

WINE AND THE BIBLE:
CHRISTIANITY'S SCANLON ERROR
Message 2

INTRO: In our last message I set out before you the Scanlon case and in the title I've given to these messages I have called Christianity's view of wine in the Bible the Scanlon error. So let me refresh our memories. Chicago policeman Richard Scanlon had been shot. In connection with the crime a man by name of Dixon was in custody. Piece by piece, item by item, witness by witness, the evidence tightened a noose around Dixon's neck. There were fingerprints and a weapon, eyewitnesses and a motive, a wounded cop and a defendant with a history of violence. Now the criminal justice system was poised to trip the trap door that would leave Dixon dangling by the weight of his own guilt.

So what is the Scanlon error? Well, since I coined the term, I guess I have the right to say what it means. Scanlon, who was guilty, was made a hero; and Dixon, who was innocent was jailed because the facts seemed so obvious that it could only be an open and shut case. The case simply did not deserve further investigation. Only a fool would have tried to uphold Dixon's innocence. The Scanlon error sets the criminal up as a hero, and convicts an innocent man and sends him to prison. And what is the reason for such injustice? Well, the case is so obvious that it is not worth time and money to investigate. That is what I call the Scanlon error.

That is how I see Christianity's view of wine in the Bible. From all appearances and from the obvious evidence, the case does not deserve much study. Even a cursory reading of the Bible will show that God approves of moderate drinking. Even a novice in Scripture could come to the right conclusion, which of course is that consuming alcohol with moderation is perfectly acceptable biblical behavior.

Now let me tell you how I plan to cover this topic of wine and the Bible. First we will look at the various views that are held by Christians on this topic. Next we will look at the kinds of wine spoken of in the Bible. From here we will look at the main words that have been translated 'wine' or as alcoholic drinks in the OT. From here we will look at the importance of wine in the Bible, giving reasons why the preservation of wine was necessary and methods of preservation. Then we will look at those passages that

speak of wine bringing about a merry heart. What does this mean? We cannot leave out in this series a look at the most difficult texts on this topic, such as I listed in message 1. Then I want to put all that information together and give the major points of evidence against fermented wine being approved by the Lord. This plan may change somewhat, but those are the present plans.

So before we go to the Scriptures, to see what they say, let us consider the various possible views one may hold on wine in the Bible, which of course will begin with the common view that social drinking has God's divine stamp of approval.

I. VIEWS OF WINE IN THE BIBLE

A. The Bible Allows Intoxicating Drinks

Now I have said that one can take one of several positions regarding alcoholic beverages as far as the Bible is concerned. The first we will look at is point A in your notes (read). McClintock and Strong's cyclopedia, which was done over 100 years ago (1895) and one of the most comprehensive works I know of, takes the position that drinking fermented beverages is acceptable behavior for the Christian, if done in moderation. Let me read to you from their introductory material: "We propose here to treat it (the subject of alcohol) in the light of Scripture, history, and morals, unbiased by the disputes into which learned and good men have allowed themselves to fall upon the subject... In most of the passages in the Bible where *yàyin* (wine) is used (83 out of 138), it certainly means fermented grape-juice, and in the remainder it may fairly be presumed to do so. In four only (Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 11:10¹² [Jer. is an erroneous ref.]; Lamentations 2:12) is it really doubtful. In no passage can it be positively shown to have any other meaning. The corresponding English word "wine" properly means "the fermented juice of the grape." It always has this meaning, except when expressly modified by the immediate connection, in which it is used. The same is true of its equivalent congeners-Greek, *oivos*;" (pg. 523).

There you have the so-called unbiased view of McClintock and Strong. This is also the view of many

other teachers of the Word of God. I asked my daughter to do some research on internet on the topic and she said, "Dad, I don't think you'll get much help from the internet." I did not expect help. I was looking for information, and I got a lot from just a few printouts she gave me. She will be surprised what I found in that material that will actually help me. Even the secular writers were a great help to me in the case that I will be presenting.

