

The Bible And Alcohol: Moderation Or Abstinence? Part 1

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

Your responses to my last newsletter dealing with "The Endtime Sign of Increased Wickedness" surpassed my fondest expectations. I posted the newsletter on Wednesday morning, July 28, and by the end of the day I received over 200 notes of thanks. Thank you for taking time to express your appreciation for the Bible Studies I am emailing you bi-weekly. Your words of encouragement motivate me to put forth greater efforts in preparing timely studies that hopefully will help many to understand and experience more fully Biblical truths.

What a blessed experience it was for me last Sabbath, August 7, to present my ADVENT SEMINAR at Elder John Carter's COMMUNITY ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP in Glendale, California. It was surprising to see several participants who had driven 3 to 4 hours to attend the meetings. They had learned about the seminar from the announcement I made on the newsletter. The reception and response was marvelous. This was the third time I was invited to minister to this dynamic congregation, which is so eager to learn and to share their faith. If you find yourself in Los Angeles on the Sabbath, you may wish to worship at the COMMUNITY ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP church located 333 East Colorado Street in Glendale. You will not be disappointed.

For several years this congregation has raised millions of dollars to sponsor the evangelistic crusades of Elder John Carter, both in the USA and Russia. As a result of these evangelistic endeavors 12,500 persons have been baptized up to this moment in Russia and hundreds in America. For the next four weeks Elder John Carter is conducting a major crusade in the Russian city of Irkutsk, near Lake Baikal-a city of about one million people with no Adventist presence. About 20,000 people are attending the crusade every night in an open soccer stadium. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will empower Elder Carter with wisdom and physical strength to lead many sincere people into a saving relationship with Christ as a result of this crusade.

THE BIBLE AND ALCOHOL: MODERATION OR ABSTINENCE? Part 1

As a spin off from the last Bible study dealing with "The Endtime Sign of Increased Wickedness," I would like to devote the next three newsletters to the study of the Biblical teaching regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. The reason for this decision is the magnitude of the raging epidemic of alcohol use in American society in general and in our own Seventh-day Adventist church in particular. We noted in the previous Bible study that indulgence in drinking is one of the endtime signs given by Jesus-a sign which is being fulfilled in a special way today.

In the American society alcohol has become its number-one public enemy, costing over \$117 billion a year, disabling over 1,000,000 persons, and claiming at least 100,000 lives, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined.¹ The real human cost of alcohol transcends these statistical figures of dollars, disabilities and death. No one can count the real cost of alcohol to our society in terms of retarded children, violence in the home, child and spouse abuse, divorce, rape, robberies, murders, sickness and death.

In our Seventh-day Adventist church, long known as a champion of temperance and abstinence, alcohol consumption is steadily rising. I have been made forcibly aware of this trend by such things as: frequent pleas for help from pastors and members facing

drinking problems in their own congregations; published surveys in our church paper, ADVENTIST REVIEW, indicating that 58 percent of Adventist youth are experimenting with alcohol and 17 percent of Adventist College students are habitual drinkers;² lectures given on our college campuses on alcohol recovery by visiting non-SDA experts;³ classes on substance abuse taught on our campuses; counseling centers set up on our campuses specifically to help students with drinking problems; the establishment by our General Conference of two organizations to meet the challenge of the steadily rising drinking of alcohol within the church: (1) a Study Commission on Chemical Dependency and the Church, and (2) the Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, besides a series of articles in our church paper on chemical dependency and ways to cope with it.⁴

Confronted with the stark reality that alcohol consumption affects, not only our society in general but also our own Adventist church in particular, I felt that in good conscience I could no longer ignore this pressing problem. Thus, I devoted two years of my life reading books and articles dealing with theological, social and medical aspects of alcohol. The results of this research has been published in my book *Wine in the Bible. A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages*. The new edition of this timely book came off the press this past week and we are glad to make it available to anyone interested. Feel free to request your copy.

The book has been favorably reviewed by numerous scholars of all denominations. The reviews are available via email to anyone interested. For example, Bishop Jack M. Tuell, President of the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church, wrote: "*Wine in the Bible* offers the most convincing case that I have seen for the principle of abstinence from alcoholic beverages. It explodes the commonly held assumption that all references to wine refer to the fermented product."

