

WINE AND THE BIBLE:
CHRISTIANTY'S SCANLON ERROR
Message 11

INTRO: We have now come to possibly the most used passage of Scripture that supposedly puts a divine stamp of approval on consuming alcoholic beverages. This passage is possibly the strongest fortress, proponents of social drinking flee to. And here they shut the door and take their stand. If this morning, I may perchance tear down this citadel or stronghold, and burn this refuge for some at least, that will be a miracle. You see, Jesus and His disciples have been invited to a wedding. And here, Jesus made about 120 gallons of wine, *oinos*. And it is claimed that this wine was fermented wine. If ever there was a Scanlon error, here, I believe, it is in a most classic form.

No doubt it will have been a wedding of some size to warrant Jesus making so much wine, especially as the wedding was already winding down, and still He made 120 gallons more. If this Cana is the one I suppose it is, then it was a village of some size. I suppose that in these villages, at least at some weddings, almost the entire village was present, and the wedding celebration could last for days. Besides, those of the village, there were invited guests such as Jesus and His disciples were. And it appears that Jesus' mother was on the food committee. So during the course of the wedding Jesus' mother told Him that they had run out of wine. Now you will understand that I take that as grape juice. Now what is more embarrassing to the hosts of a wedding than running out of either food or drink, and here they are out of wine.

Now there were six waterpots set for the washings the Jews must do to remain ceremonially clean. The NKJV says these pots contained about 20-30 gallons each. The OKJV says it was 2-3 firkins. It is not quite sure what this measurement was but a firkin is said to be between 7-9 gallons. Let us say they hold 20 gallons each and there are six pots and they are all filled to the brim as they were; then we have 120 gallons. That is like 3 45 gallon drums of drink. Now if they had run out, I suppose they have come near to the end of the wedding days, with maybe a day or two left.

Now let us say that this wine was fermented. And we know from verse 10 that all have already well drunk. And now

Jesus makes 120 gallons more. Now we have on our hands, not only the divine approval of social drinking, drinking a little, but we have divine approval on drunkenness! This is so absurd, that at bare minimum it is a Scanlon error, or should we say a scandalous error! The maker of the universe, the creator who said a drunkard will not inherit the kingdom of God condones drinking fermented wine with a miracle? And then says, "Have at it friends"? Can we even consider something so preposterous! If this is fermented wine, this passage does not only condone social drinking, it condones drunkenness, and there is no way around it.

So let us consider two very important phrases. These are the word translated 'well drunk' and the words 'the good wine.' We begin with the words 'well drunk'.

G. John 2

1. Well drunk

Let us begin our discussion of John 2, and the wine Jesus made by looking at the most difficult matter first. It is the word translated 'well drunk' in verse 10. Now you might by now well know that we have to ask, "What is the original Greek word"? since this is a NT passage. Well, fasten your seat belts, and hang on and I will tell you. It is *methuo*. "Well," you might say, "that wasn't so bad. What does it mean?" Well, if you check Strong's Concordance, it says it means 'to be drunk'! That is also its definition in numerous other Greek word study tools. That is also its translation in all six of its other occurrences in the NT.

So let us begin by taking the view that the Jews used fermented wine at weddings and Jesus made more fermented wine at this wedding. Then let us take the usual translation 'drunk' of the words 'well drunk'. Then let us consider that the verb is a passive, subjunctive, aorist Greek verb. Now let us translate it in light of this: "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have been made drunk, then they set out the inferior."

What we have now is a whole bunch of drunks. Do

you think Jesus would attend a wedding like that? And then we insist that the 'good wine' Jesus made was fermented, and that the people were already drunk when He made 120 gallons more. Is that even something we can consider? What kind of God do we have here? Here, His only, holy, sinless, spotless, perfect Son is at a wedding. The people are drunk and his mother says, "Oh, dear Son. These people are now drunk but we have a very embarrassing situation, they are out of wine. Would You please do something about this terrible situation? They need more alcohol. What a ruined wedding this will be if they cannot get a little more drunk. You came to this wedding knowing that we Jews get drunk at all our weddings. And when we are well drunk, then we bring out the wine we can't taste so well anymore, and we get even more drunk. Oh, this is dreadful. Son, can do something about this very humiliating circumstance. Please, would you make some more alcohol for us?"

