

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Be Not Drunk with Wine, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 5:18

Code: 1937

This morning we are, as you know if you were here last time, going to digress just a little bit from our text of Ephesians 5:18. In our continuing study in the book of Ephesians we found ourselves last week in verse 18, and that verse introduces to us the topic of drunkenness, and that introduces to us the topic of drinking. And because there have been so many, many questions about this very important area many of you have asked – Is it right? Should a Christian drink alcoholic beverages? What does the Bible teach? and so forth and so on – that we decided to stop here and share some thoughts on that.

Somebody was telling me that as they came to church this morning, they saw a new billboard that said: “What is Christmas without Jim Beam?” Maybe that reflects something of the sickness of the society in which we live. It does introduce to us a problem that is indeed a problem. Ephesians 5:18 says, “And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.” This is a direct command against drunkenness. Spirit of God is saying we are not to be drunk.

We can safely say that America has a severe drinking problem, and I suppose we aren't too surprised about that. We would expect a proud, self-indulgent, sinful, pleasure-mad society which is filled with consequent guilt, anxiety, frustration, and depression to try to both live it up and forget it all by drinking. We're not shocked at that at all. But what may be a little stranger to us is the fact that Christians who by our Lord's definition are meek, selfless, absolutely forgiven, comforted by the Holy Spirit, filled with the joy of the Lord, should seek their comfort and their joy from a bottle. This is a very important issue, and much discussion and much confusion goes on in the debate. Some people say a Christian should not drink at all, absolutely no, it is forbidden, it is wrong, it is sin. Others say a Christian can drink, yes, in moderation it's fine, especially since the Bible indicates that God's people drank wine, and if you do it in moderation, it's fine.

I've been with Christians in this country, in Europe, Latin America, and other places, some who did drink and some who did not. Some go to dinner and they wouldn't think of ordering wine and others order it first and then later think about dinner. I've had people on various mission fields tell me to stay in such-and-such a place because the wine was best there. And I've had, on the other hand, people who have been in a mission field society for many, many years and never have consumed any at all. It doesn't seem to be an issue of whether you're here geographically or somewhere else, but there is indeed a lot of mixed feeling about whether it's right.

I've had people come to me and say, "When are you going to preach against drinking?" And I've had people come to me and say, "You're not going to preach against drinking, are you?" You would have enjoyed being at my house yesterday and hearing the ambivalence on the phone calls that I got. "Well, we're just calling to ask – you're not going to say this tomorrow, are you?" I would say, "Come and find out." I know there's a lot of concern, and the last thing that I want to do is put everybody under a lot of guilt, and the last thing I want to do is to make you think that whether you drink or don't drink is a symbol and emblem of your spirituality. Spirituality is what you are. What you do is only a manifestation of that.

Now, remember this, that in our last study of Ephesians 5:18, we told you that drinking is used in the contrast here with the Holy Spirit filling because it was not so much a social thing that Paul is looking at as it was theological. Sure, people in that society – just as in this society and in every other society around the world through the history of man – drink to forget their troubles, drink to induce joy, drink to induce some sense of comfort. It is true that there is a social element to it. But what Paul has in mind goes way beyond that, and it is theological.

You see, wine was used for inducing drunkenness in pagan religions in the worship of pagan gods by the Greeks and the Romans in order to induce what they thought was a higher religious consciousness. They believed that the more drunk they were, the higher level of consciousness they attained to commune with their gods. It is exactly what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 10 when he said you can't drink the cup of the demons and the cup of the Lord, you can't go and drink the cup that makes you drunk to commune with the gods and then come and take the cup of Communion by which you commune with Jesus Christ. Our communion demands the full use of your faculty as it is energized by the filling of the Spirit in contrast to their communion, which is really the absence of your faculties induced by the alcoholic content in some drink.

Remember that I told you that Satan had counterfeited the whole gospel, really? We talked about the god Zeus who is sort of Satan's false father. He's sort of like God the Father. And Zeus gave birth to a son who was then torn limb from limb and was reborn, which is the false resurrection. You remember that son was originally conceived without Zeus ever meeting the mother so that it was a virgin kind of conception? And you'll remember that Zeus decided to make that son the lord of the earth, again indicating the same counterfeit? And so this became the lord of the earth, this son of Zeus who was reborn. His name was Dionysus and he is known as the god of wine. Why? Because pagan religion was induced by drunkenness. That was all a part of the system.

So when Paul is saying, "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit," he is saying your old kind of religious worship is out, the new is in, and it is by the Holy Spirit, not by drunkenness. So that's the basis of his contrast. That's the basis of his comparison. It is far more than just a social issue; he's talking religiously. He is saying if you're going to walk the worthy

walk, you're going to walk in humility and in unity and you're going to walk different than the Gentiles walk, you're going to walk in love and light and wisdom, then you will not induce your communion with God through drunkenness, you will do it by the filling of the Spirit of God.

