

WINE AND THE BIBLE:
CHRISTIANTY'S SCANLON ERROR
Message 3

INTRO: This message, in the Scanlon and Dixon story is a continuation of the whisper of an informant. You will remember that in this story Dixon had been convicted on seemingly very solid ground. Then came an informant with new information and the case was reinvestigated. Well, in the last message we heard the beginning of the whisper of an informant. Here it is: Unfermented grape juice is called wine in the Bible." I call that 'good wine.' Now we do not need to take much time to show that fermented grape juice is called wine. That is an obvious fact that remains obvious. The proposition I want to make today that will be new to many of you is this: Fermented wine in the Bible is bad wine." I believe it is always bad. It is never good. It is never condoned by God because it is inherently bad and has very evil potential.

We will be in Deuteronomy 32 this morning. We are at the close of the life of Moses. In chapter 34 he is allowed to look at the land to which he has been leading Israel, from a mountain top. And after he has seen the land, the Lord takes him home. And in Deuteronomy 32 we have the song of Moses.

Now chapter 32 is the song of Moses. This is his second song. He wrote one as soon as they had crossed the Red Sea. In 32:1-4 Moses describes the God of Israel (read). In 5-6 he speaks prophetically of Israel's departure from this great God (read). In verses 7-14, Moses recounts how God brought Israel from nothing to a great and rich nation. Then in 32:15-29 we have a description of this rebellious nation (read).

And so Moses prophecies what will happen (read 30). And in verse 31 he gives the reason why He sold them to their enemies (read). Now it is verses 31-32, that we want to spend our time on this morning (read).

The Lord says in this chapter that He found Israel poor and desolate in the desert, in a waste and howling wilderness. And he nurtured him up and like an eaglet that is nurtured by its mother until it is ready to fly, God prospered them. He brought them to self sufficiency (now read 13-14). God gave them every thing they needed for a vital godly life.

And their drink was not of the vine of Sodom. It was of the vine of Israel. According to verse 14, they drank the blood of the grapes.

Now the KJV says it was the 'pure' blood of the grapes. Darby agrees with that. The new ESV says it was foaming wine. The Message calls it 'good' wine. The idea of 'foaming' has some merit in this verse, but that does not have to refer to fermentation, as the fresh grape juice that has just been trampled by the feet would foam as well. This word is used only in one other place, Isaiah 27:2 and there it is translated, 'fine, pleasant, desirable, and red' in the various translations. I think what we have in Deuteronomy 32:14, is that wonderful fresh, sweet grape juice that was treasured so highly among the ancient Jews and other nations.

But when we come to the description of Israel in their departure from God, we find them depicted as drinking another kind of wine, and it is this wine we will be considering this morning. So we begin our look at fermented wine.

B. Fermented Wine (Bad Wine)

Now the verses I am after are verses 32-33 (read again). Now whether one takes these verses as speaking of Israel metaphorically or as literally drinking the wine of Sodom does not affect the actual meaning of what is here called the vine of Sodom. Scholars have long debated as to what is meant by the vine of Sodom. I do not want to spend too much time on these views, other than to say I think most of them missed the intent entirely. So let me give you just one example from the JFB commentary: "This fruit, (referring to the vine of Sodom) which the Arabs call 'Lot's Sea Orange,' is of a bright yellow color and grows in clusters of three or four. When mellow, it is tempting in appearance, but on being struck, explodes like a puffball, consisting of skin and fiber only." That is a description of the vine of Sodom according to this commentary. Now no sane person will consider that even Sodomites would make wine from something like that, if it is even possible.

So I do not want to spend much time debating all

those different views except to say that verse 32 tells us this vine produced grapes and verse 33, that from these grapes they made wine. So I believe that the vine of Sodom is simply the grape vine as we know it anywhere else. And I want to propose that the difference between the vine of Sodom and the vine of Israel was not in the vine, but in what they made from it. I believe that the vine of Sodom speaks of that vine which was used to produce fermented wine. I think the reason why commentaries struggle so hard to find some other meaning for the vine of Sodom is because they do not recognize fermented wine as bad wine. Almost all of them agree that God permits the use of alcoholic wine.