So what is this view that allows for moderate drinking? It says one may drink a little fermented drink and God's divine stamp of approval is on it from the Bible.

This view is what I have called Christianity's Scanlon error. In the quote I read for you is a very obvious Scanlon error. That error is the result of coming to a conclusion without proper research because the answer seems so obvious or because of preconceived ideas. I will point this error out later in this series.

In conclusion to this point, let me say that the view that God allows social drinking is by far the majority view among Christians, and in our day, it is once more gaining ground by leaps and bounds.

B. The Bible Does Not Allow Intoxicating Drinks

On the other hand, there is the view that all fermented drinks are bad and forbidden by the Word of God. It is this view I will be presenting in this series. Nor can I say that I am unbiased. If someone said, "Would you do an unbiased study as to whether it is OK to lie" I would have an impossible task on my hands. My understanding of the righteous character of God would not allow me to do an unbiased study of such a topic. When it comes to wine, and whether it is OK to drink fermented liquor, an unbiased study is impossible for me. Let me say this however, that I will not defend something where I have to go against my own better judgment or against things I recognize as facts from the information I find.

Now I might say as well, that I believe the groundwork of the matter of this subject must be, and

I believe may be found in the OT, for the NT does not seek to change the view of the OT but is rather a continuation of the same. I might go further and say that I believe this subject can be settled in the Torah alone, in the first five books of the Bible.

Many years ago, when I was a student at Prairie Bible Institute I came across a small book called, "Bible Wines or the Laws of Fermentation", by William Patton. In that book I heard the whisper of an informant. When I was teaching at a certain place here in La Crete I talked about this book and expressed my desire to be able to get a hold of that book. A young man at that Bible study said, "I've got the book. It was given to me by someone else." I then got an address of a Bethel Baptist Print Ministry that has republished this book, and now possess the book. In this book, came to me the whisper of an informant. I recommend it to you and will be making it available in the church library.

What is this second view, the one I will be seeking to uphold from the Bible? It is this: It is wrong to drink alcoholic beverages. It is a sin that needs to be repented of.

C. The Bible Allows for Intoxicating Drinks But...

There is yet another view that is held on this topic and that is this: "Yes, the Bible allows for Christians to drink alcoholic beverages moderately, but because of the dangers of alcohol it is not wise to do so." You see, among these are godly people who have seen that the Scriptures obviously allow the consumption of alcohol, at least a little. And yet they have seen the devastation caused by alcohol. Now they are between a rock and a hard spot. And the way they handle this dilemma is to say, "Yes, the Bible allows for Christians to drink alcoholic beverages moderately, but, it is not wise in our times to do so."

One of the printouts my daughter gave me from her research on the internet was called, "A Little Whine: Is the Bible Contradictory on Wine and Alcohol?" by James Patrick Holding. He gives a lot of good information and has done a good job and has well

researched the biblical words dealing with this topic. He argues firmly that the Scriptures allow for moderate drinking. Then, at the end he gives five final conclusions. His paper is written to refute the Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy, which makes the claim that the Bible contradicts itself on this subject. Here are his final five conclusions, though he has concluded that an unbiased view must agree that God condones moderate drinking:

1. Drunkenness as a condition is condemned.
2. The vast majority of cites give no moral advice one way or another.
3. Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy isn't considering most of the cites it uses in their proper context.
4. Moderate consumption is not condemned, except within the context of certain persons and certain times. (In other words, moderate drinking of alcoholic drinks is OK.)
5. **In light of the times, even moderate consumption of alcohol by a Christian is not a good idea.**

This writer spent a lot of research time and came to the conclusion that the Bible allows consumption of intoxicating beverages. But in the end says, "But, it's not a good idea to do so." Question: What kind of God does he have? Does he have an all knowing God who knows everything and only allows what is good for man? Or does he have a God who did not really know how dangerous alcohol would some day become? As if it is more dangerous today than 4000 years ago.