The point is that drunkenness is forbidden because it is a manifestation of an old way of life, incompatible with the new life, okay? "Be not drunk with wine" is a command. Drunkenness is forbidden in the Scripture. It is a pattern that belongs to the former life. In Romans chapter 13, this is made abundantly clear in verse 13: "Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in drunkenness." In Galatians chapter 5 and verse 21, we find similarly these words. Back in verse 17, it talks about the flesh; in verse 19, the works of the flesh; and then in 21, it lists these: envyings, murders, drunkenness. These things are not a part of our new life. "I have told you in the past time that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." First Corinthians 6:10 says the same thing: "Drunkards do not inherit the kingdom of God." First Peter chapter 4 and verse 3: "For the time past of our life should suffice us when we walked in lasciviousness, lust, excess of wine."

That's the past of our life, that's sufficient for it, it stays there, it belongs there and that's all. That's part of the darkness of the past. We no longer – it says in 1 Thessalonians 5:6: "We no longer sleep as do others but we watch and are sober minded, for they that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that are drunk are drunk in the night." The point is drunkenness is a part of the night from which we have come. We have entered into the day in Jesus Christ and there's no place for drunkenness.

So the Bible warns against drunkenness. A believer is not to be drunk. And people will always say, "Well, what does drunk mean?" Drunkenness can be defined as any point in which the alcohol takes over any part of your faculty. That's drunkenness. Now, it has all kinds of degrees, and I don't know for everybody where that fine line is, but whenever you have yielded the control of your faculty in any sense to that alcohol, that becomes drunkenness.

Now, the Bible has a lot to say about this. I'd like to point out a couple of things to you. Proverbs chapter 20 verse 1, the Bible says: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. The point is a person who takes that and becomes drunk is a fool and he is deceived to think that it makes something out of him that's positive. That's a deception of Satan; it is a mocker. You think it's doing something for you and it mocks you in the very act. Proverbs – I want you to look with me at chapter 23, one of the most interesting descriptions of drunkenness in all the Bible. Proverbs 23 verse 19.

The book of Proverbs, of course, was a book that fathers taught their sons and so all the way through the book of Proverbs, you hear the father speaking to his son, and in chapter 23 verse 19, you hear it again: "Hear thou, my son, and be wise and guide thine heart in the way." In other words, if you're a son of the kingdom, a son of the King, if you're a part of God's world and God's domain, if you walk in

the light, then if you're in the way, then keep yourself in the way, guide your heart in the way. In verse 20 he says, "Be not among winebibbers." In other words, your new life is incompatible with the drunkenness of those who you came from. "Be not among winebibbers" and by the way, "among gluttonous eaters of flesh." And we can talk about that sometime in the future but "for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

A person who becomes an alcoholic winds up in rags, and you can see it if you've been watching the news this week and you've been kind of in on the skid row stabbings, you know exactly what it looks like to see those people. I've preached time and time and time again in the missions. In fact, when I was very young I used to go down on Third Street night after night and preach in the mission and watch the people clothed in rags because of their drunkenness. What a deceiver drink was. You know, it was not making men of distinction, it was clothing men in rags and it was very apparent. All you need to do is take a short look at that area and you can see for yourself.

Now, he goes down to verse 29 and he describes here what is a picture of drunkenness. By the way, in the middle he talks about harlotry because drunkenness and sexual immorality are so akin. He talks about the harlot in verse 27 because that kind of goes with it. But verse 29 he describes the situation of drunkenness. I want you to see it. "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine. They that go to seek mixed wine." Now, let's just look at that for a minute. Who's got woe, who gets heartaches, sorrows, fights, who has babbling at the mouth, who has wounds without cause, who is it that – for no good reason at all runs into a freeway abutment, runs into a fire hydrant, a telephone pole, runs into a wall, falls through a window? Who is it? Who is it that has redness of eyes, who is it that just gets himself in trouble and sorrow and fights and babbles at the mouth? It's the drunk. It's they that go to seek mixed wine.

Now, in order to avoid falling into this pit, he says, "Look not thou on the wine when it is red, when it gives its color in the cup, when it goes down smooth." In other words, just don't get involved in looking at it because it is an enticing thing. You look at it – and you know what those – have you ever seen those people, you know, they hold it up, those ads, and they flash lights through it and they look at it and they pour it out slow motion and it's flopping down and you have people who are professional drinkers of wine and wine tasters. It's playing around with what is an inducement. And of course he says in verse 32, "It looks so good and it goes down so smooth and at last it bites like a snake and stings like an adder. And thine eyes shall behold strange things." I'm not going to ask all of you who've had that experience to stand up and give your testimony – we can assume it. "And thine heart shall utter perverse things." You see funny things, the pink elephants and all the rest, and your heart utters perverse things.