Now let us look at these verses. Verse 32 says, "For their vine is of the vine of Sodom..." Notice that it does not say Israel is the vine of Sodom. That is the error of some commentaries. Nor does it say that their vine is the vine of Sodom. It says their vine is OF the vine of Sodom. That is important. The "Everything Wine Book" says that grape growers do not start their plants from seeds. Rather, they start them from cuttings. The reason for this is that if they are started from seeds the blossoms may be pollinated from another vine of a different variety and the seeds then have the genetic material of both kinds. And the book said that cuttings are more predictable (37).

Look at this in the Bible (read Jer. 2:21). Notice that the Lord did not plant a cutting, but a seed. And you know the biblical principle that what a man sows he will also reap. How is it then that God sowed good seed and it bore bad grapes? It grew from good seed. Its owner was God. But this seed was cross pollinated with false gods (read verse 20, then 22-23).

And so, in Deuteronomy 32:32 what we have is a vine of the vine of Sodom. It did not grow from seed but from a cutting. Quite predictable what will come of this vine. And this vine, which was of the vine of Sodom came from the soil of Gomorrah. You see, this the vine of Sodom and the fields of Gomorrah produced their cuttings. And thus their grapes are the grapes of gall, and their clusters are bitter.

Now why did the Lord describe these grapes as grapes of gall and bitter? I believe it is because that which they made from them tasted like gall and bitter. You see, the field of Gomorrah produced the vine, the vine produced the grapes and the clusters and from the grapes and clusters, drink was made. And this drink is yayin, wine. And this wine is fermented wine. So verse 33 says this wine, yayin, is the **poison of serpents and the cruel venom of cobras**. And there you have the most precise description of fermented wine you will find anywhere! Ask anyone who has grown up in an alcoholic home. Fermented wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of cobras. And serpents and cobras are a picture of the curse of God as we learned in the garden of Eden.

You see, the difference between good wine and bad wine and the vine of Sodom and other vines is what you make of them. The vine of Sodom speaks of fermented wine and fermented wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of cobras! You say, "Hey, just a minute. Are you not reading a lot into this passage?" Consider first that it says, "Their clusters are bitter." I believe that refers to what they made from them. In "The Everything Wine Book" it says this of ancient wines, "If you sipped one of those old-style wines today, you'd probably notice that it was lower in alcohol than modern day wines and tasted more like vinegar with a hint of cider" (pg. 3). In other words it was bitter. We will learn later why this is so.

Now the word 'gall' in verse 32 is the same as the word translated 'venom' in verse 33. Then in verse 33 we have also the word 'poison'. Look at verse 24 and note the word 'poison.' Then look at verse 33 and the word you have exactly the same word. So what they made from these grapes was like the venom of snakes and poisonous! In the "Everything Wine Book" is a section with this heading, "How Wine is Made." Let me read some of this section: "Ripe grapes contain a lot of sugar. And the skins of the grapes are the perfect surface for natural yeasts to thrive. All the conditions you need to make wine. First you pick a bunch of grapes and crush them. Crushing releases the sugar inside the grapes and causes the yeast to come

in contact with the sugar. The yeast 'eats' the sugar and turns it into alcohol and carbon dioxide. The process is called fermentation, and it transforms plain old grape juice into sublime wine" (18).

Now let me rewrite the last two sentences of that quote using Deuteronomy 32:33, "The yeast 'eats' the sugar and turns it into the poison of serpents. The process is called fermentation and it transforms plain old grape juice into the venom of cobras." And all of that adds up to the vine of Sodom which grows in the soil of Gomorrah! Let me read for you from the Funk and Wagnalls College Dictionary on ethanol: An alcohol, C₂H₅OH, obtained by the distillation of certain fermented sugars or starches, the intoxicant in liquors, wines and beers..."

