

Palmetto Baptist Church – March 7, 2021

Be Not Drunk with Wine – *Ephesians 5:18*

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...

- **Walk in wisdom by yielding to the Holy Spirit. (18-20)**

- Do not be controlled by alcohol. (18a)
 - **Drunk (*methyskō*) [verb, present, passive, imperative, second person, plural]:** caused to become intoxicated
 - **Debauchery (*asōtia*):** reckless abandon, dissipation, senseless deeds, wastefulness
- Be controlled by the Holy Spirit. (18b)
 - **Filled (*plēroō*) [verb, present, passive, imperative, second person, plural]:** to make full, to fill, complete, to satisfy, to overflow

The problem is not wine.

The problem is excess.

THE PROBLEM IS NOT WINE.

Wine was a gift from God.

- The Bible refers to wine as a source of celebration (Psalm 104:14-15; Ecc. 9:7), comfort for the weary (Prov. 31:6) and medicine for the sick (Luke 10:34; I Tim. 5:23).

Psalm 104:14-15 [Source of celebration]

¹⁴ You cause the grass to grow for the livestock
and plants for man to cultivate,

that he may bring forth food from the earth

¹⁵ and wine to gladden the heart of man,

oil to make his face shine

and bread to strengthen man's heart.

Ecclesiastes 9:7 [Source of celebration]

Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

Proverbs 31:6 [Source of comfort for the weary]

Give strong drink to the one who is perishing,

and wine to those in bitter distress;^[a]

Luke 10:34 [Source of medicine for the sick]

He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.

I Timothy 5:23 [Source of medicine for the sick]

(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)

Wine was the common drink during biblical times.

- The Bible suggests the drinking of wine was a normal practice of Jewish culture during biblical times [the choice was rather simple: water or wine]. (John 2:1-11 [the first miracle by Jesus]; I Timothy 3:3, 8; Eph. 5:18a)

THE PROBLEM IS NOT WINE.

THE PROBLEM IS EXCESS.

Excessive drinking leads to drunkenness. (Lot, Noah, Nadab & Abihu, Hophni & Phineas)

Does the Bible Condone Alcoholic Beverages?

By [Gary Reimers](#) | October 28, 2015¹

Fundamentalists find themselves in a difficult and awkward position concerning alcoholic beverages. By instinct, tradition and Biblical principle they are convinced that believers should abstain entirely. Yet that position is under strong attack today by others who also claim to believe the Bible. Among new-evangelicals the trend is toward “social drinking” as an acceptable practice for Christians, and they point to the Word of God for support. Besides numerous Old Testament passages that speak favorably of wine ([Judg. 9:13](#); [Ps. 104:15](#); [Gen. 14:18](#)), the New Testament seems to permit the use of wine, even for church leaders ([1 Tim. 3:8](#); [5:23](#)). The only Biblical restriction, according to this position, is excessive drinking that leads to drunkenness. How should we respond to these arguments? Must we leave the matter to “personal convictions”? Or is there a standard for God’s people to follow? As always, the fundamentalist must turn to the Bible for the answers.

The Practices of Drinking

The first step in coming to a Biblical view of alcoholic beverages is to interpret the Bible historically. Was wine in the Bible the same as wine today? In other words, we must be sure we are comparing the proverbial “apples to apples” (or in this case “grapes to grapes”).

Alcoholic Beverages in the Ancient World

by far the easiest way to deal with this issue is to deny the alcoholic content of wine in the Bible. Perhaps it was only fresh grape juice. Unfortunately the Bible will not support that conclusion. The usual words for wine in the Bible occur in some contexts that demand an alcoholic content. For instance, without the presence of alcohol to fight bacteria, there would be no benefit in pouring wine on open wounds ([Luke 10:34](#)) or in treating stomach disorders ([1 Tim. 5:23](#)). Furthermore, there would be no possibility of intoxication ([Gen. 9:21](#); [Prov. 23:29-35](#); [Eph. 5:18](#)). With the possible exception of *fruit of the vine*, no Biblical terms clearly and consistently distinguish fermented wine from unfermented juice. In fact, without refrigeration or pressurized bottling, unfermented grape juice was available only immediately after grape harvest.