And you'll be like a person who lies down in the midst of the sea, lying on the top of the mast. The verse means here's a ship in the midst of the sea and you, when you're drunk, are like a guy who is

trying to sleep in the mast. If you know anything about a ship, it's obvious that what the motion creates at the bottom will be the most extreme at the top, and so the guy on the mast is going like this. And I talked to somebody this week who told me that he'd had the experience frequently being drunk and that is the most apt description he ever heard in his life.

But you know what the amazing part of it is? He'll say they have stricken me, and I was not sick, they beat me and I felt it not, when shall I awake, I will seek it yet again. Amazing. All that trouble and what do you do when you get up? Go right back after it. One of the great Old Testament commentators, Delitzsch, says, "The author passes in this text from the sin of prostitution and uncleanness to that of drunkenness because they are nearly related, for drunkenness excites the fleshly lust, and to wallow in delight in the mire of sensuality, a man created in the image of God must first brutalize himself by some kind of intoxication."

And so the Bible is very clear about drunkenness. In Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 11: "Woe unto them who rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink and who continue till night till wine inflames them." One of the characteristic marks of an alcoholic is he drinks in the morning. Woe to those who start in the morning and drink till night. And by the way, as we shall see later, you'd just about have to do that in that day to get drunk because the alcohol content was so low. You'd have to really go at it all day long unless, of course, you drank strong drink as indicated here. If you were just drinking wine, it would take a long time because of a difference in their kind of wine, which we'll see in a minute.

But the person who gets up and drinks all day is going to have woe to him. Chapter 28 of Isaiah and there are many other passages – I'm just going to give you some samples. Chapter 28 of Isaiah, God gives an indictment against Ephraim, the children of the Lord, that is very, very scathing. He says, "They have erred" – Isaiah 28:7 – "through wine and through strong drink are out of the way." In other words, drink has driven them out of the proper perspective toward God. Look at this: The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink.

Now, I'll tell you something, a priest was forbidden to drink at all. And we'll see that next time. Why? Because a priest was in a position of representing God, and if he became drunk and made a misjudgment or misrepresentation, he could carry a whole group of people with him. And here the priest and the prophet of God were drunk, and they had erred, they had made statements that were not true, and they were swallowed up of wine. They were out of the way through strong drink, they erred in the vision and they stumbled in judgment. They were saying wrong things, they were leading people astray. And it tells how really rotten they had become in verse 8: "Their tables were full of vomit and filthiness so that there was no place clean." They were vomiting and excreting right in the place where they were drinking. Incredible debauchery on the part of the priest and the prophet when God had called them to the place that He'd called them to. No wonder God judged them.

In the 56th chapter of Isaiah, we find again in verses 11 and 12 a similar thing. Talks about the people who were supposed to be the watchmen for Israel, people who were supposed to be caring for the people. And it says, "They are greedy dogs that could never have enough. They are shepherds that can't understand. They look to their own way. Every one is for his gain from his quarter. And they say, 'I'll fetch wine and we'll drink ourselves with strong drink and tomorrow shall be as this day and much more abundant.'" We're just going to stay drunk. And you know, God literally indicts these people. Any time any person is in any position of spiritual responsibility and they drink and become drunk, they really are indicated by God in fearful ways. In Hosea chapter 4 and verse 11: "Harlotry and wine and new wine take away the heart." And here you have God linking drinking with adultery, drinking with harlotry and prostitution.

All right now, we'll stop right there for a minute, okay? I think you get the picture of how God feels about drunkenness. You saw the evil wretchedness of the drunkenness in Genesis, where the result of it was a terrible incest. We know that God forbids drunkenness. It's repeated again and again and again and again. At no point in the life of a believer is he or she ever to yield the control of his faculties to alcohol. We are all priests unto God. We are all those with spiritual responsibility, and we are all those to speak a fit word and to speak a right representation of God and to do a thing that would rightly represent God at all times, and we do not give up our faculties at any time, in any act of drunkenness, no matter how minimal it would be, without violating God's standard for having ourselves in accord with the Spirit of God.

