

WINE AND THE BIBLE:  
CHRISTIANTY'S SCANLON ERROR  
Message 10

INTRO: In our series, we are presently in the process of going through the difficult passages in the Bible for the position that God condemns all fermented drink. These are also the passages that have created, what I have called the 'Scanlon Error.' We have already looked at Genesis 49:12. And I conclude without hesitation, that 'redness of eyes' from drinking fermented wine is not a blessing from God. Then we considered Leviticus 10:1-11. Here we saw that the priests were forbidden to drink yayin and shaykawr. If yayin and shaykawr speak of fermented drinks, then we saw that we must necessarily conclude that this is a dangerous drink because the priest was then always in danger of not discerning between clean and unclean and holy and unholy, and this is true of fermented drink. The solution then, for the priest, to avoid this danger was total abstinence while in the service of the tabernacle.

However, the problem is that if the danger of alcohol was the reason he was not to drink while in the service of the tabernacle, then we must conclude that God is OK with the priest living in this danger whenever he is not in the service of the tabernacle. Furthermore, we must also conclude that God is OK with all non-priests living in this danger all the time. This, to me, is unthinkable. It is not at all like the God I have learned to know in the rest of Scripture. So, the yayin and shaykawr in this passage, in my view, refer to unfermented drink. The reason they were not to drink these was because they picture the wrath of God, which would come upon them if they disobeyed like Nadab and Abihu had. So, whenever they ministered in the tabernacle, the prohibition of drinking grape juice was to remind them of the wrath of God that would fall like it did on Nadab and Abihu, when they disobeyed.

I have proposed to you that the view that social drinking in moderation is acceptable with God, is a Scanlon error. It is my view that this brings the character of God into question. The texts we are considering in this section are the texts that, for the most part, have been the cause of this great error. This morning we will be considering Matthew 9:17; Luke 5:37-39 and Matthew 26:26-29.

C. Matt. 9:17; Luke 5:37-38

Let us begin by reading Matthew 9:14-17 (read). Wineskins were animal hides that had been cured and then the leg holes and all cuts sewed up so as to be able to hold liquids. They were used to store wine. They look like bloated animals when they are full. The large skins were made from oxen. Smaller skins would be goat skin bottles. You can imagine how much wine a goatskin would hold.

The question of John's disciples is why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast often and make prayers, but Your disciples do not fast? Jesus' answer is that the disciples of John and the Pharisees had good reason to fast but His disciples did not. If one were to liken it to a wedding, would one fast as long as the bridegroom is present? No. It is a time of festivities and lively anticipation and that is not conducive to fasting. But after the bridegroom leaves, now times of fasting may come.

Then Jesus uses two parables to show what is really happening. The first parable is that of sewing a tear in an old garment. He says one does not use new cloth to sew an old tear. The reason is that if the new cloth is sewed to the worn cloth, the new will shrink, and cause it to be torn where it is sewed and thus create a bigger hole than the original. The disciples of John and the Pharisees were closing out an old age. They were the last of the old economy. Jesus' disciples were beginning a new era. If the new were attached to the old, before it had time to stretch, it would cause a worse condition.

Our topic is this second parable. Now Jesus takes an illustration from something that is common to life for the people He is talking to, that of storing wine, or grape juice. The explanation for the illustration seems readily apparent. You do not put new wine into old wineskins because if you do, the fermenting wine would cause these old wineskins to burst, because they can not withstand the pressure exerted by the expansive force of the fermenting grape juice. So Patton, in his book on Bible Wines says that those who hold that all wine was fermented

say that new skins were used so as to "resist the expansive force of the carbonic acid gas generated by fermentation. This explanation necessarily admits that the new wine had not yet fermented.."

Now that explanation seems so obvious, it hardly needs more investigation, but here again we may just have a Scanlon error. It may well be, and I am convinced it is so, that this text teaches the exact opposite of what we naturally think it means. To the original reader it would have presented no problem. To those of us, not familiar with how they preserved grape juice, the conclusion seems so obvious, but it is wrong.

