

AFCM INTERNATIONAL TRAINING CENTER

“WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT WINE AND ALCOHOL”

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About a century ago, some reputable Hebrew and Greek scholars set forth solid evidence showing that the major words that were translated “wine” in Scripture (Hebrew - *yayin*, Greek - *onios*) could mean either fermented or unfermented grape juice. The research of these men clearly demonstrated that the context of divine approval or disapproval in any given passage was the determining factor for interpretation rather than the innate meaning of these words. Consequently, the church has been able to boldly speak against the use of alcohol in any society.

It is important both for the purity and power of the church that the long withheld and suppressed message be exposed to all once again: Alcohol is never approved by God in any amount for the obedient Christian. Alcohol is perhaps the most dangerous drug in any culture because of its complete acceptance by society, its total availability to the populace, and its devastating effect on every area of life- including families, individual health, safety of people from accidents and violence, schools, employment, and government.

It is my prayer that Christians all over the world will boldly take a Biblical position on the use of alcohol so that the church will no longer be conformed to the world, but will be renewed in the things of God and be more effective in reaching the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. SOME OF THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

A. A partial list

1. Slows down physical reactions
2. Creates false confidence
3. Impairs concentration
4. Effects vision negatively
5. Damages the human liver
6. Damages the brain cells

7. Tends to cause irreversible brain damage in preteen children
8. Alcoholic women are more likely to give birth to mentally challenged and malformed children
9. Alcohol is a mind-altering drug.
10. Alcohol contributes to the cause of cancer
11. Alcohol is harmful to human health and a major cost to nations.
12. Alcohol is one of the major contributors to the destruction of marriages and families.
13. This is just a partial list.....the list goes on!

B. A Biblical Observation.

It's not a new revelation. Hear Solomon on the subject:

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long on the wine. Do not go in search of the mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. (Proverbs 23:29-33)

C. A Biblical Truth

1. "The thief (Satan) does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I (Jesus) have come that you may have life, and that they may have it move abundantly. (John 10:10)
 - a. God is life
 - (1) Truth brings life
 - b. Satan is death
 - (1) Lies bring death (A perversion is not the real thing)
2. God wants the whole man (spirit, soul, and body) to prosper and be in health. (III John 2; Joshua 1:8; Romans 8:17)

II. WINE AND ALCOHOL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is not silent about alcohol. The word “wine” appears more than two hundred times in the King James Version of the Old Testament.

A. Some Biblical records of intoxication.

1. Noah (Gen. 9:18-27)
2. Lot (Gen. 19:30-38)
3. Belshazzar (Daniel 5)
4. Old Testament priests were instructed not to drink wine or any kind of strong drink on duty or off duty. (Lev. 10:8-11)

Note: A close examination of verse 10 makes it clear that abstaining from beverage alcohol was to be a way of life for the priests.

5. Sampson’s mother was not to drink wine while being pregnant with Sampson because he was to be dedicated to God in a special way. (Judges 13:3-4)
6. Rulers were forbidden to use intoxicating wine. (Prov. 31:4-5)
7. Solomon gave a blanket command to avoid all fermented wine. (Prov. 23:31)

B. Some Old Testament warnings about the effects of intoxicating wine:

1. Wine is a mocker. (Prov. 20:1)
2. Heavy drinking brings poverty (Prov. 23:21)
3. The use of intoxicating wine brings trouble physically and socially. (Prov. 23:29-30)
4. Intoxicating wine ultimately harms the user (Prov. 23:32)
5. Beverage alcohol is the companion of immorality and untruthfulness. (Prov. 23:33)

6. The urge to drink can be so strong that it overcomes good judgment, making one forget the misery of his last binge. (Prov. 23:35)

7. When religious leaders indulge in strong drink, they deceive their followers as to the realities of life and the importance of getting right with God while there is time. (Is. 56:12; Is. 28:7-8)

8. Drinking makes a proud and selfish person. (Hab. 2:5)

Note: We see that beverage alcohol is an enemy attacking its users and robbing them of everything that is good in life.

C. In the Old and New Testament, wine is a symbol of God's judgment and wrath.

1. The wrath of God, prepared for the wicked, is pictured as a cup full of fermented wine. (Psalm 60:3; Psalm 75:8)

2. The prophet Jeremiah saw God's fury symbolized in a cup of wine. (Jer. 25:15-17)

In summary, the Old Testament record specific tragedies resulting from the use of beverage alcohol. It singles out special people and groups whose lives were to be examples to others, and they are commanded not to drink intoxicating beverages. Clear Old Testament commands declare that we are not to look upon fermented wine with longing nor desire.

