

# **The Bible And Alcohol - Part 3**

## **Jesus And Wine**

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#### **Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:**

A month has passed since I posted the last newsletter (No. 28) dealing with the Good News of the Sabbath. Several subscribers who are accustomed to receive my newsletter biweekly, have emailed messages expressing concern about this delay. Let me assure you that this delay does not reflect my intent to discontinue this service. On the contrary I plan to broaden this ministry after my early retirement scheduled to begin on June 1, 2000.

The reason for the delay, as many of you know, is the fact that from September 15 to October 10 I was "down under" fulfilling my ministry, first in New Zealand and then in Australia. This was a most challenging and rewarding experience. Let me briefly share with you some of the highlights of the 25 days lecture tour.

#### **NEW ZEALAND/AUSTRALIAN LECTURE TOUR**

Overall my experience in both New Zealand and Australia has been very gratifying. The reception and response of our fellow believers and friends who attended the meetings was extraordinary. Let me give you an example. When I preached for the last time on Sabbath morning September 25 at the South Queensland campmeeting to over 3000 people, I offered to deliver one more lecture after campmeeting in Brisbane on Tuesday evening September 28, if there was a sufficient interest. A good number of hands went up.

The meeting was held at the Springwood SDA Church, which is the largest church in the city of Brisbane, which is located less than an hour away from the campmeeting site. Taking into consideration that I spoke already 18 times (morning, afternoon, evening) during the campmeeting, I did not anticipate a large turn out. What a pleasant surprise to see the church which seats about 500, packed with hundreds of people standing inside and outside the church in the attractive courtyard.

We had the same experience in Sydney at the Parramatta SDA Church, which is the largest in the city with a seating capacity of about 500. I presented there my popular SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR on October 2-3. The church was packed on Friday night, Sabbath morning, and Sabbath afternoon. Surprisingly we had the largest attendance on Sabbath afternoon, when chairs were brought in to accommodate the overflow. Pastor Peter Joseit, the Ministerial Secretary of the Greater Sydney Conference, told me that it was a miracle to see so many members attending a Sabbath afternoon meeting in Sydney. Our church members in Sydney are not known for attending Sabbath afternoon meetings. Truly I can say that our believers in New Zealand and Australia manifested a very keen interest for a deeper understanding and experience of Biblical truths.

One of the gratifying aspect of my experience, was the presence of Christian friends of other faiths at the meetings. At the rally in Christchurch, South New Zealand on September 17-18, we had a good number of former and current members of the Worldwide Church of God. The same was true at the South Queensland campmeeting where many Sabbatharians came to the evening meetings.

Among those who attended the evening meetings at the South Queensland campmeeting was Rev. Corneliu Telegaru, a Pentecostal minister. He was invited by an Adventist church member who gave him my latest book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE. After reading the book he decided to come and listen to my presentations. On a Thursday afternoon he came to visit me in the guestroom. He told me how much he appreciated not only the lectures but also my research. He bought at the ABC on the campground the complete set of my 15 books which he is eager to read.

Rev. Telegaru specifically told me that he has accepted the validity and value of the Sabbath and he want to introduce the Sabbath to his congregation and radio/tv audience. In fact he asked for my permission to quote from my books for his radio and television program in Brisbane-a request that I was most happy to grant. He told me that he wanted to discuss with me via email other Adventist beliefs. I look forward to a fruitful dialogue. Incidentally, his lovely daughter came to seat next to me the following morning when I spoke at the youth tent. She told me that her father had been greatly impressed with my presentations and wants his family to join the Adventist church.

Among the 3000 email messages that arrived during my absence, there were several hundreds thank you notes from our believers in New Zealand and Australia who expressed their appreciation for the inspiration and information received at the meetings. What a moving experience has been for me this past week to read these thank you notes from so many fellow believers I came to love during this trip.

