

# **Alcohol and the Christian**

Matthew Miller

## **I. Introduction**

There is no question but that alcohol is one of the foremost factors in the destruction of the society, the family, human lives, and many other precious things. Alcohol kills, maims, and destroys the lives of millions of people yearly around the world. It is odd, then, that so many people, including those whose lives have been ruined by alcohol, still work hard to support alcohol. The Bible has much to say about alcohol, and Christians should be familiar with God's truth on drinking.

## **II. The Facts at Hand**

A. Just about every professing Christian would agree that abject, total drunkenness is immoral and condemned in the Bible. It is not difficult to see that a staggering, smelly, unkempt drunk yelling out obscenities is sinning.

B. Yet, there are many Christians who argue that mild drinking, or social drinking, is not forbidden by God. Many brethren make a distinction between social drinking, and abject drunkenness. The question must be asked: "What does the Bible teach about alcohol?"

C. It is the contention of this sermon that the intake of fermented beverages in any amount is forbidden by the Bible, both in precept and in principle. This shall be accomplished with five basic arguments. First, it shall be demonstrated that the wine of the Bible is not the same as modern wine. Secondly, it shall be demonstrated that the Bible contains two distinct evaluations of the word wine. Thirdly, specific passages which condemn the intake of fermented beverages will be examined. Fourthly, some biblical principles which forbid the intake of fermented beverages will be examined. Finally, the most common arguments in support of social drinking shall be critically examined.

D. In order for the consumption of alcoholic beverages by Christians to be approved, one would have to find the a passage of scripture with the following characteristics:

1. A clear reference to fermented beverages (not just the assumption that they are fermented!).
2. The clear consumption of fermented beverages by humans.

3. The clear approval of God.

### **III. A Brief Introduction to Alcohol**

A. Before the main arguments shall be examined, a brief introduction to alcohol and the fermentation process is in order.

B. Fermentation is the process by which yeast eat sugar and expel carbon dioxide and ethanol alcohol. Yeast can ferment anything with a fair amount of sugar; the juice of just about every fruit can be fermented.

C. Drinking alcohol is fermented liquid containing ethanol, consumed by humans for the physiological effects it produces.

D. Intoxication is the process of physiological change which occurs upon the consumption of drinking alcohol. It is not a state of being, but a process, including the following stages:

1. The dulling of the neurological system and response. A feeling of relaxation.

2. A feeling of euphoria.

3. A feeling of lethargy and depression, coupled with a lethargy of motor skills.

4. A severe distortion of neurological response, indicated by slurred speech, a staggering gate, and delayed logical thought.

5. Nausea and vomiting. This is the body's attempt to remove alcohol from the system.

6. Loss of consciousness. This is the body's last effort to stop the intake of alcohol and to deal with the symptoms of intoxication.

7. Death. This is always the last stage of intoxication. It is usually avoided by the cessation of alcoholic intake. This is because alcohol is a poison to the human body.

8. Physiological recovery. If death has not occurred, the body attempts to repair damage from intoxication. This is coupled with a severe feeling of illness with symptoms similar to those of influenza.

E. It must be asserted that alcohol is a poison to the human body. It is a slow poison, but nevertheless a poison. It destroys brain cells, and will lead

to death if consumed quickly enough and in great enough quantity. Small animals who are given large quantities of alcohol die rather quickly, and death by alcohol poisoning is more common than one might think on college campuses.

F. The fermentation of fruit juice into a tasty, drinkable, fermented beverage, is a deliberate process requiring skill. If yeast is introduced to grape juice and left out in the sun, it will quickly become a distasteful, fermented liquid, and then it will quickly become vinegar. Moreover, it is simple to prevent the fermentation process, and the ancients did this in abundance. To produce a quality, tasty wine requires a deliberate, skilled process, wherein the wine is kept in airtight containers made of special wood, and several other processes. In other words, to produce drinkable wine, people must desire it and manufacture it.

G. It is readily granted that some of the ancients, especially the people of the Bible lands, made, used, and abused fermented beverages. They knew about liquor, they made liquor, and they drank liquor. But what is not granted is the modern assumption that all of the ancients drank fermented beverages all the time, or even that they were desired. Rather, it is contended that the ancients, and especially the peoples of the Bible, knew about both fermented and unfermented wine, and produced and used both.

