

# Booze, Baptists & the Bible

## Part 4

**Text:** Eph. 5:18

### Introduction:

1. Brief review of Eph. 5:18.
  - a. "be not drunk" = lit. "to be being made drunk." "Paul prohibits them from a course of action." (Hoehner) The word translated "drunk" is the verb, "Methusko". It is related to the verb "Methuo," which, according to W.E. Vine, "signifies to be drunk with wine". In contrast, "Methusko" "signifies to make drunk, or to **grow drunk** (an inceptive verb, marking **the process of the state** expressed in No.1, Methuo (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words)
  - b. The verb is in the present tense and the passive voice. The present tense views the action as currently taking place in time. The passive voice indicates that the subject is the recipient of the action. "Here the Holy Ghost forbids, not only the final state of drunkenness, but also **the process that leads to that state**. The believer is forbidden to place himself in the passive state where he allows alcohol to lead him to intoxication." (I.W., Jan 2021)
2. Profiles of the sort of people you can expect to encounter in this debate:
  - a. The unbeliever – their primary need will be to hear the Gospel. That said, a godly and gracious stand on the issue of alcohol is an important part of your testimony to them. Illustration: The men I worked with and their perspective on drinking Christians (e.g., exclusive brethren).
  - b. The untaught believer who has just picked up mainstream ideas without examining them properly from the Scriptures. Such individuals may be open to being helped if they are shown God's mind on the issue in a loving manner.
  - c. The compromised, stubborn believer who has already hardened their heart and mind on the issue and who when presented with sound, irrefutable arguments from Scripture will simply keep manufacturing more questions and arguments in a sinful ploy to hang on to their habit of drinking. Prayer essential for dealing with such individuals. They may not be open now but the Lord can work down the track (e.g., Bro. Ryan's testimony).
3. We will briefly review what we covered in last lesson and continue with our outline from there.

## I. PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS FROM SCRIPTURE

**A. The Word 'wine' is a Generic Term in the Bible**

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

## II. PLAIN PROHIBITIONS OF SCRIPTURE

Why should we totally avoid intoxicating liquor? Because of the plain warnings and prohibitions of Scripture. It is of interest how many of these are found in the Book of Proverbs which is the Bible's manual on godly wisdom.

- A. Don't Be Deceived by It (Prov. 20:1)**
- B. Don't Even Look at It (Prov 23:29-35)**
- C. Don't Lower Yourself to It (Prov. 31:4-7)**
- D. Don't Be Amongst It (Prov. 23:20-21)**
- E. Don't Be Intoxicated with It (Eph. 5:18)**

### **III. POWERFUL EXHORTATIONS OF SCRIPTURE**

There are other Scriptural principles that have a bearing on this subject. While these verses may not make a direct reference to alcoholic wine and the believer, they certainly apply to the issue.

- A. The Exhortation to Soberness (1 Peter 1:13)**
- B. The Exhortation to Watchfulness (1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Pet. 4:7)**

### **IV. PERTINENT ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SCRIPTURE**

The Bible makes plain the Divine perspective on alcoholic wine and strong drink by its plain denunciations of it (e.g., Prov. 23) and also by the clear illustrations of the evil effects of intoxicating liquor upon those who drink it. We will survey 10 such examples from Scripture:

- A. Wine and Noah's Nakedness (Gen. 9:20-26)**
- B. Wine and Lot's Immorality (Gen. 19:30-38)**
- C. Wine and Nabal's Death (1 Sam. 25:36-38)**
- D. Wine and David's Attempted Cover up (2 Sam. 11:13)**
- E. Wine and Amnon's Murder (2. Sam. 13:28-29)**
- F. Wine and King Elah's Assassination (1 Kings 16:8-10)**
- G. Wine and Benhadad's Defeat (1 Kings 20:12-21)**
- H. Wine and Ahasuerus' Divorce (Esther 1:5-22)**
- I. Wine and the Perversity of Priest and Prophet (Isaiah 28:1-3; 7-8)**
- J. Wine and Belshazzar's Blasphemy (Dan. 5:1-4; 22-23)**
- K. Summary:** What evils are clearly linked to alcoholic wine in the above passages?