## **THE PROBLEM OF WORSHIP STYLE**

Like everywhere else, our church in Australia faces some challenges. A noticeable challenge is the style of worship which is proving to be a divisive issue. I was made aware of this fact when I spoke at the Wahroonga SDA Church in Sydney, on Wednesday evening September 29. This church is located next to our well-known Sydney Adventist Hospital and opposite to our South Pacific Division Office. It used to be our largest church in Sydney. When I spoke there over 10 years ago, it was packed with over a thousand members. Now it has only about 300 members left.

What has reduced the membership of the Wahroonga SDA Church has been the controversy over the worship style. This issue has split the into three separate congregations. One is known as "Celebration Fellowship Church" and the other is referred to as "Pentecostal," presumably because of its emphasis on the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in tongues. I do not recall the exact name of the last church. The three churches are less than half-a-mile apart from each other, but they could well be thousands of miles apart because there is no interaction among them.

The divisiveness of the worship style was brought home forcefully to me when I spoke at the second campmeeting of the North New South Wales SDA Conference, from October 5 to 9. The campsite is located at Stuarts Point, a magnificent place next to a river and a beautiful beach. I arrived there on Monday afternoon, October 4. Since my first speaking engagement was next morning at 10:30 at the so-called CONNECTIONS tent of the 30+ years old, I decided to visit the tent that evening to get a feeling of the place and the type of people attending. What I saw and heard deeply offended me. For the first one hour, from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., they played and sung jazzy, night club type of music, with various percussion instruments. The men of singing group on the platform were jumping up and down as if it were a night club performance. In all my travels across the USA I have never witness such a heavy beat, night club type of music, even in the so-called "celebration churches."

My first speaking engagement at the CONNECTION TENT was scheduled for Tuesday morning, October 5, at 10:30 a. m. Before the meeting I informed the worship leaders that I was deeply offended by the jazzy music I heard the night before in the tent and I did not want any of such music before my Bible study. They told me that if that was my decision, then they would look for another morning speaker, which eventually

they did. Such a reply surprised me, especially since they had flown me all the way from the USA to speak at their campmeeting.

Good judgment prevailed on Tuesday morning and they allowed me to speak after only one special musical number by a young lady who composed and sung her own contemporary style song. The message of the song and its music were quite suitable for a worship setting. I had no problems with her music. Out of respect for my convictions they eliminated the three other numbers because I was told they were very jazzy. I appreciated their consideration.

After the service, however, I was informed that they had found another speaker for the morning session, who had no problem with jazzy music. They rescheduled me to speak instead at 1:15 p. m. without music. It is evident that they wanted to teach me a lesson by canceling out my morning appointment and rescheduling me for the worst possible time of the day: 1:15 p. m. which was in the midst of lunch time. Surprisingly many people came out to the tent during lunch time. I explained to the congregation the reason for the change in the time schedule, namely, the fact that the jazzy, heavy beat music played for the morning meetings, was offensive to me and inappropriate for a worship setting. Such a music would cause such a mental distress to me that it would make it difficult to prepare myself mentally to lead out in the study of the Word of God.

The people in attendance gave me a prolonged ovation and many pastors and members shared with me their common concern over the bedlam atmosphere created by the night club type of music played in some of the youth tents at the campmeeting. Many of them told me that they also had registered their disapproval but their concerns were totally ignored by the leadership.

The following email message that just came into my mail box this morning, October 17, from an Adventist couple illustrates the problem. They write: "We had to pull our kids out from the Earliteen Tent at Camp [South Queensland Campmeeting] this year because of the inappropriate music and coming back into the main tent to listen to you there was a senior Pastor from the Conference Office who had done the same thing. So it was not just our narrow minded thinking but many people thought the same thing."

The whole question of which music is appropriate for church and campmeeting services, needs to be address with utmost urgency by our leaders not only in Australia, but in many other parts of the world. What is at stake is the eternal salvation or perdition of our youth, because music impacts the thinking and living of our youth for good or bad, more than any other agency.