#### **IV. Wine of the Bible and Modern Wine**

A. What comes to mind when you hear the word wine? Without a doubt, everyone who lives in our modern, Western European culture thinks of a bottle of fermented, fortified wine, with an alcohol content of 8% - 15%. This is of course almost the only meaning of the word wine in modern English. The only time the word is used to mean anything else is when it is used poetically. Thus, to the modern English speaker, all wine is fermented.

B. It is incorrect, however, to assume that the modern, cultural meaning of an English word dictates the ancient meanings of Hebrew and Greek words in an entirely different culture. The truth is that there are several Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible which are translated wine, and they have different meanings. Moreover, as recently as the 18th Century, even the English word wine had a different meaning (look it up for yourself in an old dictionary). While it is helpful to examine these words, this could be deduced from the English Bible alone, through careful study.

1. The most common Hebrew words related to the topic (though there are others):
  - a. *yayin*: 134 verses: wine; the juice of the grape, whether

fermented or unfermented.

b. *tirosh*: 38 verses: sometimes translated new wine, but actually, from the weight of scholarship and the actual biblical uses, almost definitely means grapes.

c. *shekhar*: 20 verses: the word basically means sweet (we get the English sugar from it); probably used to refer to the sweet juice of fruit other than the grape, whether fermented or unfermented.

2. The most common Greek words related to the topic:

a. *oinos*: 29 verses: wine; the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented.

b. *gleukos*: 1 verse: sweet wine (we get the English word glucose from it).

C. 2 Samuel 16:1:

1. In ancient times, wine, whether fermented or unfermented, was the drink of choice, and one of the few alternatives to water. While some ancients did purposefully ferment wine for intoxication, many of them also purposefully prevented fermentation, both to preserve the sweet and delicious taste, and to prevent intoxication. To assume that the ancients walked around drinking fermented wine all day is absurd: they would never have accomplished anything.

2. There were many methods of preserving wine from fermenting, including burying it, sealing it in a new container (Matthew 9:17). A fairly common way to preserve wine was to boil it down into a thick, concentrated paste (yeast have trouble fermenting in environments of excessive sugar); then, when ready to drink, they would reconstitute it into juice by adding water and stirring. Thus, one flask of wine-paste could be taken on journeys and reconstituted to produce multiple glasses of wine.

3. We moderns have refrigeration and machines that vacuum-pack grape juice to avoid fermentation. We are not familiar with manual methods of preventing fermentations. The ancients, however, were familiar with these methods, and employed them regularly.

D. The secular, non-biblical use of these words by ancients, demonstrates their general meaning, and demonstrates that ancients called unfermented juice wine:

1. Aristotle, born 384 B.C.: "The wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was

contained, and to dissolve the scrapings in water." Bible Commentary, p. 295, and Nott, London Edition, p. 80.

2. Horace, born 65 B.C.: "There is no wine sweeter to drink than Lesbian; that it was like nectar, and more resembled ambrosia than wine; that it was perfectly harmless, and would not produce intoxication." Anti-Bacchus, p. 220.

3. Virgil, born 70 B. C.: "Or from sweet must boils down the luscious juice, and skims with leaves the trembling cauldron's food." Georgic, lib. I. Line 295.

4. Plutarch, born 60 A. D.: "Wine is rendered old or feeble in strength when it is frequently filtered. The strength or spirit being thus excluded, the wine neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink."  
Symposium

5. Pliny, born 61 or 62 A. D.: "The most useful wine has all its strength broken by the filter." Liber xxiii. Cap. 24.

6. Because the vast majority of existing records of the Hebrew civilization in ancient times are found in the Old Testament, it is extremely difficult to find B. C. secular references to the use of the Hebrew word yayin. The only reference I could find comes from the Halakhot Gedolot, which is a Jewish compilation of Talmudic teaching, from somewhere around the 9th Century A. D.: "One may press out a cluster of grapes and pronounce the Kiddush over the juice, since the juice of the grape is considered wine [yayin] in connection with the laws of the Nazirite." This in turn was Cited by Louis Ginzberg in "A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies," American Jewish Year Book, 1923, p. 409.

