

# *The Bible and Beverage Alcohol, Part II*

## III. Christ and Wine in the New Testament

### A. The Parable of the Wine and the Wineskins (Mt. 9:17; Mk. 2:22; Lk. 5:37-39).

1. The primary message of this parable concerns the change from Mosaic legalism to free grace in Christ. Jesus taught that grace apart from the law could not be poured back into the old wineskin of legalism. New Testament grace is not merely an addition to Old Testament legalism. Grace and legalism do not mix, and attempting to mix them always results in the spilling of grace.
2. Regarding wine, Jesus taught that putting fresh grape juice into an old bottle would hasten the fermentation process due to the yeast deposits left on the previously used container.
3. History has preserved an ancient recipe for keeping wine sweet. Columella, a man contemporaneous with the Apostles, stated that in order to keep wine “always sweet” it must be put in a “new amphora,” or jar.
4. Why do those who have drunk the old wine declare it “better?” Because of the habit forming effect of alcohol. Jesus here acknowledges the addictiveness of alcohol and the fact that alcoholics desire alcohol, not grape juice.
5. The point of the parable is simply this: new wine (grace) is better than old wine (legalism). However, many who had drunk long at the old wine of legalism would prefer it to the new wine of grace. Certainly those who rejected Christ’s message proved His prediction true. Dr. H.A. Ironside writes:

And so these Pharisees would go away saying, “We are satisfied with the old wine,” and legalists and worldlings are like that today. They are apparently content with what they are trying to enjoy down here and do not care what God offers them in Christ Jesus.

### 6. Jesus taught that the new, unfermented wine is better!

### B. Jesus’ Eating and Drinking and the Reaction of the Crowd (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:33-35).

1. Jesus here contrasts His ministry with that of John the Baptist. Several important distinctions should be noted:
  - a. Jesus was called a Nazarene because He came from Nazareth. However, He was not a Nazarite.
  - b. John the Baptist was a Nazarite, one who had taken a special vow of dedication to God. The vow included several lifestyle restrictions, one of which

was abstinence from anything made of grapes—whether alcoholic or not (Num. 6:1-4).

2. Since Jesus was not restricted by the Nazarite vow, He came eating grapes and drinking of the fruit of the vine, all of which was called “wine.”
3. Since the crowd could not criticize John’s ascetic lifestyle, those who rejected his message claimed he was demon possessed.
4. Since Jesus was not an ascetic like John, those who opposed Him criticized his lack of asceticism. (On two other occasions, Jesus’ enemies accused Him of demon possession as well—John 7:20; 8:48).
5. The accusation that Jesus was a “winebibber” was false, just as was the accusation that John was demon possessed. It would be ludicrous for Bible believers to accept the accusations of Jesus’ enemies in order to justify the consumption of beverage alcohol. If their accusations were accurate, Jesus could not be the sinless Son of God!

#### C. Jesus Making Wine at the Marriage Feast in Cana (John 2:3-10)

1. In considering Jesus’ first miracle, two important principles must govern our thoughts:
  - a. The wine Jesus made did not conform to modern standards for fermented wine. His wine surpassed the standards of that day and was judged superior to that which had been previously consumed. Because new wine (unfermented) was considered superior to the sour, fermented variety; one could assume that Jesus’ wine was new wine.
  - b. Whatever the nature of the wine Jesus made, we can be certain that it was consistent with His character. Dr. R.A. Torrey has written:

The wine provided for the marriage festivities at Cana failed. A cloud was about to fall over the joy of what is properly a festive occasion. Jesus came to the rescue. He provided wine, but there is not a hint that the wine He made was intoxicating. It was fresh-made wine. New-made wine is never intoxicating. It is not intoxicating until sometime after the process of fermentation has set in. Fermentation is a process of decay. There is not a hint that our Lord produced alcohol, which is a product of decay and death. He produced a living wine uncontaminated by fermentation.

2. The true nature of the wine Jesus made at Cana is unknown. Consider the words of Dr. William Pettingill, one of the last century’s great Bible scholars:

I do not pretend to know the nature of the wine furnished by our Lord at the wedding of Cana, but I am satisfied that there was little resemblance in it to the thing described in the Scriptures of God as biting like a serpent and stinging like an adder (Prov. 23:29-32). Doubtless rather it was like the heavenly fruit of the vine that He will drink new with His own in His Father’s kingdom (Matt.