Now it appears that new wine skins were used to store fresh grape juice and to keep the juice FROM fermenting. If old wine skins were reused, a residue of yeast would adhere to them from storing grape juice in them before, this would cause the new grape juice to ferment, even though the skins were sealed. Patton holds that no wine skin, even a new one could withstand the pressure of fermentation. He writes, "Chambers, in his Cyclopaedia, early edition, says: 'The force of fermenting wine is very great, being able, if closely stopped up, to burst through the strongest cask.'"

So new wine had to be poured into new containers in order to keep the grape juice from fermenting. I quote Patton again, "The new bottles or skins, being clean and perfectly free from all ferment, were essential for preserving the fresh unfermented juice, not that their strength might resist the force of fermentation, but, being clean and free from fermenting matter, and closely tied and sealed, so as to exclude air, the wine was preserved in the state in which it was when put into those skins. Columella, who lived in the days of the Apostles, in his recipe for keeping wine always sweet, expressly directs that the newest must (grape juice), be put in a 'new amphora,' or jar'" (pg. 59).

So, according to this, why was new wine to be put in new wineskins? Not because new wine skins could withstand the pressure of fermentation. They could not. The reason was to keep the wine, or the grape

juice, from fermenting. The text teaches the exact opposite of the conclusion we naturally come to! That is the Scanlon error. And if this explanation is correct, it goes a long way to show that the Jews stored a lot of grape juice that was unfermented!

In my studies on wine on internet, I came across wine kits one can order to make home-made wine. Many of these kits include the juice, and it is, of course, unfermented. One of these companies called the 'Wine Maker' says, "The wine-kit boom began in the 1970's when high quality kits first emerged from California." So we might well ask, why would people buy wine kits and make their own when they could buy the wine ready made? The reason is that to make wine kits is less labor intensive for the companies and thus cheaper for the customer.

Now many of these companies send the grape juice in the kit. So my question is: how do they keep this juice fresh, without fermenting? Well, here is what they say about that question on page 7 point 3. The point is called, "Aseptic packaging." Then it explains aseptic packaging. "Juice is zapped at high temperatures, then sealed in pail or bladder pack. Air is vacuumed out." Point 4 says, "Bladder-pack juices can last as long as three years."

So, back to our text, a wine skin is a bladder pack. They did not put grape juice into wine skins to ferment it. They put it in wine skins and sealed it off to keep it from fermenting. If they had allowed wine to ferment in the wine skins, they would have had an explosion and lost both the skin and the wine. So by sealing it in a new wine skin, they kept the grape juice from fermenting.

Now McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia, which holds that almost every reference to wine in the Bible is fermented wine admits that this explanation is acceptable, but they feel it does not fit the context. I think it fits the context very well.

So we go to:

D. Luke 5:39

Here we come to an interesting point that Luke makes on the passage we were just looking at in Matthew. It is not found in the Matthew passage but Luke continues the same topic a little further. Luke adds that no one who has had old wine immediately desires new wine, for he says 'The old is better.' Gill says this is a proverbial expression. And what is the lesson? When would this expression be used? When some new way of doing things comes into being, people do not find it easy to change and adapt to the new. So the proverbial saying here used, comes into play. We get accustomed to a way of doing things and we do not immediately take to new ways. This is precisely the reason the Jews came to question Jesus at this point. But what is the lesson? We say the old is better, when in actual fact, the new is better!

I can vouch for this from my experience in the logging industry. I was in that industry when many of the rules now in place were being implemented. We fought every new rule. WCB would threaten to shut us down if we did not comply. Well, by and by we gave in. Today, we can hardly imagine working in the forest without a hardhat or good boots or some of the other things we were forced to learn. But today, we say, 'The new ways certainly were better.'