7. Benjamin Marin's *Lingua Britannica Reformata* or A New English Dictionary, published in 1748: "1. the juice of the grape. 2. a liquor extracted from other fruits besides the grape. 3. the vapours of wine, as wine disturbs his reason."

8. Many other ancient sources could be quoted which, along with these, demonstrate two essential facts:

- a. Both the Hebrew word yayin and the Greek word oinos were used frequently and commonly to refer to the unfermented juice of the grape.
- b. It was a common practice among the ancients of the

Middle East to purposefully prevent grape juice from fermenting, because they preferred it that way.  
c. It is therefore wrong to assume that our modern, Western, American-English use of the word wine must dictate the ancient, Middle Eastern use of Hebrew and Greek words.

E. There are some biblical passages which use these words, which, in their context, have obvious or probable reference to unfermented wine.

1. Genesis 49:11: Though this is a prophetic passage (Jacob's blessing of his sons), nevertheless the figure, or analogy, given in it is real. Judah would tie his donkey to the vine and wash his clothes in wine. It is evident that the wine under consideration is something that could be procured immediately from the vine, i.e. unfermented grape juice. Moreover, the phrase blood of grapes is a Hebrew parallel construction, intended to be a synonym of wine, and the blood of grapes is plain, unfermented grape juice.
2. 1 Samuel 25:18: Abigail was preparing provisions for a journey. She obviously prepared provisions to last for several days, and to be consumed by a group of servants. She prepared 200 loaves of bread, five sheep, five seahs of roasted grain (probably about three dry gallons of grain), 100 clusters of raisins, 200 cakes of figs, and two skins of wine. The small amount of wine does not fit the large amount of other provisions. It is most likely that this was boiled down juice, preserved from fermentation, to be reconstituted with water.
3. 2 Samuel 16:1: The same thing applies to this passage as the one before it.
4. Isaiah 16:10: In this prophetic image, treaders tread out wine in winepresses. Thus must be unfermented wine, and the image must have been familiar enough to Jews to include it in a prophecy.
5. Isaiah 27:2,3: This passage refers to a prophetic vineyard tended by God. Yet it is a vineyard of red wine, obviously unfermented. The Hebrew word used here is actually chemer.
6. Isaiah 65:8: The word here is tirosh, and it refers to wine in the cluster, obviously unfermented.
7. Nehemiah 13:15: Wine, along with other produce of the ground, is brought in directly from winepresses. This must be unfermented.

8. Jeremiah 40:10-12: Wine, along with fruit and oil (in that day, pressed from olives), is presented as harvest of the land, and is something gathered and stored.

9. Matthew 9:17: This is a very misunderstood passage. Sometimes people think that, if one puts newly fermented wine into old, weak wineskins, then when it ferments and expands, they will burst; but, if one puts it into new, strong wineskins, then they will be able to hold the expanding juice. This view is actually physically impossible. A wineskin full of fermenting yeast will produce 50 times its volume in carbon dioxide, and no wineskin in the world is strong enough to contain that! In reality, what Christ meant is this: new wine is unfermented grape juice. Old wineskins are those which may contain yeast. If one puts unfermented wine into a skin with yeast in it, then the new wine will be spoiled and ferment. To preserve it, one must put it into a new wineskin - one which does not contain any remnants of yeast. Thus, it seems apparent that Christ is using the word oinos to refer to unfermented grape juice.

10. Thus it must be concluded that the Hebrew and Greek words translated wine do not always refer to fermented grape juice, but are used biblically to refer to simple, unfermented grape juice.

F. Thus, both from secular and biblical uses, we can see that both the Hebrew and Greek words translated wine may refer either to fermented, or unfermented, grape juice. It is indeed granted that they sometimes refer to alcoholic wine. But it cannot be honestly argued that the biblical word wine always and only refers to fermented wine!