The NATIONAL WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION, an organization to which Ellen White belonged, has sponsored an abridged edition of the book (64 pages) which they are currently distributing nationwide. Several state chapters of the National Council on Alcohol have ordered the book for local distribution. In the next three newsletters I plan to share the highlights of this research which addresses one of the most critical endtime issues. Those of you who are interested in a more comprehensive analysis of the Biblical teaching on the use of alcoholic beverages, are encouraged to read *Wine in the Bible* (307 pages).

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

Christian churches bear some responsibility for the alarming drinking problems of our time, because through their beliefs, teachings and preaching they are able to influence the moral values and practices of society, possibly more than any other institution. What pastors preach from their pulpits, and what Sabbath or Sunday school teachers teach in their classes regarding drinking, determines to a large extent the stand church members take toward the use of alcoholic beverages.

Those who teach that moderate drinking is a Christian liberty sanctioned by Scripture fail to realize that moderation is the first step toward immoderation. First, because alcohol is a habit-forming narcotic and second, because even moderate drinking impairs our capacity to make moral responsible decisions. We shall see that this is the fundamental reason for the Biblical imperative of total abstinence.

The history of the temperance movement in America indicates that the cause of total abstinence was most enthusiastically embraced and promoted by those evangelical churches which stood for the Biblical imperative of total abstinence such as the Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, New School Presbyterian, Salvation Army, some holiness movements and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their fervor was inspired by the conviction that Scripture teaches abstinence from intoxicating beverages rather than moderation in their use.

An important factor which has led most churches to abandon their Biblical position for total abstinence has been the growing impact of Biblical criticism, which has weakened the authority of Scriptures by reducing them to a product of its own cultural environment, and thus, lacking normative authority for Christians today.

The impact of Biblical criticism can be seen in the movement away from total abstinence to moderate drinking. This movement has affected even those churches which had once been the strongest advocates of total abstinence. The Methodist Church, for example, was by far the leader in the temperance reform. Today, however, it allows moderate drinking even among its clergy.

Billy Graham caused a great uproar across the United States when he condoned President Carter's position to serve only wine at the White House, by saying: "I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism . . . Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That wasn't grape juice as some of them try to claim."⁵ To calm the outcry from conservatives, Graham clarified his position, saying: "It is my judgment that because of the devastating problem that alcohol has become to America, it is better for Christians to be teetotalers except for medical purposes. . . . The creeping paralysis of alcoholism is sapping our morals, wrecking our homes, and luring people away from the church."⁶ It is evident from these statements that Graham recommends abstinence, not on Biblical grounds, but because of the medical and social problems caused by alcohol.

UNCERTAINTY AMONG ADVENTISTS

Seventh-day Adventists have not been immune to the weakening of conviction regarding total abstinence experienced by other evangelical churches. In recent years I have shared the highlights of this research at numerous Adventist gatherings in North America and overseas. To my surprise I found that some members and even some pastors think that certain Biblical passages allow for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. Consequently, they feel that it is better to promote abstinence on the basis of social and medical considerations.

Uncertainty on this subject is sometimes apparent also in SDA literature. For example, a 1982 special temperance issue of *Adventist Review* affirms: "Total abstinence is but one of a number of areas where the Bible gives no explicit directive."⁷ Ellen White hardly shared this uncertainty, as she emphatically states: "The Lord has given special directions in His word in reference to the use of wine and strong drink. He has forbidden their use, and enforced His prohibitions with strong warnings and threatenings. But His warning against the use of intoxicating beverages is not the result of the exercise of arbitrary authority. He has warned men, in order that they may escape from the evil that results from indulgence in wine and strong drink."⁸

BIOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL ETHICS?

Like Graham, those church leaders and scholars today who still advocate abstinence, they do it not because they believe that it is Biblically and morally wrong to drink alcoholic beverages, but because of their harmful effects upon both personal and public health. These people are guided by what may be called biological ethics rather than Biblical ethics, that is, by their concern over the threat of alcohol to human life (*biology*=study of life), rather than by their conviction of Biblical disapproval of alcoholic beverages.

This trend is influencing the approach of some Seventh-day Adventists to the problem of alcohol consumption. An example is the series of five articles on chemical dependency published in the *Adventist Review* on October 29 and November 5, 12, 19, and 26, 1987. Its authors discuss the problem of alcohol dependency primarily as a sickness rather than as a sin problem. The underlying assumption seems to be that the Adventist church should move away from viewing the drinking of alcoholic beverages as "a deliberate sin." Instead it should view alcoholism more as a medical than as a moral problem.

