

# Booze, Baptists & the Bible

## Part 1

**Text:** Eph. 5:18

### Introduction:

1. The relevance of this sermon: Social drinking is very widespread in Christendom today and the issue cannot be ignored by Bible believers. There are popular, contemporary preachers who proclaim that part of Christian liberty is the freedom to drink alcoholic wine. For example:
  - **Mark Driscoll** in his book *Radical Reformation*, published in 2004 states the following:

“After I entered the ministry as a man of legal drinking age, the drum was again repeatedly beaten for me by well-meaning older pastors. So I never drank alcohol until I was thirty years of age. About that time, I was studying the Scriptures for a sermon about Jesus’ first miracle of turning water into wine, as reported in John’s Gospel, a miracle that Jesus performed when he was about my age. My Bible study convicted me of my sin of abstinence from alcohol. So in repentance I drank a hard cider over lunch with our worship pastor.”
  - **Jim West** in the last page of his book entitled “Drinking with Calvin and Luther, he offers a new contemporary pledge for those have adopted social drinking. One line states: “I acknowledge my sin and my uninstructed conscience, as well as my pharisaic attitude towards those who drink wine and beer to the glory of God.”
2. The aim of this sermon: To present what the Bible teaches on this hotly debated and contentious issue. Remember, the Word of God is the final authority for faith and practice so we must lay aside personal opinion and bias and submit ourselves to where the Scriptures lead on this issue.
3. We will consider this topic under four headings as follows:
  - Some Preliminary Definitions from Scripture
  - Some Plain Prohibitions of Scripture
  - Some Powerful Exhortations from Scripture
  - Some Pertinent Illustrations from Scripture

*Consider firstly...*

## I. PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS FROM SCRIPTURE

### A. The Word ‘wine’ is a Generic Term in the Bible

1. The word ‘wine’ is a generic term in the Bible. By ‘generic’ we mean a term that is general. Oxford Dictionary defines ‘generic’ as “Characteristic of or relating to a class or group of things; not

specific.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, for those who read the word ‘wine’ in the Bible and automatically assume that it refers to a glass of red are very much mistaken.

2. Keith Malcomson writes, “The word wine is a broad, generic term which includes two different and specific beverages. The first is grape juice, which is non-alcoholic or unfermented, and the second is an alcoholic or fermented drink, which can intoxicate or make a person drunk.”
3. He goes on to state, “no less than thirteen different Hebrew and Greek words are used for our one English word wine in the Bible. These can be broken down into three groupings.”
  - a. Those which mean only fermented drink like ‘shekar’.
  - b. Those which only mean unfermented drink like ‘tiros’h’.
  - c. Those words which can be used for both like ‘yayin’.
4. Other examples of ‘generic’ words in the Bible that could be misunderstood:
  - a. The word ‘man’ can refer to mankind in general or it can refer to men as in males. (E.g., Rom. 5:12).
  - b. The word ‘meat’ in old English was a word for food in general whereas now it strictly refers to the flesh of an animal. For example, we are told the ‘meat’ of John the Baptist was “locusts and wile honey” (Matt. 3:4) and the leftovers of the bread and fish gathered after Christ’s miracles was also called ‘meat’ (Matt. 15:37).
  - c. Note: This highlights that word definitions can change over time. It is therefore important not to superimpose a modern definition of a word on an ancient text like our Beloved KJV. Check out what the word meant when the Bible was being translated.
  - d. “It may be easily proved that from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, secular lexicons and dictionaries defined the word ‘wine’ correctly – as a broad term. However, from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century onward, alteration of the definition has dominated secular and Christian dictionaries. This has had the regrettable result of confusing many genuine believers who believe that the word ‘wine’ in the Bible always, and only, means a fermented drink. This most basic fact is fundamental in leading multitudes to misunderstand and misrepresent the teaching of the Bible in relation to alcohol.” (Malcomson)
  - e. For example, the current Oxford Dictionary defines ‘wine’ as “An alcoholic drink made from fermented grape juice.” To apply this definition to every occurrence of the word ‘wine’ in the Bible would be a grave mistake.