Intoxicating wine mocks and impoverishes. It contributes to immorality and dishonesty. It warps character, encouraging selfishness and greed. It is seen as a symbol of God's wrath and judgment.

D. Wine, in the Old Testament, is also spoken of as a blessing, a symbol of prosperity, a source of cheer and gladness.

There seems to be a contradiction here! However, to understand what the scriptures are saying, we must first look at some Hebrew words in order to clear up any confusion.

1. The Hebrew language

In general, there are two Hebrew words translated "wine" in the Old Testament, and one Hebrew word translated "strong drink."

a. The Hebrew word *Yayin* is a generic term used approximately 141 times in the Old Testament to indicate various kinds of fermented or unfermented wine.

(1) Nehemiah 5:18 "...and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine (*yayin*)..."

(2) Isaiah 16:10 "...no treading will tread out wine (*yayin*) in the presses..."

Note: the fresh juice pressed from the grapes is unfermented.

- b. The Hebrew word *Tirosh* is a word meaning "new wine" or "harvest wine."

Tirosh is used approximately 38 times in the Old Testament and refers to an unfermented drink. It always refers to the unfermented fruit of the vine, such as juice that is still in the grape cluster.

Tirosh means "must, fresh or new wine."

Tirosh includes all kinds of sweet juices and must. It does not include fermented wine.

Tirosh has a blessing in it. Fermented wine is a mocker and brings drunkenness.

- c. The Hebrew *Sheka* is translated "strong drink" and is used 23 times in the Old Testament.

Note: Many wines of the ancients were boiled or filtered to prevent fermentation, and these were often considered the best wines.

E. Some examples in the Old Testament of wine (*Tirosh*) as a blessing:

1. Unfermented wine (*Tirosh*) associated with corn, speaking of the harvest. (Genesis 27:28)
2. Wine (*Tirosh*) part of the offering of the first fruits. (Deut. 7:13)
3. Again, wine (*Tirosh*) with corn and oil as part of the harvest. (Deut. 7-13)
4. The gathering of the corn, oil, and wine (*Tirosh*) still in the grape. (Deut. 11:14)
5. Here the wine (*Tirosh*), still in the grape, cheers God and man. (Judges 9:13)

6. Again, wine (*Tirosh*) is spoken of as part of the offering of the first fruits. (Neh. 10:37, 39)
 7. New wine (*Tirosh*) still in the cluster! (Is. 65:8)
 8. New wine (*Tirosh*) that drops directly from the vines. (Joel 3:18)
- F. Remember that the Hebrew for wine, *Yayin*, can be used for fermented or unfermented wine. Here are some examples:
1. Priests were forbidden to use fermented wine, so here the *Yayin* had to be unfermented wine. (Gen 14:18)
 2. Because of expressions used today in regards to intoxicating beverages, one is likely to think that “making glad the heart of man” is similar to “feeling good” as a result of drinking fermented wine. Nothing could be further from the truth. Fermented wine does not make a person “glad,” it simply induces sleep in some area of the brain.

In the Scriptures, the gladness of a man’s heart, reaches its peak through appreciating God’s goodness and provision through our Blood Covenant with him. In the following Scripture, wine is translated *Yayin*, which would be for unfermented wine. (Psalm 104:14-15; Psalm 4:7)

3. In the Old Testament, *Yayin* is intended to mean “grape juice” 71 times and “fermented wine” 70 times.

In summary, symbolically, intoxicating wine speaks of judgment and wrath. In contrast, non-intoxicating wine speaks of spiritual blessings.

III. JESUS AND WINE

Did Jesus ever make, use, or approve of the use of intoxicating wine? This question cannot be answered by appealing to the Greek language, because there is only one Greek word for grape juice in all its forms (unfermented and fermented, non-intoxicating and intoxicating). In the Septuagint version, *oinos* is used to translate both *Yayin* and *Tirosh* from the Hebrew text.

In the New Testament, then, as well as the Old, an understanding of the word *wine* can only come through studying the contexts and believing God for Revelation Knowledge.

A. The wine and wine skins. (Luke 5:36-39)

1. The primary message is Salvation, not wine.
2. Law and grace were not to be mixed. (John 1:17)
3. In the case of wine, putting new wine into old bottles would hurry the fermentation and this burst the bottles or wine skins.

The aim was evidently to keep the new, unfermented wines sweet and non alcoholic as long as possible. Old bottles would contain residues of yeast and would cause the wine to ferment quickly.

4. Didn't Luke 5:39 say that old wine is better?

Not at all, he simply says that one who has been drinking old wine says it is better. This shows the Lords understanding of the habit-forming effect of beverage alcohol. It would be like trying to sell grape juice on skid row today, you'd probably have no takers.