And just what does the Bible say about drunkenness? Listen to a few Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21 those who practice drunkenness will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now if Jesus had made fermented wine and said, "Listen, this stuff is poisoned. It is a drug. I expect that all expecting mothers will not drink this. All children should, abstain. And the rest of you, please take it easy" we might have one thing. But to make 3 45 gallon drums of intoxicating wine and say nothing, is so un-Christ-like, it is so un-God like, I cannot imagine how we, as Christians are so readily persuaded that He made fermented wine.

I discussed John 2 with my son. He said, "If this was the only passage in the Bible to speak about wine, I would be thoroughly convinced this wine was not alcoholic." His point was that for Jesus to be truly the Messiah as He claimed, He could not have made more fermented wine when people were already half or completely drunk. His argument was on the basis of Theology proper. It was based on who God is. I agree with him.

Now listen to what the Bible says about temptation in James 1:13 "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." One thing we can rest assured of, if Jesus made fermented wine here after the people were already drunk, He tempted them beyond measure! But we can rest assured that what Jesus made here was NOT fermented wine!

I propose to you that if the Jews drank fermented wine at their weddings, and in this case they were already sloshed, and Jesus made a minimum of 120 gallons more, He is not God; He is not truly the Messiah; He is not holy; He does tempt people to sin as the Scripture says He does not; He does not qualify to die for the sins of the world and then say: "Be ye holy as I am holy: or "Follow after holiness, without which no one will see the Lord"; or "A drunkard will not inherit the kingdom of God"!!!

So how do we explain this problem? Well, I take you first to the "Theological Dictionary Of The NT" edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. This is not among the most conservative of word study tools but they give the definitions of all the Greek words with the same root as our word. They give the definition of its use outside the NT and drunkenness is its meaning. Then they give its use in the NT. Here is how it reads, "...methuon and methuskomai mostly have the literal sense 'to drink' (cf. Jn. 2:10) or 'to be or get drunk'" (pg. 576). We see then that not all scholars are agreed that it only means to be drunk. Patton, in his book on wine makes a full argument that methuon does not always mean to be drunk on pages 77-79 for those who wish to read more.

There is another line of reasoning that supports that the word methuon may mean something other than to be drunk in John 2:10. I spoke some time ago with one of our Bible school teachers about Bible interpretation. And we discussed word studies. And at one point in our discussions on

Bible interpretation, I told him that I believe that sometimes when the NT uses a Greek word we must understand the Hebrew thinking behind the idea, and not lean wholly on the meaning of the Greek word. I then gave as an example the word *makarios*, in Matthew 5, where over and over it says, "Blessed are the..." etc.. The word blessed is the Greek word *makarios*. It has the idea, I think, of 'happy'. But the meaning is that of one of two Hebrew words usually translated 'blessed'. It is the word 'asher'. So I mentioned to him what I believed the Hebrew word 'asher' means and over his years as a Hebrew and Greek scholar had come to basically the same view.

When I wrote my doctrinal statement and major paper for the bachelor of Theology degree at Prairie Bible Institute, I was examined by several professors. And at a certain point one of the professors took exception with the wording of a crucial point, and I took exception with him and defended the correctness of my statement. We went back and forth for some time and then he said, "Phil, do you speak German?" I told him that I grew up speaking German. And he said, "That explains your wording here." Then he said that thinking as a German, my statement was acceptable. Those who speak two or more languages know what I am talking about.

Now, as to the word 'methuo', I believe not only that it does not always mean to be drunk, but the thinking behind the word is Hebrew. Some messages ago, I spoke to you on the words, shaykawr and shawkar. I believe the Hebrew word behind the Greek word methuo is shawkawr, and would be translated, "when guests have been satisfied to the full, or satiated."