G. Even when the ancients used fermented wine, it could not have been more than 9% alcohol by volume, given that this is the natural maximum. Our modern wines are fortified. The ancients regularly mixed their wine with water in order to dilute them. In fact, the Greeks, and particularly the Cretans, were sometimes condemned by the Romans for being drunks because they drank 9% wine undiluted. Even many of the Roman and Greek religious cults drank unfermented wine in abundance. Just as they engorged themselves with food and then purged themselves, so they also drank enormous amounts of unfermented wine in order to be gluttonous, and then purged themselves. Therefore, even when ancient references to drunken people are read, it cannot always be assumed that this was fermented wine. According to the Bible Commentary, page 368, as cited by William Patton in Bible Wines, "Excessive drinking, even of uninebriating drinks, was a vice prevalent in the days of St. Paul, and corresponded to gluttony, also common - the excessive use of food, but not of an intoxicating kind."

## V. Biblical Moral Commentary on Wine

A. When the Bible describes wine and its effects and characteristics, one finds that the passages are divided into two general categories: one in which wine is obvious a good and godly blessing, and another where it is bad and a curse, and represents the wrath of God. There are a small number of uses where the meaning is not able to be determined.

1. Passages where wine is good:
  - a. Numbers 18:11-13: As part of an offering to God, and something given by God to man, this wine must inherently, and by definition, be good.
  - b. Genesis 27:28: Wine here is not only from the earth, but is a blessing.
  - c. Proverbs 3:9,10: Here, wine is a produce of the earth, and a blessing which is the result of serving God. It is something with which God rewards His faithful.
  - d. Isaiah 65:8: Wine, which is found "in the grape," is a blessing.
  - e. Joel 3:17,18: Wine is seen as a direct produce of the land, and a blessing from God.
  - f. Isaiah 55:1-3: Wine (yayin here) is a figure of a spiritual blessing. It is a symbol of salvation from God. Thus, it is an inherently good thing.
  - g. Matthew 26:26-29: Surely this fruit of the vine was wine, in that it came from a grape vine. It is most reasonable to conclude that in a culture where grapes were essential parts of the economy, the religion, and the social life, and where wine from grapes was a fundamental part of the feasts and offerings of the religion of which Jesus was a part, and given that the phrase "fruit of the vine" is an idiom in many languages, certainly including ancient Aramaic and Greek, then we may rightfully conclude that this "fruit of the vine" was wine from grapes. Thus, wine is seen as a symbol of the blood of Christ - certainly then something inherently holy, good, and a blessing, and a figure of salvation.
2. Passages where wine is bad:
  - a. Proverbs 4:14-17: Wine is drunk by the wicked, and is associated with violence.
  - b. Proverbs 23:29-35: The consumer of wine is seen as foolish, violent, physically distressed, and unconscious. He passes out and is physically harmed, then when he awakens, he foolishly seeks out more wine. Wine is like a serpent.
  - c. Proverbs 20:1: Wine is a mocker, meaning that it makes



a fool of those who use it. Strong drink (the Hebrew word here is shekhar: strong drink is not a good translation) is a brawler, causing violence.

d. Habakkuk 2:4,5: The wine drinker is a proud man who roams from his home and is compared the insatiable death.

e. Habakkuk 2:15,16: The man who gives his neighbor to drink (to drink wine? This seems the case, as wine was just mentioned in the same context) encourages wickedness and fornication, and will be punished by God.

f. Isaiah 5:22-24: Those who are good at drinking wine (yayin) are wicked and unjust, and will be destroyed by God for rejecting His law.

g. Jeremiah 25:15,16: Wine (yayin) is seen as a curse and punishment from the hand of God, and as a symbol of His wrath and fury.

h. Ephesians 5:18: There is dissipation (sensuality, moral looseness) in wine (oinos), and it is contrasted to the spiritual life.

B. Given these two classes of the uses of wine in the Bible, the following questions are valid to ask:

1. It is possible that the word wine has a range of meaning, and may not always mean the same thing?
2. Is it possible that sometimes wine is good, but sometimes it is bad?
3. Is it reasonable to conclude that God would give wine as a blessing, and then turn around and condemn it and curse those who use it? What would that say about God?
4. If wine is pressed directly from the grape, and is a produce of the land, is it reasonable to believe that it is already fermented? Does grape juice turn into tasty, fermented wine in the grape without any human intervention?
5. If sometimes wine is a wonderful blessing from God, and sometimes a curse and forbidden, what is the likely explanation? Could it be that sometimes wine is unfermented, and sometimes fermented? If not, then what could possibly be the explanation?