When grapes or anything else ferments, yeast turns the sugar into ethanol. We call it alcohol, and in fact, alcohol is poison. Bill MacCleod on page 26 of his little booklet, "Wine the Mocker" writes, "Alcohol is a poison but the only poison the government licenses for public consumption!"

Let me give a little more evidence for that. When someone has had too much to drink and he is inebriated we call such a person *intoxicated*. So what does 'intoxicated' mean? Well, here's Funk and Wagnall's College dictionary definition of toxins: Any class of more or less unstable poisonous compounds developed by animal, vegetable, or bacterial organisms and acting as causative agents in many diseases." Why do we call a person filled with alcohol intoxicated? Because he has been poisoned by alcohol! You see, such a person is loaded with toxins. We would not want to call a drunk person poisoned. That would tell us alcohol is bad. So we call him intoxicated.

The "Everything Wine Book" has a section called, "The Hangover." Listen to the beginning of this paragraph, "A hangover is the body's reaction to alcohol poisoning and withdrawal. It starts from eight to twelve hours after your last drink" (263). You see, alcohol poisoning is what causes FAS. Women who drink alcohol when expecting may expect babies with smaller heads or damaged brains. You see, bad wine is bad. It is alcoholic. It is poison! You cannot make anything

good out of it because it is all bad. There is absolutely nothing good in it. And if you are going to say, "Hey, just a minute there. What of the French Paradox?" We will talk about that later and give you the real French paradox.

Michael P. Dunlap, a clinical psychologist says in an internet article called "Biological Impacts of Alcohol Use", "Ethyl alcohol or ethanol, known commonly as alcohol, is the same whether the beverage is wine, beer, or hard liquor." Oh, what a description of alcoholic wine our passage gives: "Their wine is the poison of serpents, and the cruel venom of cobras!" Dr. Dunlap points out that at .08 BAL (blood alcohol level) a person is too drunk to drive. At BAL .30 death can occur from alcohol poisoning. At .60 most drinkers are dead.

Let me make another observation here: Alcohol is sometimes viewed as a stimulant. Bill McLeod writes, "Sometimes, people will defend social drinking by trying to put it on the same level as drinking tea or coffee. The argument is well known: tea, coffee and wine are all stimulants. Why drop one and keep the other two?" So it has been largely accepted that wine, like tea or coffee is a stimulant. There are such vast contrasts that it is amazing that anyone would use this argument. However, listen to Michael P. Dunlap again, "Beverage alcohol is a drug that depresses the central nervous system, like barbiturates, sedatives and anesthetics. Alcohol is not a stimulant. There is no question that the person who drinks alcohol seems stimulated. Speech becomes free and animated, social inhibitions may be forgotten, and the drinker can begin to act and feel more emotional. But these effects are misleading; the 'stimulation' occurs only because the alcohol affects those portions of the brain that control judgment. 'Being stimulated' by alcohol actually amounts to a depression of self control. A principle effect of alcohol is to slow down brain activity.." (pg. 1).

Go back with me to Deuteronomy 32. Israel as a nation had been taken in by the vine of Sodom. And in verse 28 it says, "For they are a nation void of counsel, nor is there any understanding in them." That is the result of the poison of wine on the body, that is the

result of following a nation like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now let me show you something else. Turn to Psalm 69, a messianic Psalm speaking prophetically of Christ. Reference is made to Jesus thirst on the cross in verse 21 which says, "They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Now the word 'gall' is the same word we have in Deuteronomy 32:32. It is poison. Listen to the NISBE, not the most conservative of material. Yet it says of this verse "In Ps. 69:21... the psalmist states that his enemies have given him poison for food and vinegar to drink..."

