

X.8. Lambs to Rams: Alcohol and the Bible

How often have we been given “reasons” to consume alcoholic beverages by even some brethren who make Biblical references to substantiate their misguided claims in order to do such? Such passages as where Jesus turned water into wine, Paul advising Timothy to drink wine for medicinal purposes, or even Old Testament writings where it was used as part of the offerings the Israelites were to give to the Levites. We understand the Bible condemns drunkenness and drinking the stronger drinks such as whiskey, even though the word “whiskey” is never used in scripture. So what is the truth on this controversial subject, is it just another matter of opinion and how can there be a civil discussion on it where brethren are concerned? Do those advocating it even want to hear the truth and/or are they even willing to change their minds when evidence is presented that is contrary to their beliefs?

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. 20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed *are* pure; but *it is* evil for that man who eateth with offence. 21 *It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

“All things” being “pure” in the context have to do with foods and do not include alcohol, as we will find here. Eating flesh had to do with Christians eating meat offered to idols and how it would adversely affect new Gentile converts who saw it as participating in idol worship. Paul stated that “an idol is nothing” (1 Cor 8:4) but explained how eating meat offered to one would “wound their weak conscience” (v. 12). But “nor to drink wine” (*Thayer: new wine [pg.442]*) had to do with drinking new “**unfermented**” wine (Gk.3631). “Why would that offend anyone?” Since there was no outward distinction between new and old wines, other than the appearance of the skins they were in, some might have mistaken the one for the other and been offended. Paul told the church at Thessalonica to...

1Th 5:22 Abstain from all **appearance** of evil. (*Emp. added*)

Mat 9:17 Neither do men put **new wine** into old bottles (*Gk.779- a leather [or skin] bag used as a bottle*): else the bottles break, and the wine runs out, and the bottles perish: but they put **new wine** into new bottles, and both are preserved. (*Emp. added*)

New skins were more pliable and would handle the expansion of the fermentation process. And Paul (*here as in other passages*) had taught concerning the drinking of alcohol as being sin. (*Eph 5:18; 1 Tim 3:3,8; Titus 1:7; 2:3*) This only confirms that teaching.

In conclusion, Paul states that no matter what the issue that would cause a weak brother to stumble, lose faith or be offended, we should immediately cease from practicing it, even if we know we are not going against Holy writ (*like when drinking “grape juice” that only **looks** like wine*). Our attitude on this issue will expose our love for even “the least of these My brethren” (*Mat 25:40*).

What about medicinal purposes?

Before taking passages out of context, as the secularists usually do, we need to be honest, especially with ourselves, because there are eternal souls at stake. You can’t seek out passages in order to read into them so as to make a point that may have nothing to do with your argument. Paul told Timothy to...

1Ti 5:23 Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

“Timothy was afflicted with a stomach ailment, the nature of which is not precisely known. It was a sickness that came and went, but apparently more often ‘came’ than otherwise. The apostle obviously suspects bad ‘water’ as the source of the young man’s problem.”

“Ephesus was an ancient and decaying city. Its harbor was silting up which, in turn, created sewage problems that poisoned some of the underground water supplies. Such might well have been the cause of Timothy’s medical ailment (Williams, p. 101).”

“Wine was often helpful in settling stomachs and preventing dysentery (it disinfected water)” (Keener, p. 619).

“Something of Timothy’s character is revealed. He had refrained even from the medicinal use of wine, a perfectly legitimate remedy, for the sake of his influence. Such was going too far, however. His service to Christ was more valuable than the possible damage that might be done by some misguided critic. Incidentally, this negates the speculation of some that ‘wine’ here possibly was grape juice. The young man would hardly have needed exhortation to use a little grape juice with his water.”

“This passage can hardly provide any comfort for those who desire to engage in the pleasurable consumption of beverage alcohol. Imbibers rarely drink just a ‘little’, nor do they dilute their wine with water. They are looking for the ‘glow’, the ‘buzz.’ Furthermore, ancient wines were not nearly as potent as today’s fortified wines.”