C. The most reasonable explanation of these two categories of wine is: when wine is a blessing from God and the produce of the land, then it is unfermented and sweet; when wine is a curse, a symbol of God's wrath,

the cause of violence and woe, and forbidden, it is fermented. Thus, we cannot just take verses where wine is approved, assume that it must be fermented without evidence, ignore all of the other verses condemning it, and conclude that the consumption of alcohol is approved by God. And, we have yet to find a passage of scripture where there exists a clear reference to fermented wine, being consumed by humans, and being approved by God. There is no such biblical authority.

## **VI. Scriptures Which Specifically Condemn the Drinking of Fermented Beverages**

A. Proverbs 23:29-35: The gazing at red wine and the consumption of it is forbidden. If this passage does not condemn the intake of fermented wine, then nothing does.

B. Galatians 5:19-21: Drunkenness is condemned as a work of the flesh, and those who practice it will go to hell. Most people assume that the meaning of drunkenness only includes abject, severe, total drunkenness. They imagine this word to only refer to the staggering, dirty, cursing drunk in the gutter. The Greek word here (*methe*), however, is defined not only as abject drunkenness, but also as intoxication. Intoxication is a process, not a state of being. Physiologically, biologically, and scientifically, the process of intoxication begins with the first sip of fermented beverage. It is invalid to isolate only the last stages of the process and then apply this condemnation only to that, when the actual Greek word refers to the entire process. Moreover, the word can also simply refer to gluttony in liquid consumption.

C. Ephesians 5:18: This is a direct commandment not to be drunk with wine. The Greek word for drunk here is from the same root as in Galatians, *methe*. It refers to the process of intoxication, not only to abject, staggering drunkenness, and this process begins with the first sip of alcohol. Secondly, intoxication by wine is contrasted with being filled with the Spirit. In other words, intoxication with wine is the opposite of living in the Spirit. The two cannot co-exist. Finally, the word drunk is parallel to the word filled. Could it be that the meaning of drunk here is simply filled up, and thus denote any intake of fermented beverage?

D. 1 Timothy 3:3: Bishops are not to be given to wine. Actually, the Greek here (*paroinos*) means near or by wine. In other words, he is to avoid it completely. This may or may not be fermented wine. Remember, the Romans and Greeks engorged themselves with unfermented wine as a form of gluttony, then purged themselves. This could very well be what Paul is condemning in bishops. If that is the case, then certainly fermented wine would also be condemned, and if it is not the case, then it can only

mean that fermented wine is condemned. Whatever the case, this verse at least proves that bishops are not to be "near or by wine," meaning that they are to be total abstainers. But, with the exception of certain qualifications (such as being the husband of one wife), which are not binding on all Christians, does the forbidding of a trait in a bishop mean license for other Christians? For example, is it approved by God for any Christian to be blameful, a polygamist, of unsound mind, of bad behavior, inhospitable, not apt to teach, violent, greedy for money, harsh, quarrelsome, covetous, and one who is a terrible ruler of his house? Do we not recognize, in all of the other qualifications, that they apply to all Christians, but are especially necessary to bishops? Why then would we exclude "not near or by wine" from that principle?

E. Titus 2:2: The word translated temperate or sober is *nephaleos* in the Greek, whose definition includes refraining from wine. If older men are to refrain from wine, does this mean that younger men and all women may partake of it? Or do not the older men set the example for the conduct of others?

F. In these passages, where the consumption of wine is condemned, there are only two possibilities as to the meaning of wine:

1. If unfermented wine is being condemned, and intoxication and drunkenness refer to engorging oneself, then what is being condemned is gluttony on fermented wine. If drinking too much grape juice is condemned, then certainly the consumption of poisonous alcohol would also be condemned, and thus a Christian cannot partake of alcohol.

2. If fermented wine is being condemned, then the entire process of the intake of fermented wine is being condemned, and thus a Christian cannot partake of alcohol.