Another internet article, written by Wayne Blank, concludes that it is allowable to 'very moderately consume alcohol.' As a matter of fact, a bottle of red wine lasts him for 8 days. And then he says that those who for medical reasons might cause harm by it should not drink it, or if alcohol would conflict with their medication, or alcoholics who can't control themselves or those who are under age, these should not drink. Sounds like a risky drink right? But then he says, "I don't recommend that anyone consume, or start to consume, alcohol, but at the same time I do not deny what the Holy Bible says is permissible among God's people who wish to make use of it - as did Jesus Christ Himself."

And so the conclusion of this view is that although God allows the use of alcoholic drinks, it is probably not a good idea to do so. It has with it many dangers and so the best policy, though God does not mind if you drink alcohol, is to not drink it because of its dangers. If God had been a little smarter, He would have spelled things out a little clearer, but since He did not know we would come to such dangerous days, now we have to be very careful. How do you like a God like that? A tad dangerous, wouldn't you say?

But many people are in this camp, I think, because of the Scanlon error. They have accepted as an indisputable fact the idea that God condones the use of alcohol. Now they are in a dilemma. So silence reigns in the pulpit on this issue. No one really wants to preach that God condones it, but few dare preach against it because, obviously the Bible allows for it.

D. I Prefer to Remain Ignorant on the Subject

There is yet one other position one might take, and that is this: I prefer to remain ignorant on the subject. If I should give study to this matter or listen to messages on it, that might tamper with my liberties and I prefer to keep them intact. Or one might conclude that being ignorant on the subject is better than having to spend a lot of time in prayer and study. Now this view is not a Scanlon error. This view is a typical error we are well acquainted with in our community. This error is precisely this: The less you know the better, because the less you will be accountable for. But let me say this: in the Bible, the sin of ignorance is still a sin.

So, with that, we begin our actual look at this subject in the Bible by considering the different kinds of wine spoken in the Bible that refer to the subject at hand.

III. KINDS OF WINE IN THE BIBLE

A. Unfermented Wine (Good Wine)

In law case I read to us from in the first message, Dixon was convicted, and it was an easy, open and shut case until an informant came along. In the next two points under kinds of wine, you will hear the whisper of an informant. If you have adopted the view that social drinking is OK, then I trust these two points will cause you to rethink this matter. I plan to cover the first point in this last part of this message and the second point in the next message.

Now let me make a statement that may come as a shock to your system, but I believe it is an indisputable fact: **Unfermented grape juice is called wine in the Bible!** If it is to drink and it comes from the grape vine, it is called wine! Now you may say, "Just a minute. You are bringing strange things to my ears." Well, I do plan to prove this. So let's go.

McClintock and Strong, who claim to be unbiased on the subject, and who hold that drinking alcohol is approved by God, and who see the word yayin (wine) as mostly speaking of fermented wine say this: "It may be at once conceded that the Hebrew terms translated 'wine' refer occasionally to an unfermented liquor; but inasmuch as there are frequent allusions to intoxication in the Bible, it is clear that fermented liquors were also in common use." Though that is a reluctant concession, it is a very important concession. That is an admission that the proposition I gave you is correct. So even these commentators concede, although somewhat reluctantly, that the Bible speaks of wine as the grape juice before it is fermented.

They later say, "In most passages in the Bible where yayin is used (83 out of 138), it certainly means fermented grape-juice, and in the remainder it may fairly be presumed to do so." James Patrick Holden, in an article, "A Little Whine" says of yayin, that "...in most contexts it clearly refers to alcoholic drink" (pg. 1).

Now we are barely into our studies and already we have a Scanlon error. The Online Bible program counts 134 references of the word yayin. I have printed those off, and the facts are that in by far the majority of its uses one cannot determine if the use

is to fermented or unfermented state. For example, in Genesis 9:21 we can determine from the context that this was fermented wine (read 20-21). But look at Genesis 14:18. Is this fermented or unfermented? Answer? The context does not indicate. Most uses of the word yayin are like this.