Wayne Jackson- The Christian Courier

If Timothy had lived in a different area where the water wasn’t affected by sewage seeping into the underground supply this passage might not have been necessary other than the fact that Holy Spirit saw the need for it in order to show there is some good to consuming alcohol. Alcohol is used in modern day medicines such as cough syrup so even today, other than in the alcohol bought at the local liquor store, Christians are permitted to consume it Biblically “for our oft infirmities”.

“For your health?”

“Oh, so then I can have a little wine to prevent any illnesses from occurring?” What is it in fermented wines that the unfermented ones lack (*or vice versa*) that can be beneficial, or detrimental, to your health? Obviously for every reason given **for** some sort of practice there will be others that are given **against** it. Ultimately, our decisions as Christians on any matter must be pleasing to God, even when a practice is lawful and by man’s moral compass acceptable. The following was a study done by a David Thompson Jr. who did not base his findings on a Biblical understanding on this topic. Which is more beneficial?

Sip Red Wine or Grape Juice

“Several studies done at the University of Wisconsin have found substances called flavonoids (*antioxidant compound*) in **purple grapes** can help **prevent** blood clots by making platelets. The research suggests drinking moderate amounts of red wine **or purple grape juice** in addition to eating five to seven servings of fruits and vegetables per day as recommended by the American Heart Association.

We're told that, in general, **alcohol is not good for us**. But then we learn about the amazing health benefits that can come from having a glass or two of red wine every day. What's the **real** story here?

Well, red wine is good for a man's health in a number of ways, according to many studies. But the **alcohol** in red wine **has little to do with it**. Red wine happens to contain powerful antioxidants, substances that protect your cells against damage caused by unstable molecules called free radicals.

The health benefits from wine are the same for men and women, but men can drink more given their generally larger body mass — one or two 4-ounce glasses of wine per day — while women should consume only one glass. (*Remember, this is a secular study and consuming alcohol is not being Biblically promoted in this lesson!*) You still need to practice moderation when you drink, as having more than this amount has been tied to heart_disease, liver damage, and **other health problems**.

In general, antioxidants keep free radicals from attacking the body's cells and contributing to destructive processes inside the body. Think of the antioxidant process in terms of what happens when you slice into an apple. Once you cut an apple slice, it begins to brown from damage caused by free radicals, a process called oxidation. But if you dip the slice in lemon juice, which contains the antioxidant vitamin C, the apple flesh will stay white.” (*Emp. added*)

By Dennis Thompson Jr.

Medically reviewed by Pat F. Bass III, MD, MPH

For a secular medical study to conclude that “alcohol...has little to do with” the health benefit associated with drinking “red wine” says something about the reason given in favor of consuming it in the first place. It's just another excuse to drink alcohol when just drinking grape juice will produce the same, or even better, results.

Not “much” wine?

In order to further their argument some will even vainly go so far as to refer to Paul's other writings to “prove” their point. “Why are elders forbidden to drink wine but deacons or aged woman are permitted to?” Obviously, we **can't** make the argument that the one is referring to non-fermented and the other fermented because that would be manipulating the passages in order to vainly make an equally false point. The passage has to be interpreted within the context. Paul was informing Timothy and Titus on how the same prohibition for one leader should definitely apply to all others as well.

1Ti 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober (*Gk.4998- self-controlled*), of good behavior, given to hospitality (*Gk.5382- fond of guests*), apt to teach; 3 Not given (*Gk.3943- staying near wine, that is, tippling*) to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

Anyone who has taken even their first drink will have to admit that it's at that point they began to lose their self-control. (*Remember even “a little leaven leavens the whole lump”- 1 Cor 5:6.*) “Given to hospitality” has a different meaning than the phrase “given” to wine in the Greek. The negative of this word is used when the complete opposite is recommended of any action. And there are **similarities** between differing roles given to differing segments of brethren within each congregation.