What I learned from this Australian experience is that we cannot blame some of our people for playing music totally inappropriate for a worship setting, if we as leaders do not help them to see the difference between the sacred and the profane. The problem is leadership and not membership. The spiritual retreat provided by campmeeting, offers an ideal setting for helping our young people to understand the difference between sacred and profane music. Incidentally this is a vital function of the Sabbath. As the Pope himself acknowledges in his Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*, the Sabbath has a "defining function" of the Christian faith. Observing a Holy Day means to be constantly reminded of the difference between the sacred and the secular.

Unfortunately we live in a society where the distinction between the sacred and the secular has largely been blurred. For many God's Holy Day has become a holiday. Similarly the sacred place of worship, has become for some a secular place of entertainment. In my view it is the loss of the sense of the sacred that accounts to a large extent for the acceptance by some of night club music in a church service. We need to be constantly reminded that observing a Holy Day means to accept the call to be a Holy person in a secularly minded and perverse generation.

### **THE BIBLE AND ALCOHOL - Part 3 JESUS AND WINE**

In the two preceding installments we established that the Biblical terms for wine (*yayin* in Hebrew and *oinos* in Greek) are used in Scripture to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. This significant finding discredits the popular 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.

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 moral, 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).

Contrary to popular opinion, in the ancient world the preservation of grape juice unfermented was a relatively simple 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. This conclusion is indirectly supported by the teachings and example of Jesus which we want to examine in this newsletter.

The example and teachings of Christ are normative for Christian belief and practice. If, as many well-meaning Christians believe, Christ **made fermented wine** at the wedding of Cana, **commended it** in the parables of the new wine skins and the old wine, **admitted to have used it** in His description of His lifestyle ("eating and drinking") and **commanded it to be used** until the end of time at the institution of the Lord's Supper, then there can hardly be anything intrinsically wrong with a moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages. Simply stated, "If alcoholic wine was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me!"

In view of the fundamental importance and far-reaching consequences of the teachings of Christ and the apostles on drinking, in this newsletter we shall briefly examine some of the wine-related stories or sayings of Jesus. In the next and final installment we will consider the teaching of the Apostolic Church regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. A fuller treatment of this important subject is found in my book **WINE IN THE BIBLE**. Feel free to contact me, if you do not own a copy. We will be glad to mail you a copy immediately. The new edition came off the press few days ago.

## **THE WEDDING OF CANA**

Many well-meaning Christians believe that the "good wine" Jesus made at Cana (John 2:10) was "good" because of its high alcoholic content. This belief rests on three major assumptions. First, it is assumed that the Jews did not know how to prevent the fermentation of grape juice; and since the season of the wedding was just before Spring Passover (cf. John 2:13), that is, six months after the grape harvest, the wine used at Cana had ample time to ferment.

Second, it is assumed that the description given by the master of the banquet to the wine provided by Christ as "the good wine" means a high-quality alcoholic wine. Third, it is assumed that the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) used by the master of the banquet indicates that the guests were intoxicated because they had been drinking fermented wine. Consequently, the wine Jesus made must also have been fermented. In view of the importance these assumptions play in determining the nature of the wine provided by Christ, we shall briefly examine each of them.

The first assumption is discredited by numerous testimonies from the Roman world of New Testament times describing various methods for preserving grape juice. We have seen in the previous chapter that the preservation of grape juice unfermented was in some ways a simpler process than the preservation of fermented wine. Thus, the possibility existed of supplying unfermented grape juice at the wedding of Cana near the Passover season, since such a beverage could be kept unfermented throughout the year.

**"The Good Wine."** The second assumption that the wine Jesus provided was pronounced "the good wine" (John 2:10) by the master of the banquet because it was high in alcoholic content, is based on the taste of twentieth-century drinkers who define the goodness of wine in proportion to its alcoholic strength. But this was not necessarily true in the Roman world of New Testament times where the best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration. Pliny, for example, says that "wines are most beneficial (utilissimum) when all their potency has been removed by the strainer."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Plutarch points out that wine is "much more pleasant to drink" when it "neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind or passions"<sup>2</sup> because its strength has been removed through frequent filtering.