Now secular and biblical history is simply full of examples of grape juice being referred to as wine. Let me quote a number of sections from David Wilkerson's book, "Sipping Saints". He writes, "Horace, in 35 B.C., said, 'Here you quaff under a shade, cups of unintoxicating wine - this day sacred in the revolving year, remove the cork fastened with pitch from the jar which was set to fumigate...Take my Macaenas - all clamor and passion be far away.'" There you have unfermented grape juice called wine, over 2000 years ago.

"Plutarch, in A.D. 60 wrote, 'That filtered wine neither inflames the brain nor infects the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink.'" Wilkerson says, "Varro speaks of 'gathering wine'". That is a reference to grapes as wine. Cato speaks of "hanging wine". Again that is the grapes. Again he says, Columella and other writers who were contemporaries of the apostles, inform us that in Italy and Greece it was common to boil the wines..." Well, only a little study on this subject lets us know that boiled grape juice does not ferment, and yet it was referred to as wine. Examples are so plentiful that I will not spend more time on this. If you have a hard time believing this, then I simply challenge you to disprove it, and you will find it is so. If you wish to read more proof, I can give you plenty.

[Let me give you some evidence for that regarding the word wine. I am quoting from William Patton in the book, Bible Wines: "Aristotle, born in 384 B.C, says, 'The wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was contained, and to dissolve the scrapings in water'" (page 20). Now this was unfermented because it was thick, and yet it was called wine. (Note this in Wilkerson page 27 pgph 2.)

I quote Patton again, "Horace, born in 65 B.C. says, 'there is no wine sweeter to drink than Lesbian; that it was like nectar, and more resembled ambrosia than wine; that it was perfectly harmless, and would not produce intoxication.' (Anti Bacchus, p. 220). Lesbian wine was wine from Lesbos, Greece. It was known for its grapes. The word 'lesbian' as we know it comes from a woman who was from this place.]

So let me show you this from a story in Genesis 40. Here we find Joseph in prison. You know the story of the imprisonment of the butler and the baker. So let us read Genesis 40:9-11. Now this story does not tell us that the juice the butler put into Pharaoh's cup was called wine, but Josephus, who wrote 2000 years ago does. Now what this text does not do is call the grape juice wine. But there is much evidence that fresh grape juice was called wine. Let me read to you from the writings of Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote at the time of Jesus: 'He therefore said that in his sleep he saw three clusters of grapes hanging upon three branches of a vine, large already, and ripe for gathering; and that he squeezed them into a cup which the king held in his hand; and when he had **strained the wine**, he gave it to the king to drink, and that he received it from him with a pleasant countenance' (48)."

Josephus has no trouble calling the unfermented grape juice wine, and such it is, and I propose to you that to say that most uses of the word yayin in the OT refer to fermented grape juice is a first class Scanlon error. It is based on heavy bias, not facts.

(Wine as unfermented drink: See MacLeod pg. 12. Wilkerson pg. 26 -> Read from Patton pg. 30-31.)

CONCL: So, let us bring this message to a conclusion. What views may one take on our topic? 1. God condones the consumption of alcohol, but only in moderation, since it is a dangerous drink. 2. God does not allow the consumption of alcohol at all. 3. God allows the consumption of alcohol, but it is wisest to abstain from this liberty because of its dangerous tendencies. 4. Please don't bother me. I might come under conviction.

So here is the first proposition in this series that must

be understood in order to objectively consider our subject: **Unfermented grape juice is called wine in the Bible!** Any objective jury would have to agree to that proposition because the facts are all there to prove it. And having heard that, you have heard the first part of the whisper of an informant. It is a matter of fact that grape juice was referred to and viewed as wine in Bible times. One must stick his head in the sand to say that that is not so. And when we agree to this fact, then we have heard the beginning of the whisper of the informant. Just this fact alone, should stimulate interest for those who condone social drinking, to restudy this subject. But if this is not enough yet, I trust that after the next message, the informant's whisper will be so urgent that it will drive the objective student of God's Word to reinvestigate the view that God's Word approves social drinking.

Now you may say, "Well, if this is the case, you have some pretty fancy explaining to do on some pretty difficult passages." Well, I plan rather to be simply factual. As factual as possible.