Listen now to John Gill, a Hebrew and Greek scholar who, by the way, also believes that the wine Jesus made was fermented, on what he says about this word *methuo*, "**and when men have well drunk**; not to excess, but freely, so as that they are exhilarated; and their spirits cheerful, but their brains not intoxicated: so the word, as answering to the Hebrew word is שָׂכַר, used by the Septuagint in **#Ge 43:34 So 5:1,**"

I do not have time to argue the inconsistencies in his argument for fermented drink, but I believe he is correct that the Greek word here answers to the Hebrew shawkawr. Patton, in his book on wine agrees that methuo does not always mean drunk, and he also gives the word 'to satiate' as the best translation for shawkawr.

I tried the word 'satisfy' for every occurrence of the Hebrew word shawkawr and the Greek word methuo and it works in every reference. In references where the satiation is brought about by alcohol, it could well be translated drunk, but not where the satiation is from grape juice or other drinks.

Now the Hebrew, shawkawr answers to the Greek word methuo. When the Jews translated the OT into Greek, they used the word methuo, to translate the word shawkawr. So I'd like you to see this in several key passages in the Old and New Testaments (Gen. 43:34 and SofS 5:1). You surely would not want to translate the word shawkawr as drunk in these passages. We will look in a later message at the word methuo in 1 Corinthians 11:21.

Now Patton argues that the word methuo may mean to satisfy **without** the idea of drunkenness. He gives a number of occurrences of the word methuo in the LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, and his comment goes like this: "A large collection of such texts illustrating the usage of *methuo*, will be found in the works of Dr. Lees, vol. ii, showing its application to food, to milk, to water, to blood, to oil, as well as to wine. - Bib. Com. p. 34Q." Patton gives the following verses in the Septuagint as proof; Genesis 43:34; Psalm 23:5; 36:8; 65:10; Jeremiah 31:14; Song of Solomon 5:1 and Proverbs 5:19.

So does the word 'methuo' necessarily have to mean drunk in John 2:10? The answer is a resound, "No!" I want to give one last bit of evidence for that, and that is how John 2:10 has been translated. In the following 20 translations I have in my library, only two allow for

drunkenness! Here is how they translate:
 KJV.....have well drunk
 Darby.....have well drunk
 ESV.....drunk freely
 HCSB.....drunk freely
 Message.....had their fill
 NKJV.....well drunk
 RSV.....drunk freely
 Weymouth.....drunk freely
 Young's Literal.....drunk freely
 Williams.....drunk freely
 Beck.....drunk much
 ①Today's English Version..when people are drunk
 Kenneth Weust.....satiated
 Philipps.....plenty to drink
 NASB.....drunk freely
 The Promise.....have had plenty to drink
 *New Life Version.....have had too much to drink
 Noah Webster.....have well drunk
 ①NIV.....have had too much to drink
 Green's Interlinear.....well drunk

There we have 20 versions or paraphrases and of those one says they were drunk and two indicate they had too much alcohol to drink. Why do the translations generally not translate it as drunk in John 2:10, when in all other references they do? Because they know better than that Jesus would have made fermented wine in a setting where everybody was already drunk!

Conclusion? If the wine Jesus made was fermented, and the Jews drank fermented wine at weddings, then being satiated or having well drunk, they would have been 'well drunk'! If the wine was not fermented, they would simply have been satiated with the unfermented wine.

2. Re: The good wine

We have a second question to answer. The master of the wedding reception, with concern written all over his face, called the bridegroom. He said, "You're starting your marriage off on the wrong track right from the beginning, young man. Nobody does something like this. Why have you kept the 'good wine' until the last?"

Now here is the common understanding. People set out the good wine first. Then, when people are half sloshed, and their taste buds have grown dull, then they serve the wine that is inferior. So the good wine is fermented and gets you drunk and then, after getting half drunk you don't notice the poor wine. Now to me, that is almost unthinkable! How can we believe in a thrice holy God, entirely separate from sin and then believe that His Son would go and make 120 gallons more intoxicating wine when people are already drunk?

Let me deal with another matter. A question I have often heard is, which is the greater miracle, turning water into grape juice or turning water into wine? It would seem it would be a greater miracle to make fermented wine, since fermentation takes time.