5. So the Pharisees would go away saying, "We are satisfied with the old wine." Legalists and worldly people are like that today.

B. Jesus, a winebibber?! (Luke 7:33-35)

1. Jesus was from Nazareth, but he was not a Nazarite. Part of the Nazarite vow was to eat nothing made from grapes, including grape juice. (Num. 6:1-4)
2. Jesus ate the grapes and drank the grape juice and was called a gluttonous man and a winebibber (a tippler or heavy drinker) by His enemies. It would be a mistake to accept the word of Jesus' enemies as truth.

C. Jesus making wine at the wedding. (John 2:1-11)

1. Two important facts to keep in mind:
 - a. The wine Jesus made did not conform to twentieth-century standards; it conformed to the standards of the day

where all juice of the grape, fermented and unfermented, was considered wine.

b. Whatever Jesus made that day was consistent with His character.

2. Jesus came to fulfill the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:3-4)
3. Fermented wine symbolized wrath and judgment in the Old Testament.
4. Jesus came to obey the Law. God the Father's moral command was; "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red....when it moveth itself aright, (ie. When it is fermented – Prov. 23:29-30; Hab. 2:15).
5. It would be quite irreverent to think that Jesus would create alcohol for a drunken party. (James 1:13; Gal. 5:19-21)
6. To create alcohol would not be a true miracle. Alcohol is a perversion of the real. Satan cannot create anything. God is the only Creator. All Satan can do is to pervert what God has created.
7. The wedding of Cana was a type of His marriage to the Church. The wine He made symbolized His Blood, with which He would purchase His Bride! (John 19:34)

D. The Lord's Supper (Matt 26:26-29)

1. The Lord's Supper was instituted when Jesus and His disciples were eating the Passover.
2. During Passover week, Passover law prohibited the presence or use of soar (Ex. 12:15), a word referring to leaven, yeast, or any agent of fermentation. Soar in the ancient world was often obtained from the thick scum on top of fermenting wine. Furthermore, anything containing any fermentation was forbidden. God has given these laws because fermentation symbolized corruption and sin. (Matthew 16:6, 12; I Corinthians 5:7-8). Jesus, the Son of God, fulfilled God's law for the Passover by not using fermented wine. Jesus was the only man that was able to fulfill every single part of the law, with perfect obedience to the Father God. For Jesus to have used fermented wine at Passover would have been in direct rebellion to God, which is sin, which would have prevented Him from becoming mankind's substitute on the cross!

3. Neither Luke nor any other Biblical writer uses the word “wine” (Greek *oinos*) in regard to the Lord’s Supper. The first three gospel writers use “fruit of the vine” (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). Unfermented wine is only true natural “fruit of the vine.” Grape juice is called the Blood of the Grapes (Duet. 32:14; Genesis 49:11).

4. Unfermented wine contains approximately 20% sugar and no alcohol. Fermentation destroys much of the sugar and alters what the vine produced. Fermented wine is not the product of the vine.

5. God commands all priests of Israel to abstain from all types of wine and strong drink because of the potential for alcoholic drinks to corrupt and alter their judgment. Violation of this command was serious enough for the priest to be put to death (Leviticus 10:9-11).

Note: Under the New Covenant, all believers are members of the Royal Priesthood. (I Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:5-6)

6. The Symbolism of the Bread and Fruit of the Vine

a. The value of a symbol is determined by its capacity to conceptualize the spiritual reality. Therefore, just as the bread represents the pure body of Christ and had to be unleavened (i.e. uncorrupted, without fermentation), the fruit of the vine representing the incorruptible blood of Christ, would have been best represented by juice from the vine that was unfermented (I Peter 1:18-19).

b. Since scripture states explicitly that the process of corruption was not allowed to work in either the body or the blood of Christ (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27; 13:37), both of these are properly symbolized by that which is uncorrupted and unfermented.

c. New Blood Covenant

The life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11-14). God’s life is in Jesus’ blood and our blood as born-again believers.

When we are served “the fruit of the vine” at the Lord’s table, it is symbolic of Jesus saying, “Now my life blood is in your life blood. We are now one together with a new nature.”

The symbolism could not represent corruption and evil, but rather the fruit of the vine—the blood of the grapes—represents the pure blood of God without corruption or sin.

IV. WINE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

A. On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4)

1. These men are full of new wine (Acts 2:13)

B. The Church at Corinth

1. Drunk at the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:20-21)
2. What the "cup" represented (I Cor. 11:23-26)

C. Temperance in the Church (Acts 24:25; Gal. 5:22-23)

1. Temperance refers to self-control and living a disciplined life.
2. Temperance vs. moderation in drinking in the New Testament.
3. Not given to much wine! (I Tim. 3:2-3, 8)

D. Wine for the Stomach

I Timothy 5:23 says, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."