1Ti 3:8 **Likewise** (*Gk.5615- in the same way*) must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given (*Gk.4337- pay attention to, adhere to*) to much (*Gk.4183- much [in any respect]*)

wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; (*The gloss “much” in this verse is further defined by “in any respect”.*) (*Emp. added*)

Tit 2:3 The aged women **likewise** (*Gk.5615*), that *they be* in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given (*Gk.1402- to enslave: -bring into bondage*) to much (*Gk.4183*) wine, teachers of good things; (*Emp. added*)

“Likewise” has to do with being of a similar conduct even though the genders and thus qualifications might differ. A person “given” to something negatively meant that they were either controlled by it or enslaved to it. “But what about the adjective ‘much’ being used to describe they were being enslaved to wine?” Using that level of understanding, how “much” sin can God tolerate?

Ecc 7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? 17 Be not over much (*Heb.7235- to increase [in whatever respect]*) wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? (*Again “in whatever respect” further defines the gloss “to increase”.*)

Was Solomon stating not to be righteous in verse 16 but that it was okay to be a **little** wicked in verse 17 as long as you weren’t **overly** wicked? The gist of his statement was that you can’t be pleasing to God if your heart wasn’t totally His. To put it more plain, I don’t **much** want to go to Hell. Is that to say I wouldn’t mind going there a little? “Much” then refers to in any respect or amount, whether specifically stated or inferred.

1Co 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a **little** leaven leaveneth the whole lump? (*Emp. added*)

Did Jesus make wine or wine?

Does the Bible refer to two different wines? We need to understand the difference.

Joe 1:5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine (*Heb.3196- wine [as fermented]*), because of the new wine (*Heb.6071- fresh grape juice*); for it is cut off from your mouth.

One such passage that advocates for drinking usually cited is where Jesus turned water into wine. Do we know how to defend the right answer here?

Joh 2:1 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: 2 And both Jesus was called, and His disciples, to the marriage. 3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine. 4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. 5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do *it*. 6 And there were set there six water pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. 7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare *it*. 9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, 10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk (*Gk.3184- to drink to intoxication, that is, get drunk*), then that which is worse: *but* thou hast kept the good wine until now.

“Many folks, upon reading this context, automatically assume that the wine mentioned here (that Jesus made) was an intoxicating spirit. Doubtless this assumption is made due to the fact that when we hear the term ‘wine’ in our modern culture, that is what we ordinarily think of. In the Bible, however, ‘wine’ is a generic term and it can denote either fresh juice or a fermented beverage; the context must determine which.”

Wayne Jackson- The Christian Courier

Because of the modern English versions we often are led to understand them as being what the writers originally meant without understanding the use of glosses substituted where necessary. But the original text was inspired. Translations, and versions of translations, are not. The governor of the feast was well aware of the fact that it was usual to bring out “the good stuff” and save the inferior wine for once the guests were well enough inebriated. By then they wouldn’t have known the difference or wouldn’t have even cared if it was even fermented. They would have been too drunk to know any better. And why would Jesus further their drunken stupor by turning a created natural substance (*i.e.*, *water*) into something that did not come about but by an **unnatural, carnal** process? He miraculously took water and transformed it into the fruit of the vine, expediting the natural process from grapes to juice, making what would be the sweetest of all non-fermented “sweet wines” ever made (*as Creator He could do that*) and had it presented to the governor who then inquired of the bridegroom as to its origin.

“This question is quite appropriate: ‘Would Jesus Christ have provided some 120 to 180 gallons of alcoholic beverage for a wedding feast?’ No one with any degree of respect for New Testament morality would suggest such.”

