

WINE AND THE BIBLE:
CHRISTIANITY'S SCANLON ERROR
Message 1

INTRODUCTION: The topic before us is that of the use of alcohol for Christians. The question before us is, "Is social drinking or drinking alcoholic beverages in moderate use acceptable Christian behavior?" David Wilkerson has written a book on this subject in 1978 and he called his book: Sipping Saints. Our question is: are sipping saints, scriptural saints? In this message I will simply introduce our topic and explain to you the meaning of the title of this series.

And so this message is an introduction to an introduction, because for the next while I want to introduce us to the difficulty of the case before us and how I propose to handle it. I want to present this series as a law case. When I began, I thought I would research this topic and present, as much as possible, unbiased information from which you might determine what you believed. But when I considered that, I realized it was far too late for that. I am already very biased from studies I have done and information I already possess. Furthermore, I realized that the weight of argument, and the common positions taken on this topic by pastors and lay people alike, are so overwhelmingly against me, that I will rather take the position of a prosecuting lawyer.

So here is the nature of the case. The following statement has already been taken to a law court: The Bible allows for Christians to drink alcoholic beverages with moderation. And what was the conclusion of judge and jury? They were unanimously in favor of that statement. There seemed no possible way but that the statement was correct. But now the case has been reopened because an informer has come with new information.

Let me say here, that it was not my choice to do some messages on the topic of alcohol in the Bible. I was rather squeezed in this direction over the past few years. Two things have pushed me in this direction. First, I have been questioned several times whether drinking alcoholic beverages is allowable to a Christian and a few times been told outright that social drinking, if it remains with a drink or two is perfectly OK as far as the Bible is concerned. Second, on several occasions I have been asked

why we do not use real wine at communion. By real wine of course is meant fermented wine.

I must admit, it was somewhat hesitantly that I even began this study. Over the years I have given thought to this topic but I thought I had much more pressing things to preach on and could hardly bring myself to spend the many hours in study it would require, in order to preach on this topic. But more and more I am hearing of sipping saints and rumors of sipping saints. I hear of them here in La Crete. I hear of them at the Bible school I went to years ago where it was not so much as mentioned when I went there. And I hear of it in the hometown where I grew up. In my home-town, so I am told, making home made wine is a fad, and many of the customers are Christians, or at least so called Christians.

I believe that the view that drinking a little alcohol is OK is somewhat like the law case I read about in a book called, "The Case For Christ" by Lee Strobel. Now Lee Strobell is in the seeker friendly movement which I do not endorse, but the book is quite good. And in the introduction to the book he gives this account of a law case that reminds me of our present topic:

"In the parlance of prosecutors, the attempted murder case against James Dixon was 'a dead-bang winner.' Open and shut. Even a cursory examination of the evidence was enough to establish that Dixon shot police sergeant Richard Scanlon in the abdomen during a scuffle on Chicago's south side.

"Piece by piece, item by item, witness by witness, the evidence tightened a noose around Dixon's neck. There were fingerprints and a weapon, eyewitnesses and a motive, a wounded cop and a defendant with a history of violence. Now the criminal justice system was poised to trip the trap door that would leave Dixon dangling by the weight of his own guilt.

"The facts were simple. Sergeant Scanlon had rushed to West 108th Place after a neighbor called police to report a man with a gun. Scanlon arrived to find Dixon noisily arguing with his girlfriend through the front door of her house. Her father emerged when he saw Scanlon, figuring it was safe to come outside.

"Suddenly a fight broke out between Dixon and the father. The sergeant quickly intervened in an attempt to break it up. A shot rang out; Scanlon staggered away, wounded in his midsection. Just then two other squad cars arrived, screeching to a halt, and officers ran over to restrain Dixon.

"A 22 caliber gun belonging to Dixon - covered with his fingerprints and with one bullet having been fired-was found nearby, where he had apparently flung it after the shooting. The father had been unarmed; Scanlon's revolver remained in his holster. Powder burns on Scanlon's skin showed that he had been shot at extremely close range.

"Fortunately, his wound wasn't life-threatening although it was serious enough to earn him a medal for bravery, proudly pinned on his chest by the police superintendent himself. As for Dixon, when police ran his rap sheet, they found he had previously been convicted of shooting someone else. Apparently, he had a propensity for violence.

"And there I sat almost a year later, taking notes in a nearly deserted Chicago courtroom while Dixon publicly admitted that, yes, he was guilty of shooting the fifteen year police veteran. On top of all the other evidence, the confession clinched it. Criminal court judge Frank Machala ordered Dixon imprisoned, then rapped his gavel to signal that the case was closed. Justice had been served" (pgs. 9-10).

Now that little story describes the case for alcoholic wine in the Bible, as I see it. Every piece of evidence seems to indicate that social drinking, if in moderation, is acceptable for Christians. It is an open and shut case. The gavel may sound, and the case considered closed. And I found that the preacher who preaches against alcoholic drink, is a loser before he begins. The evidence for alcohol being Biblically approved is so overwhelming, as to make it an open and shut case; so it seems.