1. Nakedness and dishonourable behaviour.
2. Family breakdown and division.
3. Incestuous immorality.
4. Loss of mental and moral restraints.
5. Premature death and God's displeasure.
6. Murder plots, sinister conspiracies and assassinations.
7. Poor, unwise decision making.
8. Immoral, lustful demands.
9. Marriage breakdown and divorce.
10. Deviation from the path of truth into error.
11. Blasphemy and sensuality.

## V. POPULAR OBJECTIONS MISUSING SCRIPTURE

### A. Objection 1: “Jesus turned water into wine!” (John 2:1-11)

1. This would have to be the most popular argument used by pro-drinking Christians. They throw it out as a one liner as if it settles the issue and there is not further room for consideration of other Scriptures or debate. Keith Malcomson observes, “One of the most commonly repeated, promoted and pressed comments by those seeking to justify social drinking, or the moderate drinking of alcohol is that “Christ turned water into wine.” Sinner and Saint alike use this simple comment to justify their love of alcohol. It has become a motto, national anthem, unquestioned statement of faith, and an unanswerable proclamation – or so they think.”
2. Question: In light of what we have studied about the word ‘wine’ in the Bible, what is the big assumption the individual using this argument has made? Answer: They are clearly assuming that the wine Christ created was alcoholic! They have not taken into account the fact that as previously studied, the word ‘wine’ in the Bible has a broad spectrum of meaning and often refers to non-alcoholic grape juice, the pure fruit of the vine.
3. Question: With your knowledge of the Holy character of Christ and what we have studied in the Scriptures on this issue so far, which option sounds right to you.
  - a. That Christ turned water into alcoholic wine?
  - b. That Christ turned water into non-alcoholic wine (grape juice)?
4. Consider the following 3 reasons why Christ did **NOT** turn water into intoxicating wine:
  - a. Because of Christ’s purpose in the miracle (Vs. 11)
    - i. Sadly, for many Christians, they seem to think that the primary purpose of this miracle was to teach us that social drinking is ok! How tragic that Christ’s first public miracle has become the banner for the pro-alcohol crowd! However, we need to remind ourselves of what the purpose of the miracle actually was.
    - ii. Vs. 11 “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and **manifested forth his glory**; and his disciples believed on him.”
    - iii. The purpose of this miracle was not to get people feeling merry with alcoholic wine. Nor was it to teach some warped concept of Christian liberty. It was to reveal the glory of Christ as the incarnate Son of God that men might believe.
    - iv. Question: Do you really think turning water into intoxicating liquor and getting people drunk would be a

manifestation of the pure, heavenly glory of the Son of God?

- b. Because of the Holy, Righteous Nature of Christ (Heb. 7:26)
  - i. Consider this illustration. “The word ‘cider’ may mean an alcoholic beverage, or plain apple juice. Suppose we lived during the 1920s, prohibition days, and were approached by two people offering us a drink of cider. One of the persons, we knew to be one of the holiest men in town, faithful to the house of God, separated from the world, diligent in prayers, always witnessing to others; the other was a known liquor dealer. If each one offered us a drink of “his very own cider,” we would assume that the holy person’s was no more than apple juice, but there would be no doubt about our opinion regarding the liquor dealer’s cider! Obviously, the character of a person influences what that one does. Since the Lord Jesus Christ was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,” we may safely assume that He would not make that which is called in Scripture a mocker and deceiver of man, causing untold misery.”
  - ii. Think of the implications to the character of Christ of arguing that Christ turned water into alcoholic wine! There were somewhere in the order of 9-13 gallons of water in each of the six pots according to reputable commentators (e.g., John Gill, Vincent, Clarke. William Patton in his excellent book *Bible Wines* poses some searching questions on the pro-drink interpretation of this miracle, “The moral influence of the miracle will be determined by the character of the wine. It is pertinent to ask, is it not derogatory to the character of Christ and the teachings of the Bible to suppose that he exerted his miraculous power to produce, according to Alvord and according to Smith, at least 60 gallons<sup>1</sup> of intoxicating wine? – wine which inspiration had denounced as “a mocker”, as “biting like a serpent,” and “stinging like an adder,” as “the poison of dragons,” “the cruel venom of asps”, and which the Holy Ghost had selected as the emblem of the wrath of God Almighty? Is it probable that he gave that to the guests after they had used the wine provided by the host, and which, it is claimed, was intoxicating?”