26:29). No wonder the governor of the wedding feast at Cana pronounced it the best wine kept until last. Never before had he tasted such wine, and never did he taste it again.

3. Years ago, Presbyterian scholar Albert Barnes wrote:

No man should adduce this instance in favor of drinking wine unless he can prove that the wine made in the "water pots" of Cana was just like the wine which he proposes to drink.

D. The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29)

1. Some Christian denominations argue vehemently that Jesus used fermented wine when instituting the Lord's Supper. In fact, some groups use fermented wine as a matter of conviction, rejecting the use of mere grape juice. Although not a Christian denomination, the Roman Catholic Church also uses fermented wine in the Mass, a custom which has caused widespread alcoholism among priests.
2. In instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus used two terms to refer to the liquid representing His blood: "The fruit of the vine" and "the cup." Can fermented grape juice legitimately be referred to as the "fruit of the vine?" Bible scholar Charles Wesley Ewing states:

Fermented wine is not a product of the vine. Chemically it is entirely different from the sweet and unfermented grape juice. Fermented wine is 14% alcohol, and it has other constituents that are not found in fresh grape juice. Alcohol does not grow on the vine. It is not a vine product. Alcohol is the product of decay, the product of fermentation. It is produced by the process of spoiling.

3. The "cup" used in the Lord's Supper represents Christ's blood. Interestingly, Moses long before Christ drew a parallel between fresh grape juice and blood. He referred to fresh grape juice as "the pure blood of the grape" (Deut. 32:14). Fresh grape juice, not fermented, best represents blood.
4. In addition, the Old Testament predicts that Christ's body and blood, even in death, would not see corruption (Ps. 16:10). Fermentation is a process of corruption, and would not be compatible with the uncorrupt nature of Christ's blood (I Pet. 1:18).
5. Commenting on Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:31, Dr. John R. Rice has written:

The cup the disciples drank at the Lord's Supper is nowhere called wine, but "the fruit of the vine." We believe it was simply grape juice. Even if the word wine had been used, wine in the Bible means grape juice, whether fermented or unfermented. Fermented wine, with microbes of decay, would not picture the perfect blood of a sinless Christ.

6. Another Bible scholar, William Patton, states:

Leaven, because it was corruption, was forbidden as an offering to God...If leaven was not allowed with the sacrifices, which were the types of the atoning blood of Christ, how much more would it be a violation of the commandment to allow leaven, or that which was fermented, to be the symbol of the blood of atonement? We cannot imagine that our Lord, in disregard of so positive a command, would admit leaven into the element which was to perpetuate the memory of the sacrifice of himself, of which all the other sacrifices were but types.

7. The holy nature of the Lord's Supper also mitigates against the use of alcoholic wine. Remember that the Old Testament priests were forbidden the use of any fermented wine. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is our High Priest. Certainly He remained consistent with the Old Testament commandment for priestly abstinence.
8. Lastly, Dr. Jack Van Impe has stated:

The final statement of our Lord on the Communion service settles the issue. All Christians who take Communion are to do so in anticipation of the coming kingdom. We have already seen that the wine of the kingdom is unfermented. If we are to look forward to the wine of Eden and Cana during the kingdom, it would be inconsistent to use intoxicating wine when remembering the death of our Savior and King.

E. The Wine offered to Jesus on the cross (Mk. 15:23)

1. The wine offered to Jesus at His crucifixion was doubtless of the intoxicating variety. So severe was the punishment of crucifixion that the victim was offered alcoholic wine as an anesthetic.
2. Notice that in His most trying hour, Jesus refused even the relief from pain that alcohol could provide. Alcohol is NEVER an answer to the problems of life. Jesus refused alcohol, and so should we.

In Conclusion...

1. The Bible never plainly condones the use of alcoholic wine as a beverage.
2. Alcoholic wine is frequently condemned in the Scriptures.
3. Certain classes of people (priests and kings) were expressly forbidden the use of any alcoholic beverages. (Christians are both kings and priests—Rev. 1:6, 5:10.)
4. There is absolutely no sound Bible evidence that Jesus ever consumed alcoholic wine or commanded its use.
5. There is ample evidence to indicate that Jesus Himself did not make, use, or condone the use of alcoholic wine.
6. It is impossible to use the example of Jesus to justify the imbibing of alcoholic beverages.