The adoption of the sickness model may have influenced our Adventist church to merge the TEMPERANCE DEPARTMENT with the HEALTH DEPARTMENT, thus treating alcohol consumption more of a medical than a moral or spiritual problem. Informing Christians about the harmful effect of alcoholic beverages to their health, self-image, family, and society is urgently needed. But will this provide a compelling motivation to remain or become abstinent? Will the simple knowledge of the harmful effects of alcohol adequately convince and convict Christians to be teetotalers?

In my view education alone is not enough. It takes more. It takes not merely biological ethics but primarily Biblical ethics. It is only when a Christian recognizes that drinking is not only a bad habit that can harm one's health, but also a transgression of a God-given principle to ensure our health and holiness, that he or she will feel compelled to abstain from intoxicating substances.

A personal example may serve to illustrate this point. When I visit my relatives in Italy, they will unmistakably welcome me by offering me a glass of wine, though they know very well that I am abstinent. If I refused that glass of wine on medical reason by saying: "Thank you, but I cannot drink because it is not good for my health," most likely they will laugh at me. They would retort, saying: "This is natural good wine from our own vineyard. We have drunk it all our lives and it has not harmed us!" The medical argument does not convince them. Thus, I use the Biblical and moral argument, saying: "Thank you but I do not drink alcoholic beverages because I would be violating a God-given principle for our physical and spiritual well-being." Surprisingly, when my relatives hear that drinking alcoholic wine violates a God-given moral principle, they immediately stop urging me to drink, and start listening to what God teaches us in His Word.

All of this means that our Christian position on drinking must be formulated not merely on the basis of biological ethics, but primarily on the basis of Biblical ethics. Our conviction must be rooted not only in the negative effects of drinking on the physio-social aspects of life, but also in the positive principles and admonitions regarding drinking given to us by God in His Word. The definition of our Christian position on drinking must begin by listening first to what God has to say about it in His Word, and then to what scientific research tells us regarding the effects of alcohol.

THREE MAJOR POSITIONS

What does the Bible teach us regarding the question of drinking? Does God approve the moderate use of alcoholic beverages? Does God disapprove of alcoholic beverages but permitted their use in the past because of human failings, as He allowed divorce (Matt 19:8), polygamy, and slavery? Does God totally disapprove of any alcoholic beverage, even if moderately consumed? These three questions represent three basic positions that have been articulated on the question of drinking. We shall designate them respectively as *moderationist*, *abstentionist*, and *prohibitionist*.

1. The Moderationist View

The moderationist view maintains that while Scripture condemns the immoderate use (abuse) of alcoholic beverages, it does approve their moderate use. This view is defended by such authors as G. I. Williamson in his book, *Wine in the Bible and the Church*,¹⁴ Kenneth L. Gentry in *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages*,¹⁵ and Norman L. Geisler, in his article "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking."¹⁶

The moderationist view rests on the fundamental assumption that the Bible knows only of fermented wine, which it considers a divine blessing to be freely enjoyed with moderation. Recent research, as we shall see, has challenged the "one wine" theory, by showing that the Hebrew and Greek words (*yayin* and *oinos*) which are uniformly rendered "wine" throughout the Scripture, can refer to either unfermented grape juice or to fermented wine.

By holding to the "one wine" view, moderationists argue that it was fermented wine that was exchanged as a gift between godly men (Gen 14:18-20); it was fermented wine that was brought as an offering to God (Ex 29:38, 40; Lev 23:13); it was fermented wine that the Israelites drank before the Lord when they brought their tithe to the temple (Deut 14:26); it was fermented wine that Jesus drank since He was accused of being a "drunkard" (Luke 7:33-35); it was also high-quality fermented wine that Jesus miraculously manufactured at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11); it was fermented wine that Jesus used to institute the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18) and that primitive Christians used at their communion services (1 Cor 11:21, 22).