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<sup>1</sup> Approximately 227 litres. That would be wine equivalent to around 302 bottles of wine today (750ml). Or to put it another way, that would be almost 5 kegs of beer (based on a 50 litre keg).

- c. Because as the **Living Word**, Christ would never do or say anything to contradict or cast doubt upon the **Written Word**.
  - i. John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (See also Vs. 14)
  - ii. Jesus Himself stated that “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).
  - iii. Christ also clearly said, “Think not that I am come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” (Matt. 5:17-18)
  - iv. Remember that God has exalted His Word even above all His Name (Ps. 138:12).
  - v. For Christ to produce somewhere in the order of 60 gallons of intoxicating wine for a wedding feast that had already been drinking wine for approximately 3 days would put Him completely at odds with the plain statements of Scripture such as Prov. 20:1, 23:31. It would make Christ guilty of the sin of giving his neighbor drink (Hab. 2:15). It would make Christ a transgressor of the command not to be among “winebibbers” (Prov. 23:20). To claim that Christ turned water into wine is pure blasphemy!
  - vi. Wilkerson: “Can you not picture Solomon and the prophets coming down from eternity to watch Jesus turn water into wine, just as Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount? Suppose the wine was alcoholic. Solomon would have had to tap our Lord on the shoulder and whisper, “Master, don’t You know wine is a mocker? Have You not read that it is raging? The law declares that those deceived by it are not wise. Master, look not on the wine when it is read; it will bite and sting that wedding crowd like a serpent” (see Proverbs 20:1; 23:31, 32). The prophet Habakkuk would have had to remind Him, “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink...” (Hab. 2:15). How in any conceivable way, could Jesus give His neighbors fermented wine without setting the New Testament against the Old? Without mocking the prophets who cried out against its evils? Without mocking the Lord’s own prayer that pleads, “...lead us not into temptation...” (Luke 11:4)?

**B. Objection 2: “Didn’t Jesus drink wine at the last supper?”**

- 1. Many churches use alcoholic wine for their communion celebrations based on the myth that Christ and His disciples drank alcoholic

wine on Passover night. Illustration: Communion wine made in South Australia for Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup>

2. In all the Gospel accounts of the last supper, the word 'wine' is not mentioned once. This is the same in the key Pauline passage on the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:25-28. In fact, the wording is very specific as follows:
  - a. Matthew 26:27-29 – "And he took **the cup**, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this **fruit of the vine**, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."
  - b. Mark 14:25 "...**the fruit of the vine**..."
  - c. Luke 22:18 "...**the fruit of the vine**..."
  - d. 1 Cor. 11:25 "After the same manner also he took **the cup**..."
  - e. Malcomson: "In these Scriptures the fruit of the vine is mentioned **three times** and the cup that held it is mentioned **ten times**. Why did Christ and the apostles not use the word 'oinos' (wine)? The term "fruit of the vine" expresses what 'oinos' does not. *Oinos* is a broad generic term which can mean either fermented or unfermented wine. This word for "wine" could have been misunderstood but the term "fruit of the vine" clearly explains what Christ wanted to convey. The drink in the cup which was to represent His blood was pure grape juice."
3. Leaven is always a type of sin and corruption in the Bible (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). In fact, in the Old Testament, the lamb and its blood were to be offered without leaven: "**Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven**; neither shall the sacrifice of the feast of the Passover be left unto the morning." (Ex. 34:25) This pointed forward to Christ the Perfect Lamb of God who would be totally sinless. Leavened wine therefore could not be used as an emblem of the sinless blood of Christ.
4. If Christ used alcoholic wine at the last supper, that has serious implications.
  - a. Firstly, we learn from early Jewish writings (the Mishna) that it was the common practice to drink four cups of wine at the Passover meal. That means that each person would end up drinking around three pints of wine during the Passover meal. If Christ and the disciples followed this practice using alcoholic wine, then by the end of the Supper both Christ and the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/rnfirstbite/clare-valley-winery-sevenhill-cellars-produces-a-heavenly-drop/5381562> Viewed 21/5/21

disciples would have been heavily under the influence of the alcohol.