The Talmud indicates that drinking to the accompaniment of musical instruments on festive occasions such as a wedding was forbidden.<sup>3</sup> The latter is confirmed by later testimonies of rabbis. For example, Rabbi S. M. Isaac, an eminent nineteenth-century rabbi and editor of *The Jewish Messenger*, says: "The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, including the marriage feast, ever use any kind of fermented drinks. In their oblations and libations, both private and public, they employ the fruit of the vine—that is, fresh grapes-unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction. Fermentation is to them always a symbol of corruption."<sup>4</sup> Though Rabbi Isaac's statement is not quite accurate, since Jewish sources are not unanimous on the kind of wine to be used at sacred festivals, it still does indicate that some Jews used unfermented wine at wedding feasts.

**"Well Drunk."** The third assumption that the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) indicates that the wedding guests were intoxicated and thus "the good wine" provided by Christ must also have been intoxicating, misinterprets and misapplies the comment of the master of the banquet, and overlooks the broader usage of the verb. The comment in question was not made in reference to that particular wedding party, but to the general practice among those who hold feasts: "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine . . ." (John 2:10, RSV). This remark forms part of the stock in trade of a hired banquet master, rather than an actual description of the state of intoxication at a particular party.

Another important consideration is the fact that the Greek verb *methusko*, translated by some "well drunk," can also mean "to drink freely," as rendered by the RSV, without any implication of intoxication. In his article on this verb in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Herbert Preisker observes that "*Methuskomai* is used with no ethical or religious judgment in John 2:10 in connection with the rule that the poorer wine is served only when the guests have drunk well."<sup>5</sup>

**Moral Implications.** The verb *methusko* in John 2:10 is used in the sense of satiation. It refers simply to the large quantity of wine generally consumed at a feast, without any reference to intoxicating effects. Those who wish to insist that the wine used at the feast was alcoholic and that Jesus also provided alcoholic wine, though of a better quality, are driven to the conclusion that Jesus provided a large additional quantity of intoxicating wine so that the wedding party could continue its reckless indulgence. Such a conclusion destroys the moral integrity of Christ's character.

Moral consistency demands that Christ could not have miraculously produced between 120 and 180 gallons of intoxicating wine for the use of men, women and children gathered at the Cana's wedding feast, without becoming morally responsible for 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.<sup>6</sup>

## **NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS**

Christ's statement that "new wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (Luke 5:38; Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22), is seen by moderationists as an indication that Jesus commended the moderate use of alcoholic wine. This view rests on the assumption that the phrase "new wine" denotes wine freshly pressed, but already in a state of active fermentation. Such wine, it is said, could only be placed in new wineskins because old skins would burst under pressure.

Fermenting New Wine? This popular interpretation is very imaginative but not factual. Anyone familiar with the pressure caused by gas-producing fermentation knows that no bottle, whether of skin or glass, can withstand the pressure of fermenting new wine. As Alexander B. Bruce points out, "Jesus was not thinking at all of fermented, intoxicating wine, but of 'must,' a non-intoxicating beverage, which could be kept safely in new leather bottles, but not in old skins which had previously contained ordinary wine, because particles of albuminoid matter adhering to the skin would set up fermentation and develop gas with an enormous pressure."<sup>7</sup>

The only "new wine" which could be stored safely in new wineskins was unfermented must, after it had been filtered or boiled. Columella, the renowned Roman agriculturist who was a contemporary of the apostles, attests that a "new wine-jar" was used to preserve fresh must unfermented: "That must may remain always sweet as though it were fresh, do as follows. Before the grape-skins are put under the press, take from the vat some of the freshest possible must and put it in a new wine-jar [amphoram novam], then daub it over and cover it carefully with pitch, that thus no water may be able to get in."<sup>8</sup>

