

WINE AND THE BIBLE:
CHRISTIANTY'S SCANLON ERROR
Scripture: Judges 9:7-15
Message 8

INTRO: Wine and the Bible, what a topic! In the last message we sought to prove that wine or unfermented grape juice could be stored for a long time without fermenting. The evidence is clear. And maybe someone says, "Well, all that sounds fine and good. But if the wine of the Bible is supposed to be unfermented, how can unfermented wine cause people to be merry? Is this not something only fermented wine would do?" We might take as a text Judges 9:13 that was read for us earlier. The vine said, "Should I cease my new wine, which cheers both God and men?" It is this question we want to address in this message.

IV. RESULTS OF WINE IN THE BIBLE - Merriment

A. Problem regarding the word 'merry'

For the position I have taken, that the Bible condemns the use of alcoholic drink, I also have a problem to contend with, and that is this: Why does the word 'merry' often follow the drinking of wine if the wine they drank was not intoxicating?

First of all, let me say this: Israel was not always faithful in following God. It is clear that some Israelis did drink fermented wine. But because some drank fermented wine does not prove that God is OK with it. This is an important point. For example, Abraham, an Israeli, got drunk. Since he was a man of God, does that now mean it is acceptable to get drunk? Of course not. He had a child by Hagar because Sarah could not have children. Does that mean when one cannot have children one can take a concubine? Of course not. So because some Israelis drank fermented wine does nothing to prove drinking fermented wine is sanctioned by the Bible.

Second, if the Bible records that certain Bible characters drank enough to become merry from wine, that does nothing to prove that drinking a limited amount of fermented wine was OK by God. I have read a number of times in my studies, the statement that the Bible nowhere expressly forbids the drinking of

fermented wine. Since it is not expressly forbidden, to some that means the Bible condones it. But by the same token, I have read no clear statement in the Bible that expressly approves the drinking of fermented wine.

Third, somehow, when the Bible records that certain people drank wine and were merry, we take that to mean the merriment was from fermented drink. From that we conclude that it must be OK to drink some wine. But if that is so, then we must also agree that it is OK to drink enough wine to make us 'merry'. I wonder if most who approve social drinking would go that far.

So how do we deal with this idea of being merry from wine? Well, let me give several propositions regarding wine and being merry in the Bible.

B. Propositions regarding the word 'merry'

1. Proposition # 1

Here is the first proposition: Merriment which happens from drinking fermented drinks is caused by a degree of drunkenness.

Let me begin by asking this question: When is a person drunk? If a person had a teaspoon full of wine, would that be classed as drunk? (No.) If a person could not stand up without falling down, would that be drunk? (Of course!) Before the time of breathalyzer testing, police determined if one was too drunk to drive by making the person walk the line on the pavement. If one could not walk the line, then one's mental faculties were considered too impaired to be safe as a driver on the road. Would such a person be classed as drunk? (??)

Today police use the breathalyzer test. Because the poison of fermented drink is not eliminated from the body by the usual method, they can test the BAL, or blood alcohol level, by testing one's breath. The reason for that is because this poison is largely eliminated through one's respiratory system. So a person whose blood

alcohol level is .50 Or .60 will die from alcohol poisoning. A person whose blood alcohol level is .08 is considered too impaired to drive. Such persons think there is nothing wrong with them, but they can no longer make quick decisions because their mental capacities are impaired. So the traffic violation they are charged with is impaired driving. Question: Is such a person drunk? Well, I think we would have to agree that such a person is at least a 'little bit drunk'.

Question: Is it possible to be a 'little drunk' and 'more drunk'? Turn to 1 Samuel 25:36 (read, 'very drunk').

So I propose to you that as soon as one drinks alcohol one is a little drunk. And if the word 'drunk' seems too harsh, then let us call this person a little intoxicated or inebriated. The question is, how drunk, or inebriated or intoxicated am I? And let me ask further: Is it OK to be drunk enough to be merry? If you went to a home and there was liquor on the table and they were all laughing at almost anything, would you say that the Bible OK's that kind of drinking? Or would you say they are at least a little drunk?