Let me show you how clear cut this case is. Let me give you some examples (Scriptures). Go to the first occurrence of the word 'wine' in the Bible. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 9 (read 9:20-21). Here is the very first occurrence of this word wine, and one thing we learn immediately and without question: wine in the Bible is fermented wine. It makes people drunk.

Now go to Genesis 49. In this chapter the Patriarch Jacob blesses his sons just before his death. And in verses 10-12 he blesses Judah. So let me read for you from the KJV, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his donkey'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."

Now the NKJV renders the verse slightly differently and the wine does not sound as alcoholic as this version does. But certainly, wine that makes the eyes red is fermented wine.

Let us now go to Leviticus 10:8-9 (read). Charles Ryrie comments on these verses like this: The priests were warned against using wine and intoxicating drink (from a word meaning to inebriate), in order that their faculties not be dulled when performing the rituals (v.10) and teaching the people (v. 11; cf. Ezek. 44:23).

So, if the priests were not to drink intoxicating drink when they did the service in the temple, the very clear message is this: When they were not doing the service in the temple, then they may drink intoxicating drink. And if priests were allowed, then most certainly the common people were allowed to drink it at any time, since they did not serve in the temple.

Now turn with me to Deuteronomy 14. Let us read verses 22-26 (read). So it is clear that the Jewish people had God's full permission to drink wine. They could even do this in Jerusalem at the temple, when they brought their gifts of first-fruits.

Now let us read 1 Samuel 1:9-16. This account hardly needs commentary. No doubt the understanding is that too much wine makes one drunk. We might add the many cases where they drank wine and became merry. For example, look at Psalm 104:14-15 (read).

Now let us turn to the NT. We'll begin with Matthew 9:17 (read 9:16-17). Now, what were wineskins? Well, they would cure the hides of animals and then sew up the holes and fill them with wine. In this way they could store large

quantities of wine. So when the grape harvest came they could store their grapes in this way as wine. It is very obvious that we are talking about fermented wine, for unfermented wine would not break old wineskins. In order to manage the pressure created by fermented wine, they had to use strong, new wineskins.

So we go to John 2 (read 1-11). Now we already have learned that wine in the Bible is fermented, and that God approves of drinking fermented wine. And if it was wrong to drink wine, Jesus would not have made wine at this wedding. Not only that, but the wine Jesus made was the best wine.

Then let us go to one last passage in Acts 2. On that day when the Church was born, there were people from every nation present in Jerusalem. And when the Holy Spirit came on these believers, they began to speak in other languages. It was an incredible miracle. But there were those who mocked these believers and they said, "This is no miracle. These guys are full of new wine." They are speaking gibberish. They are drunk! (read 2:12-13).

Add to all this information from the Bible the fact that almost all commentaries, new or old, say that the Bible allows for some alcoholic drink. Add to that the concession by most ministers that the Bible allows the use of alcoholic drink. Add to that, that by far the majority of Christians say the Bible allows for alcoholic drink. Add to that the fact that preachers like Spurgeon, Mueller, Luther and Whitefield drank alcoholic drinks.

Add to that the fact that Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine. Add to that the fact that Paul said pastoral candidates were not to be given too much wine, indicating that it was ok for all others. Consider all that in light of the fact that Jesus made wine for a wedding and He made a bunch of it, and you have an open and shut case. The gavel may sound; the court may be dismissed, and the newspapers may spill out the obvious.

BUT, before you leave the courtroom and write me off and decide not to listen to what I have to say, let me read a little more of the Dixon case that Strobel presented. The following material is given in Strobel's book in a paragraph entitled, "The whisper of an informant." He writes as follows: "I answered the phone in the pressroom and recognized the voice right away—it was an informant I

had cultivated during the year I had been covering the criminal courts building. I could tell he had something hot for me, because the bigger the tip, the faster and softer he would talk—and he was whispering a mile a minute.

"Lee, do you know that Dixon case?" he asked.

"Yeah, sure," I replied. "Covered it two days ago. Pretty routine."

"Don't be so sure. The word is that a few weeks before the shooting, Sergeant Scanlon was at a party, showing off his pen gun."

"His what?"

"A pen gun. It's a .22-caliber pistol that's made to look like a fountain pen. They're illegal for anyone to carry, including cops."

"When I told him I didn't see the relevance of this, his voice got even more animated. 'Here's the thing: Dixon didn't shoot Scanlon. Scanlon was wounded when his own pen gun accidentally went off in his shirt pocket. He framed Dixon so he wouldn't get in trouble for carrying an unauthorized weapon. Don't you see? Dixon is innocent!'

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"Check it out for yourself," came his reply. "See where it really points" (pages 10-11).

Well, to shorten the whole account the whole case was reinvestigated and this is how Strobels puts it: "At the same time, I started my own investigation, studying the crime scene, interviewing witnesses, talking with Dixon, and examining the physical evidence. As I thoroughly checked out the case, the strangest thing happened: all the new facts that I uncovered—and even the old evidence that had once pointed so convincingly toward Dixon's guilt—snugly fit the pen gun theory" (Page 11).

Well, you can read the account for yourself. The final facts showed that Dixon was innocent; Scanlon was stripped of his medal and fired from the force.