Now the question is whether this verse endorses drinking fermented wine. If this is a proverbial expression, it would not say anything to that matter. However, I think there is reason to think this speaks of unfermented wine. There is one word in the passages that makes me think Jesus is referring to unfermented wine. It is the word *immediately*. The impression is that once one gets used to the new wine, it is actually a preferable drink. If this passage were speaking of fermented wine, I think it would read like this: No one, having drunk aged wine, ever desires new, for he says the old is always better. In fermented wines, the aged, as far as I can tell, is **always** preferred.

This summer when we visited a winery I asked if they aged their wine. The lady looked at me to make sure I was serious, for anyone familiar with wine would not ask such a silly question. Then she said, "All our wine is aged." If the wine in our text were fermented

wine, it should read, "No man, having drunk old wine ever prefers new wine." And so the key word here is 'immediately'. The fact is that after getting accustomed to the new wine, then he says, "Ah, the new is better!" This would never be true of fermented wine. This, as far as I can see, could only be true of unfermented wine.

So this passage would not necessarily condone social drinking, even if it speaking of fermented wine. But I think the word 'immediately' argues that He is speaking of unfermented wine.

E. Matt. 11:18-19 Luke 7:34

Let us read Matthew 11:18-19 (read). In the context, John the Baptist has sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask whether He, Jesus, was truly the Christ. John has proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah and now he is sitting in prison instead of on a throne, and he is questioning what is going on. And so Jesus tells the people about John, and who John is and how great John is (read 8-11).

Then in Matthew 11:16-17, Jesus questions, not John, but the Jewish people (read). They are like children that cannot be satisfied with anything. First they want to play having a happy time, and there are no takers. Then they want to play something sad, and still no takers.

Jesus said, "You Jews are like that." John the Baptist came neither eating or drinking, and you say, "He has a devil. We won't play with him." They went out into the desert to see and hear John and they missed his message entirely. They were not happy with him, so they were like the children who said, "We won't play with you". Then they came to Jesus, the One John had told them about, and they found him eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners and they were disgusted with Him too! And so, like the children in the illustration, they said, "We won't play with you either."

Now I want us to notice something very carefully. You see, there are hints in the NT that Jesus' and the disciples did not use fermented wine at all and we

have one right here in this text. Note what the Jews said about Jesus, "He is a glutton and a winebibber." Note very carefully what they did not say. They did not say, "He is a glutton and a drunk." Someone who eats too much is a glutton. Someone who drinks too much fermented wine is a drunkard. But they do not call him a drunkard in this passage. Why did they not accuse Him of drunkenness? I think it is because He never drank fermented wine and the accusation would be totally unfounded.

So I think what we have here is some evidence that Jesus did not drink fermented wine at all. I have no doubt that if He had, they would have called Him a glutton and a drunkard. Their word for his eating habits was an exaggeration; a glutton. We know that He was never a glutton. If He had had a social drink of fermented wine, and they exaggerated, no doubt they would have called Him a drunkard. But since Jesus did not drink fermented grape juice, He is simply called an *oinopotes*, a wine bibber.

I think that this word, *oinopotes*, speaks of one who is always by the wine, which in Jesus' case was, I fully believe, grape juice. If I were to give an equivalent in our day, it would be to accuse someone of being a 'coffee shopper', someone who always sits in the coffee shop and discusses every last bit of news. Many years ago, when I was in the logging business, they called it 'chewing the rag'. I don't know if it still has the same name, but that is an interesting name.

So I think that this passage, rather than indicating that Jesus drank fermented wine, gives a good indication that all understood He did not drink fermented wine.

#### F. Matthew 26:26-29 (Passover wine)

So, let us consider one other passage in the Gospels (Matt. 26:26-29). We have all seen the picture of Jesus with His disciples at what we call 'The Last Supper.' When Jesus had the Passover meal with His disciples, and He drank wine with them, did He drink fermented wine; and should fermented wine be used at communion?

To answer that question, turn to Exodus 12. In this chapter we have the institution of the Passover (read 12:18-21). So in Matthew 26, we are in the day before the crucifixion, in the evening when Jesus had the Passover meal with His disciples. During this celebration, there was to be no leaven in the house. The Jews, at Passover, have a special time when all the children are encouraged to search for any leaven in the home, and they are rewarded if they find any. That leaven is then removed from the house. The parents often hide some, to make this a very meaningful time for the children.