If one says that it is OK to drink enough to be merry, then one has to agree that almost all the defenses in the body against getting drunk have been eliminated, in the OK stage. To keep from getting drunk after the 'merry' stage takes far more 'self control' than before that stage is reached. And how many who could freely reach that stage will not end up drinking more? I trust every parent who views their teenager in this stage of drunkenness knows that the danger is extreme. Furthermore, at this stage the inhibitions of the person have been suppressed by the alcohol to such an extent that they will easily fall into sexual sin, and that is often the outcome of this level of drinking.

2. Proposition # 2

Now I want to make a second proposition regarding the word 'merry': As there are two kinds of wine in the Bible, so there are two kinds of merriment. Let us consider these two kinds of being merry. First, there is merriment which is:

a. Induced by drugging

Drinking alcohol can make people happy or 'merry'. No need to prove that. But what kind of happiness is it? Is it real? Well, consider this, that alcohol is not only a poison, but in today's classification of drugs, alcohol is a drug because it is both a mind and mood altering substance. Let me quote from an internet source called "Alcohol Addiction", "Alcohol - including beer, wine, and hard liquor - are the most commonly used and widely abused psychoactive drug in the country. Alcohol is the most widely tried drug among teenagers. Alcohol is a potent nonprescription drug sold to anyone over the national legal drinking age."

So, how does this drug work? Well this same article says, "This drug is a tranquillizer and a member of the family of sedative-hypnotic drugs." So now that we know that alcohol is a drug, we get a much better idea of how it works. Let me quote again from the internet article I mentioned earlier, "Within moments of ingestion, alcohol reaches the brain where it: Stimulates and agitates, initially producing euphoria. Depresses and sedates, producing calmness and tranquility. Anesthizes. Induces a hypnotic state and sleep."

Let me give you an example. Turn to 1 Samuel 25:36 (read). Now for Nabal to be merry was very abnormal. 1 Samuel 25:3 says he was a sour or churlish man. The Hebrew word translated merry here is the word 'tob'. It means 'good.' He drank wine and got in a

good mood. So to be in a good mood was not normal for Nabal because he was a very sour, or churlish man (25:3). But under the influence of this drug, he all of a sudden got in a good mood.

Listen further to this article on how the drug element in alcohol works, "Alcohol quickly depresses inhibitions and judgment. As inhibitions are released the drinker may feel friendlier, more gregarious, and more expansive. The suggestion to 'have a drink and loosen up' is based on the biology of alcohol in the body. Sexual inhibitions may be released, which gives alcohol the reputation as an aphrodisiac..." Aphrodisiac means to arouse or increase sexual desire. I must ask again, does this sound like something God approves of? I have to date not found one thing positive about human consumption of alcohol. On the other hand, I am learning more all the time about how healthy grapes are for the body. Today, research on grapes for health is a big topic in the field of health. Everything from the stems to the skins and seeds of grapes has reports of use for health.

Now, since alcohol is a drug, a drug that initially produces the feeling of euphoria (all is well) and it depresses and sedates the inhibitions producing calmness and tranquility and it anesthizes, deadens the brain, and induces a hypnotic state, we can understand why it makes people happy. At least during a certain stage of drunkenness.

But this happiness is not real happiness. It is the state of a lie. The brain no longer gives the real picture and lies to the drinker. Let me illustrate. For many years my dad owned a sawmill. There were always new inventions and when the gang edger first came out, it was the deadliest piece of machinery ever invented in the sawmill. No headrig ever killed as many as the gang edger. There are still people alive today,

who have been maimed by these deadly edgers.

A man by name of Jake Elias worked for my dad. One day he put a cant, a log sawed on two sides, through this edger and it came back. One 2x4 board hit him in the thigh and one in the head. Well, they hauled him out on the back of a truck on a very rough road and got him to the hospital. For days his life hung by a thread. And his close relatives would go to the bar, the legalized drug store. And they would drink, until their brain put them in a state of euphoria. Day after day they drank, and then he died. And each time they drank they had to come back to reality and find out their own brain had lied to them. Jake was still dead and sadness was still a reality. But this is how this drug works. It is a liar, and God, who cannot lie, certainly did not make this drink.