Wayne Jackson- The Christian Courier

Eph 5:18 And do not get drunk (*Gk.3182- to intoxicate*) with wine (*Gk.3631- [Hebrew origin- Heb.3196]*), for that is debauchery (*Gk.810- unsavedness*), **but** be filled with the Spirit, [*ESV*] (*Emp. added*)

Some rhetorical questions: With reference to the previous thoughts on “much” wine could a person be a little “un-saved”? At what point is a person intoxicated? Notice, the Hebrew word for wine in this verse is with reference to the “bad wine” that is discussed below. Would I want to be found consuming in a little debauchery (*i.e.*, *unsavedness*) when Jesus comes? Can a little unsavedness keep me from Heaven? Is there a difference between being under the influence of alcohol and being influenced by the Spirit?

Do you remember what other **natural** products Jesus used to make more of the **same**? How would He feed so many with so little? (*Jn 6:9-13*)

“The claim is sometimes made, though, that in Bible times there was no method for preserving grape juice in an unfermented state. Therefore, ‘wine’ must have had some alcoholic content. That is not true.”

Wayne Jackson- The Christian Courier

Aside from the fact that fermentation takes time, if Jesus wanted to He could have expedited that process as well. What of the claim then, that the only way to **preserve** wine in Bible times was to **ferment** it?

Preservation of wine

Three ways “wine” can be preserved without the process of fermentation.

1. Grape-juice will not ferment when air is completely excluded.
2. By boiling down the juice, or, in other words, evaporating the water, the substance becomes a syrup, which if very thick will not ferment.
3. If the juice be filtered and deprived of its gluten, or ferment (*yeast*), the production of alcohol will be impossible.

“Augustine Calmet, the learned author of the Dictionary of the Bible, says: ‘The ancients possessed the secret of preserving wines sweet throughout the whole year’. If they were alcoholic, they would preserve themselves. The peculiarity was preserving them sweet. Chemistry tells us that the juice loses its sweetness when, by fermentation, the sugar is converted to alcohol. Preserving them sweet throughout the whole year meant preserving them unfermented.”

Bible Wines by William Patton

Thus the governor of the feast making the comment concerning the taste of the wine that Jesus converted from water. Throughout the Bible proof can be found that indeed there were two wines that existed, the one “good” and the other “bad”. Sometimes a generic word for wine was used to refer to either, but there were more specific passages that required specific forms of the word.

“Good” wine

Heb.8492- *must* or fresh grape juice (as just *squeezed* out).

Along with elders, deacons and older women who are to teach the younger women by their example, the membership at large is to follow their lead. Such has always been the case when it applies to God’s people; Old Testament as well.

Neh 10:37 And *that* we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of **wine** (*Heb.8492*) and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. 38 And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. 39 For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the **new wine** (*Heb.8492*), and the oil, unto the chambers, where *are* the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God. (*Emp. added*)

Neh 13:5 And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the **new wine** (*Heb.8492*), and the oil, which was commanded **to be given to the Levites**, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests. (*Emp. added*)

Would God command the Levites to be given fermented wine? If He would have, then why would He in turn punish them for drinking it?

“Bad” wine

Heb.3196- to *effervesce*; *wine* (as fermented).

Hag 2:11 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests *concerning the law**, saying, 12 If one bear **holy flesh** in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do **touch** bread, or pottage, or **wine** (*Heb.3196*), or oil, or any meat, **shall it be holy**? And the priests answered and said, **No**. (*Emp. added*)

*Num 19:22 And whatsoever the unclean toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth *it* shall be unclean until even.

If even the edge of the priests garment were to touch fermented wine, how much more offensive would it have been to consume it before performing the holy functions of the Old Testament priesthood? One of those functions was to offer incense in the Holy Place on the altar of burnt incense. The coals required to burn the incense were to be specifically taken from the altar of burnt sacrifice and carried in a censer before entering the tabernacle.

Lev 16:12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar (*of burnt sacrifice*) before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring *it* within the vail: 13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:

But something caused two particular priests to disobey this direct command from God.