Symbolic Meaning. This interpretation is further confirmed by the symbolic meaning of Christ's saying. The imagery of new wine in new wineskins is an object lesson in regeneration. As aptly explained by Ernest Gordon, "The old wineskins, with their alcoholic lees, represented the Pharisees' corrupt nature. The new wine of the Gospel could not be put into them. They would ferment it. 'I came not to call the self-righteous but repentant sinners.' The latter by their conversion become new vessels, able to retain the new wine without spoiling it (Mark 2:15-17, 22). So, by comparing intoxicating wine with degenerate Pharisaism, Christ clearly intimated what his opinion of intoxicating wine was."<sup>9</sup>

"It is well to notice," Ernest Gordon continues, "how in this casual illustration, he [Christ] identifies wine altogether with unfermented wine. Fermented wine is given no recognition. It could be put into any kind of wineskin, however sorry and corrupt. But new wine is like new cloth which is too good to be used in patching rags. It is a thing clean and wholesome, demanding a clean container. The natural way in which this illustration is used suggests at least a general, matter-of-fact understanding among his Jewish hearers that the real fruit of the vine, the good wine, was unfermented."<sup>10</sup>

## **IS OLD WINE BETTER?**

In Luke Christ's saying about new wine in fresh wineskins is followed by a similar and yet different statement: "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good'" (Luke 5:39). Though this statement is not found in the other Gospels, it forms an integral part of the narrative. Moderationists attach fundamental importance to this statement because it contains, in their view, Christ's outspoken commendation of alcoholic wine. Kenneth L. Gentry, for example, speaks of "the well-nigh universal prevalence of men to prefer old (fermented) wine over new (pre- or unfermented) wine. The Lord himself makes reference to this assessment among men in Luke 5:39: 'And no one, after drinking old wine, wishes for new; for he says, The old is good enough.'"<sup>11</sup>

**Meaning of "New Wine."** The meaning of "new wine" in this passage cannot be determined by its general usage in Scripture because in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the phrase *oinos neos*--"new wine" is used to translate both fermented wine as in Job 32:19 and unfermented grape juice as in Isaiah 49:26. In the latter it translates the Hebrew *asis* which designates unfermented grape juice.

In the passage under consideration it is legitimate to infer that "new wine" has the same meaning in the whole passage, because it is used consecutively without any intimation of change of meaning. The metaphors in both sayings are used without confusion or contradiction. This means that if the "new wine" of verse 38 is, as shown earlier, unfermented grape juice, the same must be true of the "new wine" of verse 39.

**Meaning of "Old Wine."** Before discussing whether or not Christ expressed a judgment on the superior quality of "old wine" over "new wine," it is important to determine whether the "old wine" spoken of is fermented or unfermented. From the viewpoint of quality, age "improves" the flavor not only of fermented wine but also of unfermented grape juice. Though no chemical change occurs, grape juice acquires a finer flavor by being kept, as its fine and subtle particles separate from the albuminous matter and other sedimentations. Thus, the "old wine" esteemed good could refer to grape juice preserved and improved by age.

The context, however, favors the meaning of fermented wine, since Christ uses the metaphor of the "old wine" to represent the old forms of religion and the "new wine" the new form of religious life He taught and inaugurated. In this context, fermented old wine better represents the corrupted forms of the old Pharisaic religion.

**Is "Old Wine" Better?** In the light of this conclusion, it remains to be determined if Christ by this saying is expressing a value judgment on the superiority of "old [fermented] wine" over "new wine." A careful reading of the text indicates that the one who says "The old is good" is not Christ but anyone who has been drinking "old wine." In other words, Christ is not uttering His own opinion, but the opinion of those who have acquired a taste for the old wine. He says simply that anyone who has acquired a taste for old wine does not care for new. We know this to be the case. Drinking alcoholic beverages begets an appetite for stimulants and not for alcohol-free juices.