Fermentation is a natural process that takes place when grape juice comes into contact with the yeast released from broken grape skins (during the *treading of grapes*). **Under normal conditions the resulting wine will contain no more than seven percent alcohol. According to secular authorities, people in Bible times would dilute this wine, usually with two parts water, reducing the alcohol to less than 2 1/2 percent (see *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1989, Vol. 29, pp. 44, 45).** The reason for this

¹ <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2015/10/28/does-the-bible-condone-alcoholic-beverages/>

mixture of wine was very practical: pure drinking water was scarce. Even today travelers to the Holy Land must be careful about drinking the water. People in the ancient world discovered that the alcohol in wine killed enough of the harmful bacteria to make the water acceptable. The resulting mixture, however, was more like water than wine. At this alcohol level the average person would have to consume nearly a gallon of the mixture to become intoxicated. The same is true for other varieties of wine in the Bible. “Mixed wine” (Prov. 23:30) was wine flavored with herbs, and “strong drink” (Deut. 14:26; Luke 1:15) was the fermented juice of other fruits (*strong* refers to the flavor, not the alcoholic content). In every case, the wine was diluted with water. It is the use of undiluted wine, with its deep red color, that Scripture condemns as dangerous (Prov. 23:31).

Alcoholic Beverages in the Modern World

While the goal in the ancient world was to *reduce* the alcohol content of beverages, the modern world has sought ways to *increase* it. Standard table wines have as much as 14 percent alcohol due to the addition of extra yeast and the control of the heat generated by the fermentation process. Of course, wine is not diluted today so that modern wine has more than five *times* as much alcohol as the diluted wine of the ancient world. Furthermore, fortified wines such as port or sherry have alcohol *added*, resulting in an alcoholic content of 18 to 24 percent. Hard liquor produced by distillation, such as vodka or gin, has as much as 40 percent alcohol. Even beer, produced by fermentation of cereal grains, contains 4 to 7 percent alcohol. While this amount approximates the amount in naturally fermented wine, it is of course never diluted. In fact, each of these modern categories of alcoholic beverages, when consumed in their standard serving sizes, contain about the same amount of alcohol. That is, an average drink = 5 ounces of wine = 12 ounces of beer = 1 1/2 ounces of whiskey = 0.6 ounces of pure alcohol. That would be about *three times* the alcohol contained in an 8 ounce cup of diluted wine in Bible times. Clearly wine today is *not* the same as wine in the Bible.

A second important difference is the purpose for using alcoholic beverages. In Bible times the purpose was to purify drinking water. In our world good drinking water is usually available. Instead, most people who drink alcoholic beverages today do so either because they like the effect of the alcohol or because they want to be accepted by others. Alcohol today is not so much a beverage as it is a planned intoxicant— exactly the use prohibited in the Bible. With the higher levels of alcohol, intoxication and even alcohol dependence can be difficult to avoid. Currently there are an estimated 10 million alcoholics in the United States and another 10 million are categorized as problem drinkers. National surveys reveal that alcohol is involved in as many as 65 percent of the murders committed in the United States, 50 percent of the assaults, 35 percent of rapes, 55 percent of domestic violence, 60 percent of child abuse cases and 60 percent of all traffic fatalities. The use of alcohol in our society is a raging menace, far different from anything imagined, permitted or encouraged in the Bible.

The Problems of Drinking

Both in the ancient world and in the modern world there were and are serious problems associated with alcohol. The Bible recognizes these problems and urges God’s people to avoid them.

Personal Problems

Those who love wine are susceptible to *loss of resources* (Prov. 21:17) as they spend their money and time on its purchase and pleasure. The annual consumption of alcoholic beverages in the United States has reached 2.7 gallons of pure alcohol for every person 14 years of age or older, the equivalent of 591 beers each, a substantial financial expenditure.

The use of alcohol also causes the *loss of discernment*. Isaiah knew of individuals who “erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in

vision, they stumble in judgment” (Isa. 28:7). Modern medical research has proven that even a few drinks impair mental ability.

The *loss of control* is probably the most dangerous result of alcohol use. Even a godly individual like Noah found that alcohol can lead to sin, shame and family divisions (Gen. 9:21). Today the loss of control seen in drunken driving is a serious problem facing our nation.

Spiritual Problems

God’s Word associates serious spiritual problems with the use of alcohol— problems that ought to make any believer shudder. First, wine is on the same level with sexual immorality in its ability to turn the heart of a person away from the Lord (Hos. 4:11). That is, it can cause a *lack of love* for God. Second, it can promote a *lack of service* for God. Matthew 24:48-51 pictures a servant who loses sight of the Lord’s return and turns to drinking instead of fulfilling his service for the Master. Third, the abuse of alcohol can indicate a *lack of relationship* with the Lord. Drunkards are regularly included in the New Testament lists of those who shall not “inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:10). Should God’s people be playing with such a dangerous substance?