## **VII. Scriptures Which Condemn the Drinking of Fermented Beverages in Principle**

A. Colossians 4:2; 1 Peter 5:8: Christians are commanded to be vigilant (Greek *gregoreuo*: from which derives the English term Gregorian: it is defined as watch; take heed; give strict attention to). This is because we have an enemy, Satan, who seeks to devour us. If we are not actively watchful, careful, and prayerful, then we are not obeying this commandment, and we will be harmed or destroyed by Satan. It is a biological, physiological, scientific fact that the first sip of alcohol begins to lessen one's vigilance. Thus, for a Christian to partake of any amount of fermented beverage is to lessen his vigilance, and thus to disobey this

principle.

B. Mark 9:42: To be a stumbling block to another (especially children), i.e. to influence or cause him to sin, is a grievous sin against God. Christ says that it is better for those who do this that they be drowned in the sea. It is a fact of science that some people are genetically more inclined to alcohol addiction. This is not to say that genetics excuse our behavior, but it is to say that it is scientifically provable that people with a certain genetic makeup are more prone to be tempted to abuse alcohol and to be generally impulsive. Thus, to drink alcohol and to be able to control it, is to make it appear attractive to others, and to perhaps cause someone else to sin.

C. 1 Peter 4:1-5: Peter contrasts the former life of the Gentile Christians with their new life in Christ. In their former life, they lived to please their flesh, but in the new life, they were called to suffer in the flesh and live in the spirit. The particular sins that Peter lists - lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries - represent sins that are associated with the pagan lifestyle. Also, most of them, if not all of them, in ancient Rome, involved the use of unfermented or fermented wine. Drunkenness, or intoxication, is a part of all of these sins, and thus is associated with the general category. The word translated drunkenness here is *oinophlugia*, which means excess of wine. This may refer to fermented wine drunk in excess, but it also may refer to the gluttonous use of unfermented wine.

D. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20: The specific theme in this passage is fornication. Yet there is also the principle that our bodies are not our own, and that we should therefore glorify God in our bodies. It stands to reason then, that any activity which shames God in our body, or which destroys the body, would be sinful. Alcohol use inherently harms and destroys the body every time it is used. While the effects are not always immediately obvious, and while there are degrees of harm, nevertheless alcohol always harms the body to some degree. Thus, the use of alcohol, like that of cigarettes, violates this scriptural principle.

## **VIII. Rebuttals to Common Arguments in Support of Social Drinking/Alcohol Use**

A. The Bible approves the use of wine in several passages: As we have already seen, the Bible, in some passages, approves the use of *yayin* and *oinos*. It also strongly condemns their use in other passages. We cannot assume that the modern English definition of the English word wine dictates the biblical Hebrew and Greek use. In fact, the word can refer to fermented or unfermented wine.

B. Christ made wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11): Actually, Christ turned water into oinos. Remember, this word refers either to fermented, or unfermented, wine. Whatever Jesus made, He made from 120 to 180 gallons of it, and approved of its being served to guests who had apparently already drunk a large amount of it. If one contends that this was fermented wine, then we have Jesus clearly approving the consumption of large quantities of alcohol, we have His approval of bartending, we have the Son of God being a bartender, and we have the Son of God violating several clear scriptures. Given that the word oinos can refer to unfermented wine, and given that unfermented wine was a favorite drink of the ancients, is it not fairer to Christ, and in accordance with His character and the scriptures, to say that He made unfermented wine?

C. The Corinthians used fermented wine in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:18-29): There are several points to consider. First, the word oinos is not used anywhere in this text. It is merely assumed that drunk must mean highly intoxicated from alcohol when the word may also be defined simply as having drunk large quantities of liquid. So, it is an assumption that fermented wine is under consideration. Secondly, the actual sin of the Corinthians was that they were turning the Lord's Supper - a spiritual memorial meal - into a common meal to satisfy hunger and thirst. There is no indication that their sin was turning the Lord's Supper into revelry. More likely, the rich members were eating and drinking lots of food and drink, while the poorer members went without. The word drunk is contrasted with the word hungry, being a state of emptiness. Thus, the more logical, contextual meaning here of drunk is full, in contrast to emptiness. Finally, even if the Corinthians were using fermented wine (which is highly unlikely), Paul condemns their practice; he does not approve of it!