Well, let me tell you wherein I believe the greatest miracle of all lies in this first of Jesus' miracles. David Hocking said he had watched the wine making process in Israel. He said every one who has been there and has watched knows what the good wine is. When they make wine, they dump the grape bunches, stems and all in the wine vat. So in a large vat there could be hundreds of pounds of grapes. Now these grapes begin to crush one another and before the grapes are trampled, fresh grape juice begins to run into the lower wine vat. This juice has no seeds, no skins, and no pulp. It is the clear sweet juice without the lees and he said that is the juice everyone wants. It is the best wine. It is the purest, sweetest grape juice you can get.

Now when vintage comes, everyone wants a little share of that wine. I do not know how much of this good juice they get for every gallon of grape juice. But I would suppose that for every 10 gallons of wine, maybe a quart or so is of this 'good wine'. And this special good wine would be kept for the most special of occasions, weddings of course being one of those.

Now tell me, how many grapes would you have to

trample before you would get 120 gallons of this good wine? I recommend to you that any Israeli who saw 120 gallons of this choice wine, and there was no regular wine, it was all good, would have marveled until he could marvel no more. There should be several thousand gallons of the regular wine for all the good wine they have here, but it is all good wine. Unbelievable!

Let me make another point. To read this passage now and insist that this 'good wine' from this first of miracles was decaying, fermented grape juice, strongly mixed with poison and full of drugs was the miracle performed by Jesus; is it not again, sacrilegious? What kind of God do we have if this was the case? Here is God's only Son at a wedding. The people are drunk and his mother says, "Oh, dear Son. These people are drunk but they are out of wine. Would You please do something about this terrible situation? They need more alcohol."

The NISBE explains the various kinds of wine in the Bible. On page 1069 of volume IV it explains 'sweet wine'. The article begins like this: Biblical terms for sweet wine are Heb. *yayin hatob*..." Well, *yayin hatob* is literally, 'wine, the good' or the good wine. That is what we are talking about in John 2. This article then gives Song of Solomon 7:9.

The Greek translation in the LXX is 'hos oinos ho agathos' literally, 'as wine, the good' or the good wine. Now you know that if this wine was sweet, it was not fermented because fermentation changes the sugar into a poisonous drug that is anything but sweet. The NISBE then goes on like this: "Rabinic sources mention a sweet wine produced by exposing the grapes in the sun for three days (that causes sweetening) and then treading them in the midday sun."

Patton, speaking of the method of subsidence as a way of keeping wine from fermenting says this: "Columella gives the recipe, 'Gather the grapes and expose them for three days to the sun; on the fourth, at mid-day, tread them; take the mustum

liximum; that is the juice which flows into the lake before you use the press, and when it has settled, add one ounce of powdered iris; strain the wine from its faeces, and put it into a vessel. This wine will be sweet, firm or durable, and healthy to the body" (pg. 27).

So, if Jesus miracles were done to give evidence that He was truly the Messiah, and He made 120 gallons of wine when the people were already, either drunk or at least half drunk, could we call that a good miracle? A good way to start off giving evidence that He is the Messiah?

But what was this first miracle that Jesus performed? He made the grape juice comes before the grapes are trampled. He made the wine that was a rare and prized drink by all, kept only for the most special of occasions. To make 120 gallons of this choicest of grape juice, without having the trampled wine as well, is a miracle among miracles! If anything gave evidence that He was truly the Messiah, this miracle does!

CONCL: So, how shall we then conclude? If the wine the Jews drank at weddings was fermented, and they had well drunk or were satiated by the time Jesus made more, then they were drunk already. And if Jesus made more wine when they were already drunk, then He condoned, not only social drinking but drunkenness. Such a conclusion is unthinkable.

But I believe, the facts are Jesus has come to a truly special occasion; one He fully approves of, a wedding. And on this wedding, He did a truly amazing miracle! After the people had eaten and were satiated, they ran out of wine, that is grape juice. And there, in the presence of such a crowd, He performed His very first miracle, a miracle that would be the beginning of many. And each miracle was performed to prove that He was truly the Messiah of God.

You see, from here Jesus will do many more miracles. And their purpose? To give evidence that He is truly the Messiah. A miracle that made drunk people more drunk, certainly would not be helpful to give evidence to the holy Messiah of Israel. But when we see what His miracle truly was, must we not conclude, like doubting Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"?