Lev 10:1 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange (*Heb.2114- profane*) fire before the LORD, which He commanded them not. 2 And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

Lev 10:8 And the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying, 9 Do not drink wine (*Heb.3196- wine [as fermented]*) nor strong drink (*Heb.7941- liquor*), thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations:

It is to be inferred from the context that a direct command to Aaron followed this incident where his sons made “strange fire” having obtained their coals from a source other than the altar of burnt incense because they weren’t in the right mindset to do so. Furthermore, they must have been drunk to have had such an irreverent attitude toward the priesthood and the specific law concerning the source of the coals. Their office served as a **shadow** of the New Testament priesthood and the incense as a function of prayer within the church (*Rev 5:8; 8:3-4*). How then can we be any different? How can we even think of consuming alcohol and think we can remain in a holy state of mind while offering up our prayers through Jesus to God? True, the O. T. priests only offered up incense in the tabernacle, but when is it that we ever leave the N. T. tabernacle, the Holy Place, a.k.a. the church, that we would be free to profane our relationship with the Father? As the priesthood of the New Covenant then, we are to strive to remain above reproach as Paul warned the church at Corinth.

1Co 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a **brother** be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a **drunkard**, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. (*Emp. added*)

“*Oh but I don’t get drunk so drinking socially or in the privacy of my own home wouldn’t be a sin, would it?*” Alcohol profanes our relationship with God no matter where it’s consumed. It would diminish having a godlier attitude toward our individual “temples” that collectively make up the body of our dear Lord on earth. How can we “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (*Rom 12:1*) if we profane them with alcohol?

1Co 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *Who* is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

“Because the Holy Spirit is said to dwell in the saved, God’s people are a ‘temple.’ In ancient times temples were sacred structures. People cared for, looked after, and respected them. Temples were kept in a state of good repair, and all these points are to be true for our physical bodies. If our body is a temple, it is unfit for the filth of sin. Moreover, since a Christian’s body is a temple of the Spirit, Christians do not accept the world’s argument about a person’s body ‘being their own’ and they can ‘do with it whatever they choose’ (this argument is often made when people discuss abortion and euthanasia). God says our bodies are not our own. They belong to Him, and He has placed some restrictions upon what should and should not be done with them. As the CBL (First Corinthians, p. 327) said, ‘The temple does not draw dignity or purity from itself, but from the God who inhabits it.’”

Brad Price

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Maybe, as a Christian, you’ve had some ideas about alcohol that don’t line up to what the Bible, and thus what God says about it. Will your pride keep you from Heaven? Remember...

Pro 20:1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

X.8. Questions

1. Why did Paul tell Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake? a) Timothy refused to drink wine to avoid the appearance of evil; b) alcohol disinfected the water Timothy drank; c) both a and b.
2. Since both red wine and grape juices contain flavonoids, which one is forbidden? a) grape juice; b) red wine; c) the text does not say.
3. How do we understand the word "much" as it applies in the negative with respect to alcohol? a) that deacons are permitted to consume a little wine; b) that older women are permitted consuming wine in moderation; c) Christians are not to consume alcohol in any respect.
4. How do we interpret the word "wine" in scripture? a) whether it's good or bad according to context; b) all wine in scripture is considered fermented; c) Jesus turned water into wine.
5. Why were Nadab and Abihu punished while ministering in the tabernacle? a) they forgot to wipe their feet before entering such a holy place; b) they forgot to bring coals from the altar of burnt sacrifice as part of their ministry; c) they may have been drunk.
6. How is the sugar of sweet wine made sour? a) through sifting it out; b) through fermentation; c) through evaporation.
7. What is the difference between the O.T. temple worship by priests and that of the New? a) our bodies are temples to the Lord; b) both offer up prayers to the Lord; c) the text does not say.
8. Why should Christians not drink alcoholic beverages? a) consuming alcohol separates us from the world; b) consuming alcohol helps us with regard to our relationships; c) consuming alcohol profanes our relationship with God.