D. Timothy was told to take wine (1 Timothy 5:23): There are a few points to make. First, since Paul had to tell Timothy to stop drinking only water, it is obvious that Timothy was a teetotaler, not a social drinker. Why would he have been a teetotaler if the apostles had clearly taught that it was approved to drink alcohol? Secondly, the term oinos in this passage may refer to fermented, or unfermented, wine. Which sounds better for frequent stomach problems: poisonous, harmful, acidic, fermented wine, or cool, soothing, vitamin-filled unfermented wine? Finally, even if Paul was referring to fermented wine (which he probably was not), it was for medicinal, not recreational use. If a Christian today receives morphine in a hospital to help the pain while a doctor works on a broken leg, does that give him approval to use morphine recreationally when he leaves the hospital? Obviously not! Finally, even if this was fermented wine for medicinal purposes (which it was probably not), Timothy was told to use a

little, not to socially consume it day after day.

E. Deacons were not to be given to much wine, therefore non-deacons may partake of much wine (1 Timothy 3:8; Titus 2:3): The Greek phrase in Timothy literally says not holding on to much wine, and that in Titus says not enslaved to much wine. First, this may or may not refer to fermented wine. Remember that the Greeks and Romans indulged in the gluttonous drinking of unfermented wine as part of their cults. This verse may simply warn deacons against partaking of lots of unfermented wine, so as not to be identified with those pagan cults. Even if it is fermented, we must remember that elders and deacons have qualifications so that they may be examples to other Christians. If it were the case that any qualification of a deacon meant that other Christians were free to do the exact opposite, that would defeat a main purpose of qualifications. For example, can non-deacon Christians be irreverent, double-tongued, greedy for money, not holding the mystery of the faith, slanderers, unfaithful, and teachers of wicked things? If not, then why would the wine qualification be the one exception?

F. Romans 14:21 allows the use of alcohol as long as it does not cause others to stumble: Again, this is a major assumption that the oinos of this verse is fermented wine. In fact, this entire chapter is about doing things that are liberties - neither forbidden nor commanded, and it has special reference to eating meat. It makes more sense that the wine here fits the meat, that is, something which is a part of normal eating and a liberty, but which must not cause others to stumble, than that it is a substance that is otherwise forbidden in the scriptures. Why would unfermented wine cause others to stumble? Again, because, just like meat offered to idols, unfermented wine was used in gluttony in pagan Roman and Greek cults, and many Christians would have associated it with them.

G. Wine is a natural creation of God, so He allows us to enjoy it: Actually, grapes are God's natural creation, as are yeast, and the process of fermentation. It takes man's deliberate effort and skill to produce drinkable, desirable wine. Moreover, just because something occurs naturally does not mean that God intends its human consumption. Would those who make this argument consume lava, petroleum oil, or arsenic? After all, these things are all natural.

H. Wine can be harmful, but so can steak and hamburgers; so, to condemn alcohol is to condemn red meat: There is a major difference between the two. Red meat was given by God for food (Genesis 9:3). Moreover, red meat is not always harmful: in conjunction with an otherwise healthy diet and exercise, red meat is actually good for us. It is only harmful when overeaten, and without other foods and exercise. Alcohol, however,

is always and inherently harmful. Moreover, we must eat something to live, but there is no natural need to drink alcohol.

I. I can understand not drinking alcohol in front of others, and not drinking to excess; but what is wrong with one or two glasses in the privacy of my own home? Well, this still harms the body, reduces spiritual vigilance, and violates several clear scriptures.

J. Recent studies show red wine to clear the arteries of plaque: While this is true, there is debate over whether it is the alcohol or a substance in the skin of the grape. Doctors admit that cadavers of drunks have very clear arteries: but they have diseased livers the size of footballs! This is like shooting yourself in the foot to cure a headache: it works, but it causes more harm than it prevents. How many people who drink alcohol do so for this reason? Moreover, there is a much healthier way to clear your arteries: eat better and exercise!