We will show the weaknesses of each of these claims. At this juncture it suffices to make two general observations. First, moderationists fail to explain adequately those passages which unreservedly condemn not merely the abuse but even the use of wine (Lev 10:8-11; Judges 13:3, 4; Prov 31:4, 5; 23:31; 20:1; 1 Tim 3:2,3). How can Scripture approve the moderate use of fermented wine while denouncing it at the same time as "a mocker" (Prov 20:1) that "bites like a serpent and stings like an adder" (Prov 23:32)? How can the same wine be both commended and condemned in the Bible as good and evil? If the answer is the amount rather than the kind of wine consumed, then the Scripture should have given some hints regarding safe limits of drinking.

A second observation has to do with the nature of fermented wine or of any other alcoholic beverage. Could God legitimately recommend the moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages while knowing of their harmful effects? Moderation reduces but does not eliminate the ill-effects of alcohol. The same is true with tobacco. Smoking only half a pack instead of two packs of cigarettes a day reduces but does not eliminate the harm of nicotine. It is absurd and dangerous to imagine that God would have approved and encouraged the moderate use of a substance which intoxicates our organism, and impairs our mental judgment, irrespective of the amount consumed.

2. The Abstentionist View

Many conservative Christians recognize the problems inherent in the moderationist view, and consequently they espouse what we shall call the "abstentionist view." This view maintains that although God approved the moderate use of alcoholic beverages in Bible times, today it is preferable for Christians to abstain from them because of the many serious social and health problems related to alcohol consumption.

The abstentionist view is held, as noted earlier, by Billy Graham. Among the recent studies supporting this view are the reports on the use of alcoholic beverages released by the (former) Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod,¹² Harold Lindsell's book, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*,¹³ and Arnold B. Come's, *Drinking: A Christian Position*.¹⁹ According to this view, abstinence is not a matter of explicit Biblical teaching, but rather of prudence in view of the devastating impact of alcohol consumption in our society.

Our Seventh-day Adventist Church has adopted in recent times the abstentionist view, but on a somewhat different ground. It believes that God did not approve but merely permitted the use of alcoholic beverages. As stated in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* "Scriptural stories involving the use of alcoholic beverages may give the impression that God approved their use. However, Scripture also indicates that God's people participated in social practices . . . that God certainly did not condone. In interpreting such Scriptural passages, it is helpful to keep in mind that God does not necessarily endorse all that He permits."¹⁵

In its comment on Deuteronomy 14:26, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* explicitly affirms: ". . . Thus it was with 'wine' and 'strong drink.' Neither was strictly prohibited, except to those engaged in religious duties, and perhaps also in the administration of justice (Lev 10:9; Prov 31:4, 5) . . . In times past God often 'winked' at the gross 'ignorance' responsible for practices He could never approve."¹⁶

By viewing alcoholic beverages as permitted (though not approved) by God in past times of ignorance and perversion, Adventists find it necessary to appeal primarily to health reasons for their position on abstinence. An example is the Fundamental Beliefs 21, which deals with Christian behavior. It states: "Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well."¹⁷

The position that God allowed use of alcoholic wine as a concession to human failings is weakened by those passages which describe "wine" (*yayin*), not as a divine concession but as a divine blessing for the people to enjoy. For example, Psalm 104:14, 15 says: "Thou [God] dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine [*yayin*] to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart." Here "wine" is joined together with food and oil as a basic divine blessing which enjoys God's approval. Other examples are discussed in *Wine in the Bible*.

Those texts which recommend wine as a divine blessing for believers to enjoy stand in sharp contrast to those passages condemning wine as "treacherous" (Hab 2:5), and "a mocker" which "at the last . . . bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder" (Prov 20:1; 23:32). These two contrasting sets of verses present a puzzling Biblical paradox. How can the same inspired Bible both commend and condemn the use of wine? It is evident that the same wine cannot be both good and evil at the same time.

The solution to this apparent paradox cannot be found in the amount of wine ingested, as argued by moderationists, because, as will be later demonstrated, the Scripture commends and condemns wine itself, irrespective of the quantity used. Nor is the solution to be found by viewing the positive references to wine as divine concession rather than a divine approval, since often wine is presented together with food as a divine blessing for people to enjoy.