1. We've already established that God considers any use of alcohol a symbol of corruption and sin.
2. Timothy developed stomach trouble as a result of the alkali in the water at Ephesus and needed to neutralize the harmful effect of the alkali.
3. According to Greek writings on medicine, often wines used for the stomach were un-intoxicating.

The writer Athenaeus states, "Let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, especially that kind called *protropos* (juice coming from the grapes before

they are pressed), as being good for the stomach, for sweet wine (*oinos*) does not make the head heavy.”(Athenaeus, Banquet, 2.24)

4. It would be inconsistent for Paul to ask Timothy to disobey God’s moral standards and consume an alcoholic drink for his stomach problem.

5. To quote the advice of Paul to Timothy in order to justify the drinking of intoxicating wine for personal gratification is to distort the meaning of this passage.

6. It’s interesting to note that secular fitness and health magazines today are recommending the use of non-alcoholic wine for medicinal purposes because the same health benefits are in the grape juice as in the red wine.

E. God’s Word vs. Culture

Some traditions and culture drink alcohol daily as part of their meal. Others drink alcohol during holidays or for a toast. Should Christians participate in such practices? The answer is absolutely NO!

It is argued that it is rude and offensive to refuse to drink what is offered by one’s host. Does that mean we should smoke marijuana, cigarettes, or cigars offered to us? Must we yield to the seducer because of the “graciousness” of the offer? Sin is sin! No matter how or through whom the temptation comes, it must be resisted—no matter whose feelings get hurt. The consequences of our harmful influence on others should be a greater concern than for the hurt feelings of our host or hostess!

Jesus did no such thing and His ministry has been a life changing success for centuries for individuals, families and nations.

The Body of Christ is in pretty bad shape once it puts the world’s culture above God’s Word. The Word is to change the parts of culture that are bad (Rom. 12:2).

We’re to abstain from all appearances of evil (I Thess. 5:22)

F. The Law vs. Grace regarding Ministerial Qualifications

1. Grace has requirements and a long list of questions to determine qualification for ministry. (Gal 5:19-23; I Tim. 3:1-13)

G. Alcohol is a heart issue.

1. Some would say that alcohol is just an outward issue and that inward issues of the heart are more important. By outward issue, they're saying that according to I Timothy 4:1-5, foods or substance ingested into the physical body are not that important.

Normally, foods ingested in your body are not the main issue, unless they are foods or substance that will harm or destroy your physical body. In that case, you have a big spiritual problem. Your physical body belongs to God and He is requiring you to take good care of it (I Cor. 6:19-20; Rom. 12:1)

- a. For the times you're not aware of what you ate (Mark 16:18)

2. Alcohol is not a food. It is defined as *volatile*, which means a flammable liquid that is unstable, likely to erupt in violence. A substance easily set on fire. More accurately alcohol could be defined as "Fire from Hell."

Alcohol is an inward issue. Alcohol is an attitude. Alcohol is a heart issue. Alcohol is an "I want to do it" issue. Alcohol is a sin issue. Alcohol ingested in your body will impair your judgment and affect you emotionally and spiritually. Alcohol in some cases is a "rebellious spirit" that can affect people like cancer does to a physical body.

V. **BETTER THAN WINE**

1. God's love is better than wine

a. His power, to see people free from any kind of bondage, is made available to those who respond to His love. (Col. 1:13)

2. Christian fellowship is better than wine.

a. It's no accident that Paul's command, "Be not drunk with wine" (Eph. 5:18), is followed by instructions concerning Christian fellowship and family relationships. (Eph 5:18-21)

3. Christians are not to be controlled by wine or anything else but the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:9; Rom 8:14; Eph. 5:18-21; Acts 1:4)

Conclusion:

You do not have to be an alcoholic to have alcohol ruin your life and relationships with other people.

Each drink of alcohol dulls the senses of the user and in some measure causes him to miss out on the thrill of being alive. Thomas Edison said, "I do not drink alcoholic liquors. I have better use for my head. To put alcohol in the human brain is like putting sand in the bearings of an engine."

And then consider this:

How bold and strongly marked is the contrast:

The one the cause of intoxication, of violence, and of woes

The other occasion of comfort and peace

The one the cause of irreligion and of self-destruction

The other the devout offering of piety on the altar of God

The one the symbol of divine wrath

The other the symbol of spiritual blessings

The one the emblem of eternal damnation

The other the emblem of eternal salvation