- b. Secondly, it is blasphemous to suggest that Christ would use intoxicating liquor to represent His pure, sinless blood. Malcomson issues some challenging questions on this point, “Would Christ use an intoxicating drink to represent His precious redeeming blood instead of fresh grape juice? Would He use a drink which Moses warned was “poison of dragons” and the “cruel venom of asps”,<sup>3</sup> which Solomon said “biteh like a serpent” and “stingeth like an adder”? Would Christ say “drink ye all of it” and contradict Solomon who said, “Look not thou upon wine when” it is fermented? Are we to believe that Christ insisted on drinking fermented wine at the Passover and that He then went on to institute it in the public, regular practice of the Church when the Apostles in their later writings utterly forbade its use?”

**C. Objection 3: “Didn’t Paul command Timothy to drink a little wine?” (1 Tim. 5:23)** Let’s analyze the verse and seek to arrive at a faithful understanding of what it really means:

**1. Timothy’s Condition**

- a. Timothy’s medical problems are indicated by the following two phrases:
  - i. “thy stomach’s sake”
  - ii. “thine often infirmities”
- b. Paul was obviously concerned about Timothy’s **health** and offered some practical advice. It is important that a pastor look after his health and it is not wrong to use the means we have available to that end.

**2. Paul’s Prescription**

- a. “drink no longer water” = obviously Paul has Timothy’s fluid intake in mind. He wants him not to drink water exclusively. Water contamination would have been a common problem in the ancient world as it still is in many parts of the world today.
- b. D Cloud: “Pure wine, also called the fruit of the vine (Matt. 26:29), is healthy and is not contaminated as water often is. This principle applies to life in “third world” countries today. The water is commonly unhealthy unless it has been boiled or filtered, and it is wise to drink other types of beverages, such as fruit juices, to avoid stomach problems.”
- c. Bruce Lackey: “Many insist that here the Bible gives the privilege, if not a command, of using alcoholic wine as a medicine. However, this cannot possibly be referring to alcoholic

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<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 32:33 “Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.”

wine, because he specifically says that it is to be taken for Timothy's stomach. He obviously had some kind of stomach disease and any doctor will tell you that such a person must abstain from alcoholic beverage. This author has had much stomach trouble through the years and has consulted various doctors, observing various dietary restrictions. In every case, they warned against drinking any alcoholic beverage whatsoever. If we know that today, surely the Holy Spirit of God knew that when He inspired this verse! We do not know what Timothy's specific infirmities were, nor do we know what kind of healing properties there were in grape juice. Maybe Paul was saying that Timothy should not drink the water, since in many parts of the world it is not pure and would cause a healthy person to have trouble from amoebas etc. One who already had stomach problems would only multiply them by drinking impure water. Paul might have been recommending that Timothy drink grape juice only. In any case, we can be positive that he was not telling him to put alcohol in a bad stomach!"

- d. K. Malcomson: "Please note that alcoholic wine is not advised by the medical profession for stomach problems, in fact quite the opposite. Alcohol would tend to aggravate any stomach problems by inflaming the tissue of the stomach. Inflammation of the stomach tissue is not uncommon in moderate drinkers. Paul could only have been suggesting that Timothy drink grape juice, as it would settle the stomach."
- e. Note: Remember Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who had perfect understanding of the human body long before the discoveries of modern medicine.

#### **D. Objection 4: "Doesn't the Bible say to do all things in moderation?"**

1. Question? Where is the verse that says "do all things in moderation"? Answer: The simple answer is **NOWHERE**! There is no verse in the Bible that says "do all things in moderation".
2. The English word 'moderation' is only found once in the New Testament in Philippians 4:5 "Let your **moderation** (επιεικνης), be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."
3. The word 'moderation' means "the avoidance of excess or extremes, especially in one's behaviour" (Lexico). It means "the state of being moderate, or of keeping a due mean between extremes or excess of violence." (Webster)
4. We get a good sense for the meaning of the word within the biblical context by studying how the same Greek word is translated elsewhere in the New Testament.