I propose to you, that this is precisely the case with alcoholic wine in the Bible. I propose to you that not only does the Bible not condone alcoholic drink, but it condemns as sin, any use of alcoholic beverages; whether they be wine or any other kind.

Now you may well say, "Could this actually be the case? Could it be possible that we have mistaken many of these passages? With passages so obvious, is it possible we have misjudged the Bible?" And I say to you, "Come and see."

As a preacher, when this subject begged treatment, I had several options before me. I could leave the subject alone, as I had up until now; and that would, at least for the immediate future, be the easiest. So I could leave it out and just hope for the best, and save myself a lot of time in research, and allow no possibility for embarrassment; except maybe before God Almighty. And if I left it out, I would face no opposition from others. That certainly would be nice. Or I could study the matter and then preach on it in the way I believed the Bible teaches.

I spoke over the phone with one of our Bible school teachers, a district superintendent for the Alliance church in the US, a while ago. After our discussion I said, "Have you ever studied the use of alcohol in the Bible?" He said, "Yes." I said, "And what conclusions did you come to?" He said, "I came to the conclusion that alcoholic drink is wrong and I preached a message on it once. I have never gotten more flak for anything I preached than that message." I told him that I have determined to preach on this subject. But I had already concluded that if I try to cover this subject in one message, I will not be believed. And so I plan to cover the subject in a number of messages.

I spoke with others, men who knew the Scriptures well, and when I told them what I was planning and the position I held, they looked at me as one whose credibility all of a sudden was under serious question. How would anybody with any credibility take such an obvious error for truth. And I had the feeling they were sorry that they had placed such stock in my views before.

Now let me explain what I see my task is from a lawyer's perspective. A lawyer either prosecutes or defends a court action. Let me read here a brief statement from the Encyclopedia Britannica on the lawyer: "The lawyer applies the law to specific cases. He investigates the facts and the evidence by conferring with his client and reviewing documents, and he prepares and files the pleadings in court. At the trial he introduces evidence, interrogates witnesses, and argues questions of law and fact" (Mic.

VI:93).

And so, what is the court action before us? It is to bring back into the courts this case that has already found unanimously agreement by the court that: The Bible allows for Christians to drink alcoholic beverages with moderation. It is argued that social drinking is OK, as far as the Bible is concerned. Sipping saints are justified in partaking of alcoholic beverages, provided they do not drink too much. God Almighty, in the Scriptures, condones the use of alcoholic drink. Wine in the Bible refers to fermented drink. The Lord Jesus Himself made wine, therefore it could not be wrong to drink it as well.

I have taken on the case to defend the view that Christians should never partake of alcoholic beverages at all. It is an evil that is never becoming to a Christian. God's approval of sipping saints, in my estimation, brings the very character of God Almighty into question. I have known this God for 30 some years. I have learned to know many things about His character and I say God is not guilty of something that lends itself to such incredible sins as alcohol leads to.

Now your task in this will be to be the jury and judge. When the information has been presented, you will decide on and answer whether you agree or disagree with this statement: The Bible allows for Christians to drink alcoholic beverages with moderation.

And so, as jury, let me give you your task. I will quote from Strobel again: "If you were selected for a jury in a real trial, you would be asked to affirm up front that you haven't formed any preconceptions about the case. You would be required to vow that you would be open-minded and fair, drawing your conclusions based on the weight of the facts and not on your own whims or prejudices. You would be urged to thoughtfully consider the credibility of the witnesses, carefully sift the testimony, and rigorously subject the evidence to your common sense and logic" (page 18).

Now I ask you: Do you qualify to be on the jury? Or do you qualify to judge? Will you listen to this series with an open mind? I spoke to a scholar of many years about this series and the look I got was, "I thought higher of you. I thought you were more objective with truth."

CONCL: So, let us conclude this introductory message. The title of this series is: Wine and the Bible: Christianity's Scanlon Error. The Scanlon error is this: The conclusion regarding who is guilty is so obvious it does not deserve much time in research for more facts. The Scanlon error is to pin a hero's badge on the criminal. The Scanlon error in the Bible regarding wine is that the conclusion is so obvious it does not deserve much study. And in my view, we have made a hero of a drink that was made in hell. I believe it is a drink that comes from the vine of Sodom which grew in the soil of Gomorrah.

I trust you realize by now that my task in these messages is monumental, if it can even be done. I am here to say that it is a sin, even to have just a social drink. Now I ask you, are you ready to judge without bias? Are you ready to listen without preconceived ideas? Maybe you would talk to the Lord about this and say: Lord, help me discern right from wrong. If this preacher is doing his own thing, help me to discern it. But if there is a message here for me, speak to me. Your servant has ears to hear."

It is my desire that God Almighty may be honored in these messages, and that He might be well pleased with this series of messages. And may the end result be that hundreds maybe even thousands would be turned from the dangers that alcohol brings. May many a mother, may many a home, live in harmony, with godly sons and daughters; never realizing it is due to the fact that someone heard these messages. May the devil's dominion shrink; and may the Lord's dominion increase. That is my sincere desire.