So, the state of happiness induced by alcohol is not realistic. It is a state produced by the drugging of the brain. You see, this induced feeling of happiness is unreal, and every drinker finds that out after the drug wears off.

But there is another state of happiness that is:

2. Induced by the goodness of the grape

Patton, in his book on wine says on page 54: "There is a strange impression, very current in our day, that nothing can cheer and exhilarate but alcoholic drinks." Then he gives Psalm 4:7 (read). Now the word 'gladness' here is the same as the word 'cheers' in Judges 9:13. This is the passage that speaks of the wine that 'cheers' both God and men. Now there is no way we can read a verse like that without our preconceived ideas about fermented wine kicking in. But do these passages speak of fermented wine?

Well the word translated 'wine' in Judges 9:13 is not yayin. It is tirosh, which I believe means 'fruit'. The NKJV thus translates it 'new wine'. Young's literal translation says the same. Now, neither the fruit of the vine (grapes), nor the fresh juice from the grapes produce intoxication. Yet this fruit cheers both God and man!

Secondly, the word translated 'cheers' in this verse is 'samach'. It occurs 152 times in the Hebrew Bible. 95 times it is translated to rejoice. 45 times as glad; 2 times joyful; 2 times merry and 3 times in miscellaneous ways. This word could well be translated 'to rejoice' in these passages. Since I believe tirosh is fruit and the word 'cheers' might be translated 'to rejoice', one could well translate this verse like this: "Should I leave my fruit which causes both God and man to rejoice." The cheering or rejoicing that happens here is from grapes or unfermented grape juice!!

How does it make God rejoice? Well, it is performing the will of God. If the vine had obeyed the other trees in the parable, it would have ceased performing that for which God prepared it. God made the vine to produce grapes not rule over others. And how does it make man rejoice? Well, it is health for the heart and blood. In Israel, the rejoicing began right at vintage time. There was shouting during the time of the treading of grapes, which had nothing at all to do with inebriation or drunkenness!

So let me ask this question: Is there any historical evidence that unfermented wine cheers people up? Let me give some evidence from the historian Josephus, who wrote shortly after the time of Christ. This is with regard to the story of Joseph when he is in prison with the butler and the baker: "He (the butler) 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 later writes what Joseph said to the cup bearer about wine: "...for he (Joseph) let him (the butler) know that God bestows the fruit of the vine upon men for good which wine is poured out to him, and is the pledge of fidelity and mutual confidence among men, and puts an end to their quarrels, takes away passion and grief out of the minds of them that use it, and makes them cheerful." Now Josephus is speaking of unfermented wine for he says, "Thou sayest that thou didst squeeze this wine from three clusters of grapes with thine hands, and that the king received it..." (48). There is no way that the juice could ferment in that amount of time. Besides, it would do away with the need for a cup bearer, whose job it was to see to it that the king was not poisoned to death.

So what qualities does Josephus ascribe to unfermented grape juice? 1 It is a pledge of fidelity and mutual confidence among men. 2 It puts an end to quarrels. Does fermented wine do that? 3 It takes away passion and grief out of the minds of them that use it. Now fermented wine may take away grief for a while, but it certainly does not remove passion. Rather it may excite passion. 4 It makes them cheerful. Now this is unfermented wine, and Josephus is not biased by argument about whether it is OK to drink fermented wine or not. He is recording history.

Now turn with me to Psalm 104:15 (read 14-15). This text says wine makes glad the heart of man. The word 'glad' here is the same word translated 'cheers' when the vine said, "Should I leave my fruit, which cheers both God and man?"