## **B. Some Key Words in the Old & New Testaments**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/generic> Viewed 30/4/21

Let's consider four key words relevant to this study:

1. Old Testament: "**Yayin**" – "In the Old Testament 'yayin' is the most popular term for wine, being used 141 times. It is used in 31 of the 39 books of the Old Testament and is used throughout the written history of God's people from the days of Noah and to the days of Nehemiah. The word is used in a great variety of ways to mean anything from "grapes hanging on a tree, to wine in a cup."  
(Malcomson)
  - a. Sometimes 'yayin' refers to good, unfermented wine and is commended by Scripture as a blessing. For example: Psalm 104:14-15 "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; And **wine (yayin)** that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make *his* face to shine, and bread *which* strengtheneth man's heart."
  - b. Sometimes 'yayin' refers to fermented wine and it is strongly warned against. For example:
    - i. Prov. 20:1 "**Wine (yayin)** is a mocker, strong drink *is* raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."
    - ii. Prov. 23:31 "Look not thou upon the **wine (yayin)** when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright."
    - iii. Robert P. Teachout in his thorough word study says: "Half of the times *yayin* occurs in the Old Testament (71 times) the text is talking about grape juice; in the other half of the 141 references, scripture is talking about wine."
2. Old Testament: '**Tirosh**' – "The second most commonly used word for 'wine' in the Old Testament. "It is found 38 times, of which 26 times it is translated as 'wine', eleven times as "new wine" and one time as "sweet wine." It is always spoken of as a blessing and never warned against. It is given as a good, pure, wholesome gift from God." (Malcomson) For example:
  - a. Prov. 3:9-10 "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with **new wine** (Tirosh)."
  - b. Deut. 7:13 "And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy **wine** (Tirosh), and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee."
3. Old Testament: '**Shekar**' – This is the word translated "strong drink" in the Old Testament. The word is mentioned 23 times out of which 21 times it is translated as "strong drink", once as "strong wine", and once as "drunkards". Interestingly, in 209 of these mentions, wine (yayin) is mentioned in tandem with it and usually appears before it.

Strong drink is condemned outright and only spoken of in a positive light once in relation to religious offerings at festivals (Deut. 14:26). (Malcomson) For example:

- a. Lev 10:8-10 “And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink **wine** (yayin) nor **strong drink** (shekar), thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: *it shall be* a statute for ever throughout your generations: **And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;**”
  - b. Prov. 20:1 “**Wine** (yayin) *is* a mocker, **strong drink** (shekar) *is* raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”
  - c. Isaiah 5:11 “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, *that* they may follow **strong drink** (shekar); that continue until night, *till wine* (yayin) inflame them!”
  - d. Isaiah 28:7 “But they also have erred through **wine (yayin)**, and through **strong drink** (shekar) are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through **strong drink** (shekar), they are swallowed up of **wine** (yayin), they are out of the way through **strong drink** (shekar); they err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment.”
4. New Testament: ‘**Oinos**’ – the most prominent Greek word in the New Testament for ‘wine’. It is used 33 times and is translated ‘wine’ each time in our King James Bible. Like the Hebrew word ‘yayin’, the word can refer to either fermented or non-fermented wine. For example:
- a. Matt. 9:17 “**Neither do men put new wine (oinos) into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine (oinos) into new bottles, and both are preserved.**” This is clearly a reference to fresh grape juice. The word ‘new’ implies that which has been freshly pressed (See Prov. 3:10).
  - b. Eph. 5:18 “And be not drunk with **wine** (oinos), wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;”

**C. The Context is Key to Determine which Wine is in View**

1. Since the word ‘wine’ is generic, the context becomes all important in the process of identifying which kind of wine is in view.
2. Remember, words travel in meaning according to context.

**D. The Principle of Comparing Scripture with Scripture Vital**

1. Like with formulating any other position in the Christian life, start with the clearest, plainest statements on the subject. Don’t start with a more obscure verse and then twist it to try and support an ungodly practice like drinking wine.
2. Sometimes it can be hard to determine which wine is in view. At such times, keep in mind other clear Scriptures on the subject.

*Consider secondly...*

## **II. PLAIN PROHIBITIONS OF SCRIPTURE**

Why should we totally avoid intoxicating liquor? Because of the plain

warnings and prohibitions of Scripture. Let's consider several of these:

**A. Don't Be Deceived by It (Prov. 20:1)**

Intoxicating wine is deceptive by its very nature. It draws the individual in with promises of joy and pleasure. Multitudes fall for the lie that it will enrich and benefit their lives when in reality it brings damage and ruin.

1. It produces shame and disgrace – “wine is a mocker”
  - a. ‘mocker’ = same word translated as ‘scorn’. Wine makes a mockery of those who are deceived by it.
  - b. Think of all the senseless stupidity alcohol produces in those under its influence.
2. It produces unrest and disquiet – “strong drink is raging”
  - a. The word ‘raging’ means “to make a loud sound; by implication to be in great commotion or tumult, to rage, war, moan clamour.” (Strong's)
  - b. The same Hebrew word is translated ‘uproar’ (1 Kings 1:41), ‘disquiet’ (Ps. 39:6, 42:5, 11; 43:5), “cry aloud” (Psalm 55:17), “make a noise” (Ps. 59:6, 14), ‘troubled’ (Ps. 77:3), “make a tumult” (Ps. 83:2), ‘clamorous’ (Prov. 9:13) and ‘roar’ (Jer. 5:22).
  - c. Illustration: Party across the road from our house (swearing and shouting).