K. The Bible never comes out and plainly condemns the drinking of alcohol: No? What does "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler" mean? What does "Those who practice drunkenness shall not inherit the kingdom of God" mean? It is only our incorrect assumptions that these passages only refer to abject drunkenness which makes it appear that moderate drinking is not condemned. It is clearly condemned in principle. Also, there is not one single verse in the entire Bible which gives the authority for drinking alcohol: that verse would require the clear consumption of fermented wine by humans with God's approval, and it simply does not exist.

L. Jesus was called a winebibber; doesn't this mean that He drank fermented wine? (Matthew 11:18,19): This was an accusation by His enemies. If it was a correct assessment of Him, then it would not be the case that He moderately partook of fermented wine; it would mean that He was both gluttonous in food, and a drunk (winebibber does not mean moderate social drinker, but abject drunkard)! Is it not more reasonable to believe that His critics were wrong?

M. In some cultures it is considered polite to socially drink; would we not offend our hosts by refusing alcohol? We very well might. This is not a problem unless we are more afraid of offending human hosts than offending God! Moreover, many who use this argument are not consistent. In Japan, it is polite to eat raw fish; in Italy, raw horse meat; in China, scorpions and baby snakes; in Alaska, raw red meat, blood, and guts. Would those who use this argument eat all those things, which are offensive to the Western palette, in order not to offend the host?

N. What is wrong with one drink to take the edge off? What "edge" would a Christian want to take off? If a Christian is suffering personal problems, should he pray, ask brethren for help, read the Bible, and think on godly things; or should he drink poison to deaden his senses and procrastinate dealing with his problems?

O. But I like the taste of alcohol: This may be true. But, many people "like" the feeling of lust, fornication, stealing, lying, etc. Just because we like something does not mean it is approved by God.

P. There is simply no harm in drinking wine: Tell that to Lot, whose daughters raped him. Tell it to Noah, whose nakedness was uncovered. Tell it to the millions upon millions of people whose lives have been ruined and shattered by alcohol, to the millions of young women who have lost their virginity to strangers, never to gain it back, or who have become mothers while still children themselves; tell it to the millions of women who have been beaten by drunken husbands, or the children who go hungry because of lazy, drunken fathers.

Q. What about cooking with alcohol; doesn't all of the alcohol burn off? Yes it does. However, where did you buy the alcohol? The liquor industry is a multi-billion dollar industry which willingly sells poison to millions of people whom they know use it to harm themselves and others. The liquor industry is directly responsible for millions of human deaths, and countless human suffering. It costs the United States taxpayers more money per year to treat the symptoms of alcoholism than it makes in liquor taxes. The liquor industry also targets young people, and blatantly lies about drinkers: real life drinkers are usually not muscular, healthy, beautiful young people who play volleyball on the beach: they are often lazy, dirty, and have wrecked lives. If you buy alcohol from the liquor industry, you are directly supporting an evil industry.

## **IX. Conclusion**

A. The Hebrew and Greek words for wine may refer either to fermented or unfermented wine. The Bible clearly disapproves of the intake of fermented wine, both in many specific passages, and in principle. There is no good, godly reason for a Christian to drink alcohol. The one and only reason that 99% of human beings who drink alcohol do so, is to enjoy the effects, period.

B. There is simply no scriptural justification for drinking alcohol in any amount by Christians. To find God's approval of this, we would need a scripture where the consumption of fermented wine by humans is approved by God, and that passage does not exist. There are enough obviously



harmful effects of alcohol that we cannot merely assume it is approved. When the actual meaning and use of the biblical word wine is studied, we find no valid argument, from the scriptures, for abject drunkenness or social drinking. If Christians support social drinking, let them ask themselves, "Why do I support it? What good and godly reason is there for drinking alcohol? How do I reconcile my belief with scriptures which disapprove of wine? Have I thoroughly studied the issue, or have I just assumed that social drinking is fine because I like it?"

C. Brethren, let us honestly and seriously study this issue, using the scriptures and logic, and not merely assume things. Millions of people each year die and suffer from the effects of alcohol. We must be sober-minded and serious enough about this to give it honest thought.