Christ's saying does not represent His judgment regarding the superiority of old, fermented wine. Several commentators emphasize this point. In his Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Norval Geldenhuys says: "The point at issue here has nothing to do with the comparative merits of old and new wine, but refers to the predilection for old wine in the case of those who are accustomed to drink it."<sup>12</sup>

R. C. H. Lenski states the same truth most concisely: "It is not Jesus who calls the old wine 'good enough,' but he that drank it. A lot of old wine is decidedly bad because it has not been prepared properly; age is one thing, excellence with age quite another."<sup>13</sup>

**The Context of the "Old Wine."** The view that old, fermented wine is better than new wine, would be false even if everyone on earth believed it! And in the passage we are considering it is contradicted by the context in which it occurs and by the whole purpose of the illustration. In the immediate context Jesus uses the same word (*palaios*) of old garments, which He obviously did not esteem as better than new ones. The statement about "old wine" seems to contradict the preceding one about "old garment," but the contradiction disappears when one understands the purpose of the illustration.

The purpose of the illustration is not to praise the superiority of old wine but to warn against an over-estimation of the old forms of religiosity promoted by the Pharisees. Such religiosity consisted, as verse 33 indicates, in the fulfillment of such external ascetic practices as frequent fasting and public prayer. To justify the fact that His disciples did not adhere to such external forms of religiosity, Christ used four illustrations: wedding guests do not fast in the presence of the bridegroom (vv. 34-35); new cloth is not used to

patch an old garment (v. 36); new wine is not placed in old wineskins (vv. 37-38); new wine is not liked by those accustomed to drink the old (v. 39).

The common purpose of all the four illustrations is to help people accustomed to the old forms of religion, and unacquainted with the new form of religious life taught by Christ, to recognize that the old seems good only so long as one is not accustomed to the new, which in and of itself is better. In this context, the old fermented wine seems good only to those who do not know the better new wine.

## **WAS JESUS A GLUTTON AND A DRUNKARD?**

More than nineteen centuries ago Jesus was accused of being "a glutton and a drunkard" because He came "eating and drinking" (Luke 7:33-34; Matt 11:19). Moderationists find in Jesus' description of His own lifestyle as "eating and drinking" (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34) an unmistakable proof that He openly admitted having used alcoholic wine. Moreover, it is argued, Jesus must have drunk alcoholic wine for His critics to accuse Him of being a "drunkard."

**Social Lifestyle.** This interpretation ignores several important considerations. The phrase "eating and drinking" is used idiomatically to describe the difference between the social lifestyle of Jesus and that of John the Baptist. John came "eating no bread and drinking no wine" (Luke 7:33), that is to say, he lived a lifestyle of full social isolation, while Christ came "eating and drinking," that is to say, He lived a lifestyle of free social association.

**No Mention of "Wine."** A significant point often overlooked is that Jesus did not mention "wine" in describing His own lifestyle. While of John the Baptist Jesus said that he came "eating no bread and drinking no wine," of Himself He simply said: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking." If Jesus had wanted it to be known that, contrary to John the Baptist He was a wine-drinker, then He could have repeated the word "wine" for the sake of emphasis and clarity.

By refusing to specify what kinds of food or drink He consumed, Christ may well have wished to deprive His critics of any basis for their charge of gluttony and drunkenness. The omission of "bread" and "wine" in the second statement (Matthew omits them in both statements) could well have been intended to expose the senselessness of the charge. In other words, Jesus appears to have said, "My critics accuse me of being a glutton and drunkard, just because I do not take meals alone but eat often in the presence of other people. I eat socially. But my critics actually do not know what I eat."

Even assuming that His critics actually saw Jesus drinking something, they would have readily accused Him of being a drunkard, even if they saw Him drinking grape juice, or water, for that matter. On the day of Pentecost critics charged the apostles with being drunk on grape-juice (gleukos-Acts 2:13). This goes to show that no matter what Jesus drank, His unscrupulous critics would have maligned Him as a drunkard.

**Critics' Accusation Unsafe.** To infer that Jesus must have drunk wine because His critics accused Him of being a "drunkard" means to accept as truth the word of Christ's enemies. On two other occasions his critics accused Jesus, saying: "You have a demon" (John 7:20; 8:48). If we believe that Christ must have drunk some alcoholic wine because His critics accused Him of being a drunkard, then we must also believe that He had an evil spirit because His critics accused Him of having a demon. The absurdity of such reasoning shows that using critics' accusations is not safe grounds for defining Biblical teachings.