**B. Don't Even Look at It (Prov 23:29-35)**

1. The Category of this Wine (Vs. 31)
  - a. This is a clear description of fermented wine. The word ‘when’ is key. It is when wine is fermented that it becomes unsafe and must be strictly avoided.
  - b. “when it is red” = Rod Phillips (A Short History of Wine) states: “Actual grape juice is always light-coloured, no matter what the colour of the skin or flesh of the grape, and red wine is given its colour in the fermentation process, when the red or black grape skins remain in the fermentation process, in contact with the juice. It is the duration of this contact that largely determines the colour of the finished wine.”
  - c. “when it moveth itself aright” = the term “moveth itself” is the Hebrew word ‘halak’ meaning to ‘walk’. The word ‘aright’ means in a straight or upright manner. This was a very ancient practice in discerning the alcoholic content of the wine. The wine is swirled in the glass and as the wine runs down the inside surface of the glass it forms what is called “legs”. Legs are used to discern the alcoholic content of the wine. The slower it moves down or walks down the glass the higher the alcoholic content. (Malcomson)
2. The Command concerning this Wine (Vs. 31)
  - a. The command is not to “Look” upon this wine. The word means “to fix your eyes upon it, to gaze at it, to consider or take heed to it.” (Malcomson)
  - b. Illustration: Mrs Lot looked back when fleeing Sodom and was destroyed. The idea is not that she merely glanced back but rather she turned and indulged in a lingering gaze back at Sodom. As a result, she lost her life!
  - c. The warning is that a lingering look at wine is a dangerous first

step to falling under its deceptive spell. We dare not gaze upon it lest we find ourselves getting drawn in by its seductive power. How often temptation starts with the eye gate!

- d. Alexander Maclaren: "The writer thinks that the only way of sure escape from the danger is to turn away even the eyes from the temptation. He is not contented with saying 'taste not,' but he goes the whole length of 'look not'; and that because the very sparkle and colour may attract... The advice given is to keep entirely away from the temptation. 'Look not' is safe policy in regard of many of the snares for young lives that abound in our modern society. It is not at all needful to 'see life,' or to know the secrets of wickedness, in order to be wise and good. 'Simple concerning evil' is a happier state than to have eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Many a young man has been ruined, body and soul, by a prurient curiosity to know what sort of life dissipated men and women led, or what sort of books they were against which he was warned, or what kind of a place a theatre was, and so on. Eyes are greedy, and there is a very quick telephone from them to the desires. 'The lust of the eye' soon fans the 'lust of the flesh' into a glow. There are plenty of depths of Satan gaping for young feet; and on the whole, it is safer and happier not to know them, and so not to have defiling memories, nor run the risk of falling into fatal sins."
3. The Consequences of this Wine (Vs. 29, 32-35)  
Observe at least 10 dire effects of alcohol in these verses:
    - a. Heartache and Misery – "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow"?
    - b. Strife and Violence – "who hath contentions?" The word 'contentions' means 'brawlings'.
    - c. Incoherent Speech – "who hath babbling?"
    - d. Needless Injuries – "who hath wounds without cause?" (Also Vs. 35)
    - e. Bloodshot Eyes – "who hath redness of eyes?"
    - f. Danger and Destruction – "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." (Vs. 32) "The serpent's lithe gracefulness and painted skin hide a fatal poison; and so the attractive wine-cup is sure to ruin those who look on it." (Maclaren)
    - g. Lust and Immorality – "Thine eyes shall behold strange women" (Vs. 33). It is significant to note the section just before this warning against intoxicating liquor has to do with the danger of the strange woman (Vs. 26-28). A tremendous amount of immorality is committed under the influence of alcohol as well as a large percentage of crimes such as rape and child abuse.
    - h. Vulgar Speech – "and thine heart shall utter perverse things". The heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Intoxicating liquor has the effect of removing restraints and inhibitions in an individual, allowing the sewer of their depraved hearts to flow out to the contamination of others around them. Illustration: Party over the road from our place and the horrific language.

- i. Loss of Control (Vs. 34) “The point of the verse seems to be the drunken man’s utter loss of sense of fitness, and complete incapacity to take care of himself. He cannot estimate dangers. The very instinct of self-preservation has forsaken him. There he lies, though as sure to be drowned as if he were in the depth of the sea, though on as uncomfortable a bed as if he were rocking on a masthead, where he could not balance himself.” (Maclaren)
- j. Addiction – “when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.” The sad reality of one around whom the serpent of drink is coiled. Drink never satisfies, brings destruction and misery to the one deceived by it and yet it also creates a desire for more of the same.

***To be continued...***

**Conclusion:**

1. D. Chaney Testimony.
2. Will you take a stand on this issue in your personal life?