The solution is rather to be found in recognizing that the Hebrew and Greek words (*yayin* and *oinos*) which are uniformly translated "wine" can refer to both unfermented grape juice and fermented wine. The failure to note this double meaning of the Biblical terms for wine has led some to conclude that Bible teachings on drinking are contradictory. Lael Othniel Caesar, for example, concludes his thesis on "The Meaning of Yayin in the Old Testament," saying that while "the use of *yayin* was sometimes proscribed . . . there is Scriptural evidence that God gave Israel permission to consume intoxicants."¹⁸ The same view is expressed by The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary on its comment on Deuteronomy 14:26, as cited above.

3. The Prohibitionist View

The prohibitionist view maintains that the apparent contradiction between the Biblical approval and disapproval of the use of wine can best be resolved by recognizing that the same Hebrew and Greek words for wine (*yayin* and *oinos*) can refer both to unfermented grape juice and to fermented wine. Consequently the "wine" God approves of is uniformly unfermented grape juice and the "wine" He disapproves is fermented and intoxicating.

According to this view alcoholic beverages are prohibited in Scripture as unfit for human consumption. To partake of them is not only unhealthy but also immoral, because it represents the violation of a Biblical principle designed to ensure our health and holiness. This is the view that I have come to accept, after a careful examination of all the Biblical references to drinking "wine." I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Ellen White, who greatly influenced the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the adoption of the Biblical principle of abstinence, clearly espouses the prohibitionist view. The theological basis of her views is presented in chapter 8 of *Wine in the Bible*.

The most comprehensive and compelling defense of the prohibitionist view to date is the doctoral dissertation of Robert P. Teachout entitled "The Use of 'Wine' in the

Old Testament," presented in 1979 at the Dallas Theological Seminary. To this study I am greatly indebted for both sources and analysis, as indicated by my frequent references to it. Teachout later published in 1983 (revised in 1986) a 96-page popularized summary of the conclusions found in his 462-page dissertation, entitled *Wine. The Biblical Imperative: Total Abstinence*.¹⁹ Words fail to express my appreciation to Teachout, not only for making available to me a copy of his dissertation, but also for writing a "Foreword" to *Wine in the Bible*.

Another significant study supporting the prohibitionist view is Stephen M. Reynold's *Alcohol and the Bible*, published in 1983 by The Challenge Press. Reynold, who was one of the translators of the New International Version, offers valuable linguistic analysis of crucial words and phrases. Ernest Gordon's booklet, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine* (1944) provides a helpful exegetical study of the New Testament references to wine.²⁰ Other significant studies are cited in *Wine in the Bible*.

In presenting the results of my own investigation of the Biblical teachings regarding the use of alcoholic beverages, I feel deeply indebted to the scholars cited above and to many others who have broadened my understanding of this complex and vital subject. Though I often refer and give credit to the research done by other scholars, the views and conclusions presented are my own and I assume full responsibility for them.

A PREVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Before sharing with you in greater detail the findings of my research in the next two installments, it might be helpful to offer you a brief overview of the issues I have examined and the conclusions that I have reached.

Since the assumption that the Bible sanctions the moderate use of alcoholic beverages is dictated by the belief that the terms for "wine" in the Bible always mean "fermented wine," I began this investigation by ascertaining the Biblical and historical usage of such terms. The objective of the survey conducted in Chapter 2 was to ascertain if the terms used for "wine" in the Bible denote exclusively fermented wine or inclusively either fermented or unfermented wine.

I traced the usage of the word "wine" backward, from English, to Latin, Greek and finally to Hebrew. The survey shows that the four related words—*wine* in English, *vinum* in Latin, *oinos* in Greek and *yayin* in Hebrew—have been used historically to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. This significant finding discredits the claim that the Bible knows only fermented wine, which it approves when used moderately. The truth of the matter is that the Bible knows both fermented wine, which it disapproves, and unfermented grape juice, which it approves.

Building on the conclusions reached in Chapter 2, I proceeded in Chapter 3 to examine the reasons for the Biblical approval and disapproval of wine. What I found is that the positive references to "wine" have to do with unfermented and unintoxicating grape juice. Because of its natural and nourishing properties, grape juice was fittingly used to represent the divine blessing of material prosperity (Gen 27:28; 49:10-11; Deut 33:28), the blessing of the messianic age (Joel 2:18-19; Jer 31:10-12; Amos 9:13, 14), the free offer of God's saving grace (Is 55:1), the wholesome joy God offers to His people (Ps 104:14-15; 4:7), and the acknowledgment of God through the use of grape juice as tithe, offerings and libations (Num 18:12; Deut 14:23; Ex 29:40; Lev 23:13).