The Prohibitions of Drinking

So far it is clear that alcoholic beverages come with a serious set of problems that would seem to be sufficient to convince any believer to abstain. Scripture also contains some clear commands concerning drinking that turn this issue into a matter of obedience or disobedience.

General Prohibitions

Christ frequently warned His disciples to be alert for His Second Coming. Together with the pleasures and cares of this life, drunkenness can dampen our expectation and weaken our preparation of Christ (Luke 21:34). Do not let alcohol *divert your attention* from Christ!

The influence of alcohol on *our* lives is not the only consideration. Given the weakness and inability of so many to withstand and control the effects of alcohol, God commands us to abstain lest we corrupt others (Rom. 14:21). Do not let alcohol *destroy your brother!*

Certainly no one ever took his first drink expecting or planning to become an alcoholic. There is a subtle deception about alcohol that leads people to believe that nothing bad will happen to them. Scripture says the one who believes that lie is a fool (Prov. 20:1). Do not let alcohol *deceive you!*

Specific Prohibitions

While the Bible does not prohibit the use of wine for people in general (assuming the proper dilution), there are three classes of people for whom no amount of alcohol is allowed. The *priests* serving in the tabernacle were not to use alcohol lest it hinder their ability to communicate the truth of God’s Word to others (Lev. 10:9- 11). *Kings* were not to use alcohol lest it distort their ability to discern what is right (Prov. 31:4, 5). *Nazarites* were not to use alcohol lest it deter their dedication to the Lord (Num. 6:3).

Those are not outdated Old Testament categories. God has designated us “kings and priests” (Rev. 1:5, 6) and calls on us to dedicate ourselves to serve Him (Luke 9:23). Certainly God’s standards for His kings, priests and dedicated servants today are at least as high as they were then. The only question is, “Are we willing to submit to His will and His Word?” Consider carefully the apostle Paul’s exhortation:

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof (Rom. 13:12-14).

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Strong drink was forbidden in the Bible.²

- Leviticus 10:9
- Numbers 6:3
- Deuteronomy 29:6
- Judges 13:4, 7, 14
- I Samuel 1:15
- Proverbs 20:1; 31:4, 6
- Isaiah 5:11, 22; 24:9; 28:7; 29:9; 56:12
- Luke 1:15

In our day and age, we think of a strong drink as something with a high alcohol content, such as whiskey or vodka. However, the ancients knew nothing of distilled alcohol. To the writers of the Scriptures, *strong drink* did not mean bourbon or tequila; it referred to *unmixed wine*. William Patton wrote, "As to distillation, by which alcoholic liquors are now principally obtained, it was utterly unknown to the Hebrews, and, indeed to all the world in ancient times."^[i] Secular writers have recorded the same conclusions.

"Neolithic farmers soon learned to ferment their newly domesticated grains and grapes. Biblical accounts of early man mention alcohol some 250 times—usually wine, but beer and vinegar as well. Some versions talk about strong drink, but that's misleading. Distillation was a medieval invention. No one made really strong drink before the 13th century."^[ii] However, another source indicates that the first written account of alcohol distillation was recorded at a medical school in Salerno, Italy.^[iii]

Another issue, which might be misleading to modern readers, is the fact that several Biblical passages differentiate between wine and strong drink. The modern reader would naturally be inclined to think that the author is differentiating between wine (as we know it today) and strong drinks such as whiskey or vodka. That is not the case. The difference is really between wine (mixed with an appropriate ratio of water) and strong drink (unmixed wine). To the ancients, unmixed wine WAS the strongest drink known to man.

In light of the ancient practice of mixing wine with several parts of water, the **alcoholic content** of the drink is another issue to be considered. The argument is made, "They drank wine in the Bible times. We can drink wine today too." This analogy is faulty. Consider the following chart of alcoholic content in drinks today:

- Modern wine has between 9-11% alcohol
- Brandy has 15-20 % alcohol
- Liquors usually have between 40-50 % alcohol
- Some extra hard liquors can be 90 proof

That which is on the LOW end of alcoholic content today is what used to be called "strong drink." What we call strong drink did not exist in Bible times.

² <https://www.salembible.org/wine-strong-drink-in-the-bible-part-4/>

To compare apples with apples, it is necessary to take the wine sold in stores today (9-11% alcohol) and dilute it with between 3-10 parts of water. Even if we take one of the stronger wines (11% alcohol) and dilute with the lower end of the water ratio (three parts water), we still end up with a drink which has an alcoholic content of only about 2-3%. If one uses a ration of 5-10 parts water, the alcoholic content becomes negligible. What the ancients actually drank would be considered today a sub-alcoholic drink by today's standards.^[iv] That which is sold in stores today as wine would have been considered *strong drink* by the ancients and those who drink it unmixed were considered barbaric. Comparing modern wines and modern practices to ancient wines and ancient practices is NOT comparing apples to apples.