The day after the 14th in the evening, began the feast of unleavened bread. So for one week, the Jews would partake of no leaven at all. Now leaven, in this connection, is a picture of sin. And at Passover, when Christ died, all sin was dealt with in Christ. Now the wine they drank at the Passover as recorded in the NT is never called wine. It is always referred to as the 'fruit of the vine.' I might add here that grape juice can truly be called the fruit of the vine. But I'm not at all sure it is accurate to say that fermented wine is the fruit of the vine because the vine NEVER, under any conditions whatsoever, makes fermented juice. That is an absolute. Wine must be manufactured. So, in the Gospels, the juice used at Passover is always referred to as the fruit of the vine, and never as wine.

In the early years of our conference, our ministers and deacons wrestled with this issue because they were the ones who appeared at the liquor store, along with drunks and alcoholics, to buy wine. They came under such a burden, that they studied the Scriptures and said, "The Bible calls the juice used at communion the fruit of the vine. We will use grape juice from now on." They were absolutely right. Never does the Bible make reference to this drink they used as wine, but it is called the 'fruit of the vine'. I am honored to be a pastor among men of such conviction, and credit our early leaders for the way we practice communion.

I spoke with one of our Bible school teachers about



Passover and wine. He is a Jew who works among Jews and he sent me an internet article on "Passover Preparation". Here is what they say, "A few days - in many cases weeks or months before the Passover holiday begins, observant Jews clean their households of any traces of fermented grain products and chametz... In essence, chametz includes leavened foods, drinks and ingredients that are made from or contain wheat, rye, barley, oats or spelt." Then later the article says, "Why do we do this? In Exodus 12:15 of the Torah, it states that no leavened bread (chametz) must be eaten during the Passover holiday. Four verses later, the Torah states that no chametz of any kind should be found in the home during the Passover holiday."

Now wine is loaded with leaven, chametz. If grape juice does not have leaven it cannot ferment. One must have yeast or leaven to make wine. I have no question that Jesus would not have used fermented wine at Passover. It is this same juice that we are to commemorate communion with. To have fermented wine at communion, is a picture of the presence of sin.

Now turn with me to 1 Corinthians 5 for a lesson on this in Church life (read 1-8). If leaven pictures sin, and we are to keep the feast, that is communion, with unleavened bread, how could we then have fermented wine which has leaven? So, what wine should be used at communion? Without question, it is the unfermented, unleavened fruit of the vine. And yes, grape juice is 'real wine.'

CONCL: So in conclusion, why did they put new wine into new wine skins? Well, it appears that it is not because the new skins could withstand fermenting wine. It was to keep the grape juice from fermenting. If they had allowed it to ferment, even in new wine skins, they would have exploded the skins.

Luke adds to Matthew's passage by saying that no man who has had old wine immediately desires the new. What happened? Well, throughout the year they drank the grape juice made that year. Over the year, the taste changed somewhat, but the change was so gradual they did not notice it. Then when the new year's grape juice had just been made, the taste was somewhat different. And at first, it

was strange to the taste, but after a while, they took to the new grape juice. This happened every year. This would not be the case if it were fermented, where the aged wine is always preferred.

Then in Matthew 11:18-19 and Luke 7:34, Jesus is called a gluttonous man and a winebibber. He is not referred to as a drunkard, one who drinks too much fermented drink, but a winebibber. I have suggested that in our day we might refer to someone who is always in the coffee shop, one who picks up on all the latest information going around. I expect that our expression 'the grapevine' comes from this. We talk about having heard it on the grapevine, that is where all the talk happens over a drink.

Last, was the wine at Passover fermented wine? I have concluded that it most certainly was not, since they did not partake of anything with yeast during the Passover.

In our next message, we want to look at John 2, the most used passage of our topic.