On the other hand, the negative references to "wine" have to do with fermented and intoxicating wine. Some of the reasons Scripture condemns the use of alcoholic beverages are that they distort the perception of reality (Is 28:7; Prov 23:33); they impair the capacity to make responsible decisions (Lev 10:9-11); they weaken moral sensitivities and inhibitions (Gen 9:21; 19:32; Hab 2:15; Is 5:11-12); they cause physical sickness (Prov 23:20-21; Hos 7:5; Is 19:14; Ps 60:3); and they disqualify for

both civil and religious service (Prov 31:4-5; Lev 10:9-11; Ezek 44:23; 1 Tim 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8).

A major objection against the view that Scripture approves the use of unfermented grape juice is the alleged impossibility in Bible times of preserving grape juice unfermented. Thus, I devoted Chapter 4 to probing this popular assumption by investigating the testimonies of ancient writers regarding the art of preserving fruits and wines in general and grape juice in particular. To my surprise I discovered that the ancients were far more knowledgeable in the art of preserving fruits and wines than is generally believed.

Contrary to popular opinion, the problems the ancients encountered in preserving fermented wine were as great as, if not actually greater than, those faced in preserving unfermented grape juice. To prevent fermented wine from becoming acid, moldy, or foul-smelling, vintners used a host of preservatives such as salt, sea-water, liquid or solid pitch, boiled-down must, marble dust, lime, sulphur fumes and crushed iris.

In comparison to preserving fermented wine, preserving grape juice unfermented was a relatively simpler process. It was accomplished by boiling down the juice to a syrup, or by separating the fermentable pulp from the juice of the grape by means of filtration, or by placing the grape juice in sealed jars which were immersed in a pool of cold water, or by fumigating the wine jars with sulphur before sealing them. The use of such techniques clearly indicates that the means of preserving grape juice without fermentation were known and used in the ancient world.

The next logical step was to examine the major wine-related stories or sayings of Jesus since these are commonly used to prove that Christ made, commended, used and even commanded the use of alcoholic wine. In Chapter 5 I went into considerable detail to examine these claims. The conclusion of my analysis is that they are devoid of textual, contextual and historical support.

For example, the "good wine" Jesus made at Cana (John 2:10) was "good" not because of its high alcoholic content, but because it was fresh, unfermented grape juice. This is indicated by external and internal considerations. Externally, contemporary authors, such as Pliny and Plutarch, attest that "good wines" were those which did not intoxicate, having had their alcoholic potency removed.

Internally, moral consistency demands that Christ could not have miraculously produced between 120 to 160 gallons of intoxicating wine for the use of men, women and children gathered at the Cana's wedding feast, without becoming morally responsible for prolonging and increasing their intoxication. Scriptural and moral consistency requires that "the good wine" produced by Christ was fresh, unfermented grape juice. This is supported by the very adjective used to describe it, namely *kalos*, which denotes that which is morally excellent, instead of *agathos*, which means simply good.

The way the Apostolic Church understood, preached and practiced the teachings of Jesus and of the Old Testament regarding the use of alcoholic beverages provides a most valuable verification and clarification as to whether Scripture teaches moderation or abstinence. In view of the fundamental importance attached to the witness of the Apostolic Church, my next logical step was to examine in Chapter 6 the apostolic teachings regarding the use of wine in particular and of intoxicating substances in general.

This investigation proved to be the most rewarding. Contrary to the prevailing perception, I found that the New Testament is amazingly consistent in its teaching of abstinence from the use of alcoholic beverages. The very passages often used to support the moderationist view, under close scrutiny were found to negate such a view, teaching abstinence instead. For example, the irony of the mockers' charge that on the day of Pentecost the apostles were drunk on *gleukos*, that is, on grape juice which apparently was their common beverage (Acts 2:13), provides an indirect but important proof of their abstemious life-style and inferentially of the life-style of their Master. There

would have been no point in the mockers' attributing to unfermented grape juice the cause of the disciples' strange actions, if it was not common knowledge that the apostles abstained from intoxicating wine. The intended jibe was that the disciples were such naïve simpletons they got drunk on grape juice! It is like mocking Adventists for being drunk on seven up.