- The distillation process in biblical times vs. the distillation process in modern times. (Article by Stein)³

Strong drink was forbidden in the Bible.

The sin of drunkenness has consequences.

- Mental consequences (Isaiah 5:11; Prov. 23)

I do not agree with the argument that Dr. Reimers makes regarding the “divine imperative” in Proverbs 23. When I served with him at Cornerstone Baptist, he preached that the imperative in Proverbs 23:31 to “look not thou upon the wine...” is a direct command from God that is binding on all believers of all time. I understand Proverbs 23 from the context of Solomon speaking to the nation of Israel using the vehicle of poetry. Of course, a prudent Christian would take heed to avoid unmixed wine based on the warning provided to us in Proverbs 23 about the effects of drunkenness.

- *Generational consequences (Gen. 9:20-25; 19:30-38)*

Genesis 9:20-25

²⁰ Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard.^[a] ²¹ He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. ²² And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. ²³ Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. ²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said,

“Cursed be Canaan;
a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”

Genesis 19:30-38

³⁰ Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters. ³¹ And the firstborn said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. ³² Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our

³ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1975/june-20/wine-drinking-in-new-testament-times.html>

father.” ³³ So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

³⁴ The next day, the firstborn said to the younger, “Behold, I lay last night with my father. Let us make him drink wine tonight also. Then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father.” ³⁵ So they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. ³⁶ Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. ³⁷ The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab.^[a] He is the father of the Moabites to this day. ³⁸ The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi.^[b] He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.

- *Mental consequences (Isaiah 5:11; Prov. 23)*
- *Generational consequences (Gen. 9:20-25; 19:30-38)*

- *Relational consequences (Lev. 10:1-11; Esther 1).*

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- *Eternal consequences (I Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21)*

I Corinthians 6:9-10

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous^[a] will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,^[b] ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy,^[a] drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do^[b] such things^[c] will not inherit the kingdom of God.

***Strong drink was forbidden in the Bible.
The sin of drunkenness has consequences.***

The solution to drunkenness is simple.

- Be filled with the Spirit (controlled by). (Eph. 5:18b; I Cor. 6:12; Gal. 5:22-23)
 - Be controlled by the Holy Spirit. (18b; I Cor. 6:12 & 2 Peter 2:19)
 - **Filled (*plēroō*) [verb, present, passive, imperative, second person, plural]:** to make full, to fill, complete, to satisfy, to overflow
 - **Spirit (*pneuma*):** breath, breeze, wind, God the Holy Spirit

⁴ <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2015/10/28/does-the-bible-condone-alcoholic-beverages/>

- Be concerned for the weaker brother. (I Cor. 8:7-13)

⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating[Ⓜ] in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged,[Ⓜ] if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers[Ⓜ] and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

- Be aware of your identity as followers of Jesus. (Prov. 31:4; Lev. 10:10; I Peter 2:9)

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While the Bible does not prohibit the use of wine for people in general (assuming the proper dilution), there are three classes of people for whom no amount of alcohol is allowed. The *priests* serving in the tabernacle were not to use alcohol lest it hinder their ability to communicate the truth of God's Word to others (Lev. 10:9- 11). *Kings* were not to use alcohol lest it distort their ability to discern what is right (Prov. 31:4, 5). *Nazarites* were not to use alcohol lest it deter their dedication to the Lord (Num. 6:3).

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- Be willing to make a call: (1) in your home: Jonadab to his sons...the Rechabites [Jer. 35:14]; (2) at your work: (let your light shine... avoid cloudy thinking... (I Cor. 6:12 & 2 Peter 2:19)

Application:

- Be filled with the Spirit (controlled by). (Eph. 5:18b; I Cor. 6:12; Gal. 5:22-23)
- Be concerned for the weaker brother. (I Cor. 8:7-13)
- Be aware of your identity as followers of Jesus. (Prov. 31:4; Lev. 10:10; I Peter 2:9)
- Be willing to make a call: (Jer. 35:14)
- Be honest about the difference between the alcoholic content in drinks of today compared to the alcoholic content in biblical times... AVOID EXCESS BY AVOIDING ALCOHOL!!!

⁵ Ibid