- a. 1 Timothy 3:3 “Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but **patient** (επιεικης), not a brawler, not covetous;”
- b. Titus 3:2 “To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, *but* **gentle** (επιεικης), shewing all meekness unto all men.”
- c. James 3:17 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, **gentle** (επιεικης), *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”
- d. 1 Peter 2:18 “Servants, *be* subject to *your* masters with all fear; not only to the good and **gentle** (επιεικης), but also to the froward.”
- e. Adam Clarke: “The word means mildness, patience, yieldingness, gentleness, clemency, moderation, unwillingness to litigate or contend. “Moderation”, says Dr. Macknight, “means meekness under provocation, readiness to forgive injuries, equity in the management of business, candour in judging of the characters and actions of others, sweetness of disposition, and the entire government of the passions.”
5. Think about the implications of the “do all things in moderation” mantra. If that were true, does that mean we can swear in moderation, be immoral in moderation, get angry in moderation, be violent in moderation etc...?”

#### E. Objection 5: “Total Abstainers are Legalistic”

1. What is legalism? The strict definition of legalism is reliance upon law works for salvation. This is even reflected in secular dictionaries such as the Oxford dictionary of English which defines it as follows: “*Theology* Dependence on moral law rather than on personal religious faith.” Legalism can also be an approach to sanctification which often involves strict adherence to man made commandments or a legal approach to sanctification rather than sanctification through the Word, the walk of faith and reliance upon the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. A Spirit-filled zeal for holiness and a passion to please God by submitting to the authority of God’s Word however is **NOT** legalism. 1 Peter 1:15 “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in **all manner of conversation;**”
2. Some object and say, “But what about grace?” See Titus 2:11-12 & Romans 6:12-15
3. Some object and say, “But what about love?” See John 14:15, 21 & 1 John 5:2
4. Some object and say, “But what about liberty?” See Gal. 5:13
5. Remember: Liberty in Christ means freedom **from** sin not freedom **to** sin!

#### F. Objection 6: “Alcoholic wine is natural so it must be God-given”

1. Decay and fermentation is actually a result of the curse. Alcoholic wine could not have been produced in Eden prior to the fall.
2. The making of alcoholic beverages is not a strictly natural process. Bruce Lackey writes, “Years ago I took for granted that if you took the juice of a grape and let it alone, not refrigerating it, it would automatically, in time, turn into alcoholic wine. There are several reasons why this is not true. It takes more than time to make wine. Sometimes people try to defend its use by saying that it must be good because God made it. But the fact is, God did not make it. Man has learned how to make alcoholic liquors through processes that he has invented. Wine-makers know that one must have the correct amount of water, sugar, and temperature to make wine.”
3. William Patton in his book *Bible Wines* concurs, pointing out that the making of alcoholic wine requires input from man. It requires the addition of certain additives (though it might be something as simple as sugar) and the control of temperature, etc. The natural processes alone will produce fermentation under certain conditions, but these natural processes, if unaided by man, rapidly move to a vinegar state. The alcoholic beverages industry is very much a man-made thing. Natural processes are perverted by man. (Way of Life Encyclopedia)
4. Note: Alcohol has some positive uses as a chemical in things like cleaning agents or as an ingredient in certain medications. These uses are distinct from using alcohol as a beverage.

**G. Objection 7: “Wine is good for your health”**

1. Even if this was true, it would not invalidate the commands and principles of Scripture but in reality, this is not a true statement.
2. Malcomson writes, “Even the medical profession say that a little alcoholic wine is good for the heart but the truth is that the ‘good’ ingredient in wine which is beneficial for the heart, called *resveratrol*<sup>4</sup>, is higher in the content of purple grape juice than in fermented wine. Also, for the heart to gain any benefit from fermented wine, it would need to be drunk in such an amount that it would take the consumer passed the safe line of sobriety professed by social-drinkers. It would also have to be drunk in such an amount that the damaging side effects of the alcohol would damage other parts of the body. In other words, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages.”

**Conclusion:** Testimony by S. Vanson

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<sup>4</sup> “A compound found in red grapes, mulberries, peanuts, and certain plants, used medicinally as an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory.” (dictionary.com)