rioting, which to any degree is too much.

“*Oinophlugia* occurs only in this text, and is a compound of *oinos*, wine, and *phluo*, to overflow – a debauch with wine.... The Greek word *asotia*, in Eph. v. 18, is rendered excess, and is connected with wine; and means, literally, unsavableness, utter depravity, and dissoluteness. In the text [1 Pet. 4:3-5], and Tit. I. 6, it is connected with riot, which means overflow, outpouring of dissoluteness, thus denoting the same moral character. As the two phrases occur in the text, it teaches that excess of wine and excess of riot are related to each other as cause and effect; but excess of wine no more justifies moderate drinking than excess of riot justifies moderate rioting. The design of Peter was to encourage those to whom he wrote to continue in their abstinence.”<sup>14</sup>

Lastly: the Christians to whom Peter was originally writing were total abstainers; because their old companions now spoke against them *for* their abstinence.

## Conclusion

In the light of all the evidence, there is only one path open to the true Christian, when it comes to alcoholic drinks: *he must totally abstain from them*. His Lord did not drink them, and nor should he. The Lord’s Word condemns them, and so should he. There can be no excuse for “social drinking”, or for so-called “moderate drinking”, for no argument that men can bring forward can stand in the light of the Bible’s teaching. The Bible does not permit the use of alcohol, but instead strongly condemns it. If you love the Lord, and desire to observe what He has commanded and live a life of separation from the world and from sin, then do not attempt to use the Scriptures to defend the indefensible, but totally abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages!

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The author has a set of recorded sermons available, entitled *Wine in the Bible*. Please see the website below for details.

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## ENDNOTES:

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1. *Alcohol and the Christian*, by W.H. Molland, pg. 7. North Road Chapel, Bideford, England.
2. *Wine: the Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence*, by Robert P. Teachout, pg. 56. Published by the author, 1983. The reference to “Lolli” in the quotation is to *Social Drinking*, by Georgio Lolli, Collier Books, New York, 1960.
3. *Wine: the Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence*, pg. 58.
4. *Alcohol and the Christian*, pg. 9, quoting *The Band of Hope News*, Spring 1986.
5. *Bible Wines*, by William Patton, pgs. 25-41. SANE Press, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA, undated. First published in the nineteenth century.
6. *Bible Wines*, pgs. 41-49.
7. *Bible Wines*, pgs. 40-41.
8. *Wine: the Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence*, pgs. 65-66.
9. *Alcohol and the Christian*, pg. 9.
10. *Bible Wines*, pgs. 104-105.
11. *Bible Wines*, pg. 105, quoting from the works of William Newcome and S.T. Bloomfield.
12. *Bible Wines*, pg. 112.
13. *Wine: the Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence*, pgs. 78-79.
14. *Bible Wines*, pg. 123.

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