Jesus answered the baseless charge of His critics, saying: "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" (Luke 7:35). Textual evidence is divided between "children" and "works," but the meaning of this cryptic statement remains the same, namely, that wisdom is to be judged by its results. The wisdom of God is vindicated by the works of

goodness to which it gives birth. Thus, to infer on the basis of the aspersions of His critics that Jesus drank wine shows a complete lack of wisdom. The results of His life of self-denial speak for themselves.

## THE COMMUNION WINE

Fundamental importance is attached to the "wine" of the Last Supper because Christ not only used it, but even commanded it to be used until the end of time as a memorial of His redeeming blood (Matt 26:28-29; Mark 14:24-25). It is widely believed that the wine of the Last Supper was alcoholic for two main reasons: (1) the phrase "fruit of the vine" is a figurative expression which was used as the functional equivalent of fermented wine, and (2) the Jews supposedly used only fermented wine at the Passover. This belief is discredited by several important considerations.

**"The Fruit of the Vine."** The language of the Last Supper is significant. In all the synoptic gospels Jesus calls the contents of the cup "the fruit of the vine" (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). The noun "fruit" (gennema) denotes that which is produced in a natural state, just as it is gathered. Fermented wine is not the natural "fruit of the vine" but the unnatural fruit of fermentation and decay. The Jewish historian Josephus, who was a contemporary of the apostles, explicitly calls the three clusters of grapes freshly squeezed in a cup by Pharaoh's cupbearer as "the fruit of the vine."<sup>14</sup> This establishes unequivocally that the phrase was used to designate the sweet, unfermented juice of the grape.

**"All" to Drink the Cup.** If the contents of the cup were alcoholic wine, Christ could hardly have said: "Drink of it, all of you" (Matt 26:27; cf. Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17), especially in view of the fact that a typical Passover cup of wine contained not just a sip of wine, but about three-quarters of a pint.<sup>15</sup> Christ could hardly have commanded "all" of His followers to drink the cup, if its content were alcoholic wine. There are some to whom alcohol in any form is very harmful. Young children who participate at the Lord's table should certainly not touch wine. There are those to whom the simple taste or smell of alcohol awakens in them a dormant or conquered craving for alcohol. Could Christ, who taught us to pray "Lead us not into temptation," have made His memorial table a place of irresistible temptation for some and of danger for all? The wine of the Lord's Supper can never be taken freely and festally as long as it is alcoholic and intoxicating.

**The Law of Fermentation.** Further support for the unfermented nature of the Communion wine is provided by the Mosaic law which required the exclusion of all fermented articles during the Passover feast (Ex 12:15; 13:6, 7). Jesus understood the meaning of the letter and spirit of the Mosaic law regarding "unfermented things," as indicated by His warning against "the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt 16:6). "Leaven" for Christ represented corrupt nature and teachings, as the disciples later understood (Matt 16:12). The consistency and beauty of the blood symbolism cannot be fittingly represented by fermented wine, which stands in the Scripture for human depravity and divine indignation.

We cannot conceive of Christ bending over to bless in grateful prayer a cup containing alcoholic wine which the Scripture warns us not to look at (Prov 23:31). A cup that intoxicates is a cup of cursing and not "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10:16); it is "the cup of demons" and not "the cup of the Lord" (1 Cor 10:21); it is a cup that cannot fittingly symbolize the incorruptible and "precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). This gives us reason to believe that the cup He "blessed" and gave to His disciples did not contain any "fermented thing" prohibited by Scripture.