Adam Clark comments on Psalm 104:15 like this: "And wine, in moderate quantity, has a wondrous tendency to revive and invigorate the human being. Ardent spirits exhilarate, but they exhaust the strength; and every dose leaves man the worse. Unadulterated wine, on the contrary, exhilarates and invigorates: it makes him cheerful, and provides for the continuance of that cheerfulness by strengthening the muscles, and bracing the nerves. This is its use. Those who continue drinking till wine inflames them, abuse this mercy of God.

Oil to make his face to shine That is, to anoint the body; and particularly those parts most exposed to the sun and weather. This is of high importance in all arid lands and sultry climates. By it the pores are kept open, and perspiration maintained.

Bread which strengtheneth man's heart. In hunger not only the strength is prostrated, but the natural courage is also abated. Hunger has no enterprise, emulation, nor courage. But when, in such circumstances, a little bread is received into the stomach, even before concoction can have time to prepare it for nutriment, the strength is restored, and the spirits revived. This is a surprising effect; and it has not yet been satisfactorily accounted for.

Three of the choicest and most important articles of life are here mentioned: WINE, for the support of the vital and intellectual spirits; BREAD, for the support of the nervous and muscular system; and OIL, as a seasoner of food, and for those functions so necessary for the maintenance of health..."

Now let me comment on his comments. He says, "And wine, in moderate quantity, has a wondrous tendency to revive and invigorate the human being." This is speaking of

unfermented wine. It is grape juice that has these qualities. Then he says, "Ardent spirits exhilarate, but they exhaust the strength; and every dose leaves man the worse." Fermented drinks exhilarate, but they exhaust. And the more one drinks, the worse it gets. Then to that he adds, "Unadulterated wine, (unfermented wine) on the contrary, exhilarates and invigorates: it makes him cheerful, and provides for the continuance of that cheerfulness by strengthening the muscles, and bracing the nerves. This is its use."

We have read and seen from Scripture passages that the vintage was a time of great joy in Israel and as far as I can find, that joy had nothing to do with drunkenness. So according to all of this, unfermented wine causes joy or rejoicing or health or happiness, but this is real, not induced by drugs.

C. The Hebrew Words Translated 'merry' (KJV)

Let me just briefly give you the three major words translated 'merry' in the OT. The first is tob. It is used 559 times in the OT and usually means good. Of those 559 times it is translated 'merry' 7 times. Then there is yatab, which basically means 'well' and it occurs 107 times and is translated 'merry' 5 times. And last, there is Samach which occurs 152 times and is translated 'merry' 2 times.

I have spent many hours on these words, only to put my findings into one sentence: These words may speak of both induced merriment or real merriment.

CONCL: So, in conclusion I want to report to you, what I believe to be another Scanlon error. It is this: When wine and being merry occur together, this merriment is always caused by intoxicating drink. When you read the Bible with the understanding that there are two kinds of merriment, it will go a long way in correcting the Scanlon error regarding wine in the Bible.

So, as there are two kinds of wine in the Bible, so there

are two kinds of merriment. One is induced and unreal, and caused by the drug we call alcohol. The other is real, and may be caused by many things, including the healthy drink, we call grape juice, and which the Bible calls wine. The one God, makes; the other man makes. Let me say this about alcohol. Alcohol never occurs naturally. Never. It must be made or manufactured. That alone does not make intoxicating drink wrong, but it does indicate to us that God did not make intoxicating drink.

So you may say, "Some of this is very tricky. It seems it could be read this way or that way; it could mean this or that." And that, is precisely what has created the Scanlon error. Since we are bent on making alcohol consumption acceptable, you know which way we will most naturally tip when things are dicey. And when the translators were already tipped that way, they increased the potential for the Scanlon error, which in turn has given divine approval to the consumption alcoholic beverages and reduced to nothing, the healthy use of grapes.

Now, the purpose of these eight messages thus far has largely been to prepare us for a look at the difficult passages in the Bible, if one holds the view that all alcoholic beverages are forbidden in the Bible; passages like John chapter 2, where Jesus turned water into wine. That is the plan for the next several messages which we will conclude by summing everything up under several major arguments.