I found one of the most powerful Biblical indictments against intoxicating wine in Ephesians 5:18, where Paul condemns wine as the cause of debauchery and shows the irreconcilable contrast between the spirit of wine and the Holy Spirit of God. To my great surprise, however, I found that most English translations and commentaries have chosen to translate or interpret Ephesians 5:18 by making "drunkenness" rather than "wine" the cause of debauchery. This was surprising to me because not only the Catholic and Protestant Italian translations, with which I am most familiar, but also numerous other ancient and modern translations, all translate Paul's text as saying that in the very nature of wine is debauchery. It seems that some English translators had such a predilection for wine that they decided, to borrow the words of Ernest Gordon, to "save the face of wine while condemning drunkenness."²¹

The translators' bias toward wine became most evident in the study of the apostolic admonitions to abstinence, expressed through the verb *nepho* and the adjective *nephalios*. The first meaning of the verb is "to abstain from wine" and of the adjective "abstinent, without wine." Yet these words have been consistently translated with their secondary, figurative meaning of being "temperate, sober, steady," rather than by their primary, literary meaning of being "abstinent." Such biased and inaccurate translations have misled many sincere Christians into believing that the Bible teaches moderation in the use of alcoholic beverages, rather than abstinence from them.

It was equally surprising for me to discover that the fundamental reason given by Peter and Paul for their call to a life of mental vigilance and physical abstinence is eschatological, namely, preparation to live in the holy presence of Christ at His soon Coming. This reason gives added significance to the abstinent lifestyle of those Christians, like the Seventh-day Adventists, who are preparing themselves for the soon return of Christ. To abstain from intoxicating substances represents a tangible response to God's invitation to make concrete preparation for the return of Christ. Physical abstinence makes it possible to be mentally vigilant for Christ's return.

To be fair to those who find support for their moderationist position in certain Biblical passages, I devoted Chapter 7 to an extensive analysis of five of such passages. The study of each text in the light of its immediate and larger context, the historical customs of the time and the overall teaching of Scripture, has shown that none of them contradict the Biblical imperative for abstinence. On the contrary, some of them indirectly but conclusively support abstinence.

For example, 1 Timothy 5:23, is often quoted to support the moderate use of wine, because Paul counsels Timothy, saying: "No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for your stomach sake." Surprisingly, this text supports the principle of abstinence in two significant ways. First, the advice, "No longer drink only water," implies that Timothy, like the priests and Nazarites, had abstained until that time from both fermented and unfermented wines, presumably in accordance with the instructions and example of Paul.

Second, the apostle recommended to Timothy to use only a little wine, not for the physical pleasure of the belly, but for the medical need of the stomach. Ancient writers such as Aristotle, Athanaeus, and Pliny indicate that unfermented wine was known and preferred to alcoholic wine for medical purposes, because it did not have the side effects of the latter. In the light of these testimonies and of the other Biblical teachings regarding wine, it is reasonable to assume that the wine recommended by Paul for medical use was unfermented grape juice.

The conclusion of this whole study on the Biblical teaching regarding the use of alcoholic beverages can be summarized in one sentence: *Scripture is consistent in*

teaching moderation in the use of wholesome, unfermented beverages and abstinence from the use of intoxicating fermented beverages. This conclusion will become clear in the next two installments, where we shall take a closer look to the Biblical material.

NOTES

1. See Chapter 9 of WINE IN THE BIBLE where the sources of the statistical information are given.
2. Carlos Medley, "GC Wages Combat Against Chemical Dependency," *Adventist Review* (October 29, 1987):6-7. A new survey of 5,500 readers of *Adventist Review*, sponsored by the Health and Temperance department of the General Conference of SDA, confirms the previous study done on youth. The preliminary report based on 2200 respondents indicates that 15 percent of Adventists between the ages of 30 and 40 find it acceptable to drink alcohol on social occasions. The final report is scheduled to be published sometime in 1989.
3. See, for example, my reflections on the lecture of Father Joseph Martin delivered to the students and faculty of Andrews University on March 30, 1986 (*Student Movement* [April 6, 1986]:3-4).
4. The articles appeared in the November 5, 12, 19, and 26 issues of *Adventist Review*.
5. "Carter Will Restore Confidence, Graham Says," *Miami Herald* (December 26, 1976), section A, p. 18.
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