**Historical Testimonies.** Jewish and Christian historical testimonies support the use of unfermented wine at Passover/Lord's Supper. Louis Ginzberg (1873-1941), a distinguished Talmudic scholar who for almost forty years was chairman of the Department of Talmudic and Rabbinic Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, provides what is perhaps the most exhaustive analysis of the Talmudic references regarding the use of wine in Jewish religious ceremonies. He concludes his investigation

by saying: "We have thus proven on the basis of the main passages both of the Babylonian Talmud and that of Jerusalem that unfermented wine may be used lekatehillah [optionally] for Kiddush [the consecration of a festival by means of a cup of wine] and other religious ceremonies outside the temple."<sup>16</sup>

Ginzberg's conclusion is confirmed by The Jewish Encyclopedia. Commenting on the time of the Last Supper, it says: "According to the synoptic Gospels, it would appear that on the Thursday evening of the last week of his life Jesus with his disciples entered Jerusalem in order to eat the Passover meal with them in the sacred city; if so, the wafer and the wine of the mass or the communion service then instituted by him as a memorial would be the unleavened bread and the unfermented wine of the Seder service."<sup>17</sup>

The custom of using unfermented wine at Passover has survived through the centuries not only among some Jews, but also among certain Christian groups and churches. For example, in the apocryphal Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle, which circulated in the third century, a heavenly voice instructs the local Bishop Plato, saying: "Read the Gospel and bring as an offering the holy bread; and having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when He rose from the dead on the third day."<sup>18</sup> This is a clear testimony of the use of freshly pressed grape juice in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The practice of pressing preserved grapes directly into the communion cup is attested by councils, popes and theologians, including Thomas Aquinas (A. D. 1225-1274).<sup>19</sup> The use of unfermented wine is well-documented especially among such Eastern Churches as the Abyssinian Church, the Nestorian Church of Western Asia, the Christians of St. Thomas in India, the Coptic monasteries in Egypt, and the Christians of St. John in Persia, all of which celebrated the Lord's Supper with unfermented wine made either with fresh or dried grapes.<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the foregoing considerations we conclude that the "the fruit of the vine" that Jesus commanded to be used as a memorial of His redeeming blood was not fermented, which in the Scripture represents human corruption and divine indignation, but unfermented and pure grape juice, a fitting emblem of Christ's untainted blood shed for the remission of our sins.

The claim that Christ used and sanctioned the use of alcoholic beverages rest on unfounded assumptions, devoid of textual, contextual and historical support. The evidence we have submitted indicates that Jesus abstained from all intoxicating substances and gave no sanction to His followers to use them.

## NOTES

1. Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24, trans. W. H. S. Jones, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961).
2. Plutarch, *Symposiac* 8, 7.
3. See Sotah 48a; also Mishna Sotah 9, 11.
4. Cited in William Patton, *Bible Wines. Laws of Fermentation* (Oklahoma City, n. d.), p. 83. Emphasis supplied.
5. Herbert Preisker, "Methe, Methuo, Methuskomai," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1967), vol. 4, p. 547, emphasis supplied.

6. "It must be observed," notes Leon C. Field, "that the adjective used to describe the wine made by Christ is not *agathos*, good, simply, but *kalos*, that which is morally excellent or befitting. The term is suggestive of Theophrastus' characterization of unintoxicating wine as moral (*ethikos*) wine" (*Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* [New York, 1883], p. 57).
7. Alexander Balman Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels in The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 500.
8. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 29.
9. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine. An Exegetical Study* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 20.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
11. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 54.
12. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 198.
13. R. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio, 1953), p. 320.
14. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2, 5, 2.
15. According to J. B. Lightfoot, each of the four Passover cups contained "not less than the fourth part of a quarter of a hin, besides what water was mingled with it" (*The Temple-Service and the Prospect of the Temple* [London, 1833], p. 151). A hin contained twelve English pints, so that the four cups would amount to three-quarters of a pint each.
16. Louis Ginzberg, "A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies," *American Jewish Year Book* 1923, p. 414.
17. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 edition, s. v. "Jesus," vol. 5, p. 165.
18. Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 8, pp. 532-533.
19. For references and discussion, see *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 168-169.
20. Information about these churches is provided by G. W. Samson, *The Divine Law as to Wines* (New York, 1880), pp. 205-217. See also Leon C. Field, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* (New York, 1883), pp. 91-94; Frederic R. Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (London, 1894), pp. 280-282.

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