Now let me show you something absolutely incredible. The Psalmist calls the poison, or the alcohol 'food'. Is that a scientific statement? Listen to Michael P. Dunlap, the clinical psychologist again, "Alcohol is also classified as food...". Isn't that incredible to have it described 3000 years ago as food? And then he goes on to tell us why it is food, "...because it contains calories"! Then he says, "The average drink has about the same calorie count as a large potatoe..." Unbelievable!

Now listen to "The Everything Wine Book" in a section titled: Wine and Weight Loss, "Confusion reigns when it comes to the effect of wine (and other alcoholic beverages) on weight loss. Wine has plenty of calories - about 100 calories a glass. So it would seem logical that if you cut out wine, you'd lose weight. But there's no evidence that giving up wine on your diet will necessarily help you shed pounds. In fact, a major U.S. study revealed that dieters who gave up their alcohol lost no more weight than those who kept drinking" (pg. 261).

Confusion reigns? Why does giving up wine drinking not make a difference if it is food and has 100 calories per glass? William Patton said of alcohol almost 200 years ago, "...it will not assimilate, nor does it incorporate itself with any part of the body. Then he quotes Dr Lionel S. Beale, Physician at King's College Hospital, as saying, "Alcohol does not act as food; it does not nourish tissues." Patton further quotes Dr. James Edmunds of London who says, "Alcohol is, in fact, treated by the human system,

not as food, but as an intruder and as a poison."

Why does giving up wine drinking not make a difference if it is food and has 100 calories per glass? Let Dr. Michael P. Dunlap answer that question for us: "Alcohol is also classified as a food because it contains calories. The average drink has about the same calorie count as a large potatoe but, unlike a potato or any other food, alcohol has no nutritional value. The calories are empty" (pg. 1). So alcohol has empty calories and is poisonous. Does this sound like something Jesus made? Does this sound like the best wine? No wonder ungodly men gave Jesus poison as food, when He hung on the cross. The only value it had was to deaden His brain and pain. And do you want to know something else? When they offered Jesus alcohol, He refused it! (Matt. 27:33-34). We will see more of this later.

Now let's go to Hosea 7:5 (read). The NKJV says, "In the day of our king princes have make him sick, inflamed with wine." The word 'inflamed' is the word 'bottles' in the KJV. In Hebrew it is khamah, or poisoned. You see, the word 'bottle' is a figure of speech for what it contains. Take one more verse, Habakkuk 2:15 (read). The word 'bottle' is again the word poison, and refers to the poison of fermented grape juice.

To conclude our look at bad wine, although we will have more to say on this subject later, let me read for you from Proverbs 23:29-35: *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 at the wine, Those who go in search of 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. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"*

Now listen to Proverbs 20:1 *Wine is a mocker, strong*

drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

CONCL: So let me conclude by giving you two propositions. These are the whisper of an informant that is becoming quite excited. One: *In Bible times unfermented grape juice was called wine.* Two: *In the Bible fermented grape juice is bad because it is poisonous and depresses the brain and causes one to act like a fool. It deforms babies and causes untold miseries and brings nothing good with it. It has calories that are empty and useless to the body and its ethanol depresses the mind.*

And maybe after this message you say, "I never knew alcohol was poison. I didn't know that there was nothing good in it. I am convinced you are right, alcoholic beverages are condemned in the Bible. It must be so." If you are now convinced that the Bible condemns fermented wine, then you have just disqualified yourself from being either judge or jury on this case. I hope if I am ever convicted of a crime that you will not be either judge or jury. If you are now convinced, you have made a very premature judgment. We have some very difficult texts to consider yet. You see, any good judge or jury must wait until all the information is in before coming to a conclusion.

But maybe you say, "I don't care about anything further. This is enough for me. I will never view alcoholic beverages as acceptable by God. It cannot be. This is all the information I needed to make up my mind." Then I say to you, "You may be neither judge nor jury in this case, but you may be on my team! I am simply delighted you believe that way. Welcome to my very biased camp!"