But on the other hand, did you know that wine is also commended in the Bible? Now some of you are saying, "Oh, no, I was so comfortable with that first part." But wine is also commended in the Bible, and we got to be fair. It is. Did you know that in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 23, the people were to bring drink offerings to the temple to offer to God? And those drink offerings were wine? And in Judges 9:13 and in Psalm 104:15, it says there is a special kind of wine that cheers, that makes you happy. And in Isaiah 55:1-2 – and this is a shock – Isaiah 55:1-2, Isaiah equates wine with salvation. He says, "Come and buy wine," and he's really giving a salvation invitation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ drank wine and ordained the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 23 to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake. And it's obvious that Old Testament and New Testament, the staple drink of the people was wine. And by the way, when the Good Samaritan went down the road and found the man on the side of the road, it says in Luke 10:34 that when he got him all fixed up, he poured wine in his wounds. And in Proverbs 31, it says that when somebody gets old and they're really sick and they're about to die, give them some wine to act as a sedative, to ease the pain as an anesthetic.

So you see, in the Scripture, we have wine as a destroyer and wine as a mocker and wine as something that dissipates and wine as something that causes drunkenness, which is forbidden of

God. On the other hand, you have wine as an acceptable thing in many places in Scripture, so indicated. You say, "What are you trying to say?" Well, I'm trying to say that it's like anything else. That little grape that hangs on the vine has a potential for good and a potential for evil. Now you say, "Well, can we know what to do? Can we know whether we should drink or not drink? Does the Bible say anything to help us?" Well, yes it does, and I'm going to give that to you.

This is what I call the Christian's Wine List. I'm going to give you eight checkpoints. I don't know what your presuppositions are, and I want you to know I love you all and I'm not trying to just, you know, wail away on you. I'm going to ask you these eight questions, and you have to think them through with me, and we'll cover the first two and just a little bit into the third one today, all right? And I really believe, first of all, that this will help you to make a decision. Now, let me tell you this: The Bible does not forbid drinking wine. Now, don't say, "Amen." You don't want to do that because somebody around you might be shocked, see. The Bible does not forbid drinking wine. If it did, I'd just read the verse, pray, and we'd go home. I'd have to preach another sermon, right? That would be over. Bible does not say that. It does not say that wine is forbidden. But it does say some things that help us to know what we ought to do.

Number 1, and this is the first question that came into my mind. Is it the same? What do I mean by that? Is drinking today the same as in Bible times? Better, is the wine today the same as then? Now, the reason I ask this is because inevitably Christians who rely – Christians who drink, rather, rely strongly on their right to drink being based on the Bible. They say, "Well, Jesus drank, the apostles drank, they drank in the Old Testament drank, drank in the New Testament. There can't be anything wrong with it." And I thought about that. I thought, "Well, that's good. I mean they want to use a biblical base, "The Bible people did it, so what's the big deal?" "And since they didn't have," they say, "refrigeration then, it surely was fermented, and they drank it fermented, and we're drinking it fermented. What's the big deal?" So I immediately began to think, "Well, I wonder if the wine today is the same as it was then." So for the last three weeks I've been chasing this around, trying to find out if it was the same, and I have found some fabulous information and I'm going to share it with you, so hang on.

I want to give you some words to start with. These are the biblical words and then I'm going to integrate those into the thing we discuss. Was the wine they drank the same as ours? If we're going to use their drinking as the basis of our drinking, then it's going to have to be the same. If it isn't, then that principle is out and we'll find another one. All right, first of all, the most common word in the New Testament is oinos, O-I-N-O-S, the Greek word oinos. It is a word that simply refers to the juice of grapes. It is a very general word, it is used very commonly, and it is the normal New Testament word for wine.

Now, the Old Testament equivalent for oinos is yayin, Y-A-Y-I-N. That's the Hebrew word. It's used 141 times in the Old Testament. And the word yayin is referring – watch this one – to wine that is

mixed. Okay? Mixed. Not with other wine but usually with water. Sometimes with honey, sometimes with herbs, and sometimes with myrrh, but always mixed. And even if it was mixed with honey, myrrh, and herbs, it could also be mixed with water. So they had some various concoctions.

Now, yayin, by the way, means mixed wine. I found that in the 1901 Jewish encyclopedia. That's not a Christian interpretation, that's not just something that we just thought up. The Jews themselves, looking at their own Hebrew text and examining their own use of words, say yayin means mixed wine. There are two more words we have to consider. Gleukos, from which we get "glucose," which is a sugar-based kind of thing. Gleukos means new-wine. New wine. It's used in Acts 2:13 when they said of the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, "They're filled with new wine." It is that fresh wine but watch: It is still fermented. It wouldn't take very many days to ferment. And even fresh wine just out of the grapes without a refrigeration process would ferment very rapidly. So though it was comparatively fresh and was not fully aged, it was still potentially intoxicating. That is why in Acts 2:13, they said, "These men are drunk with new wine." The fact that it was new wine did not mean that it didn't intoxicate. It would ferment just as fast.

Now, if you just squeezed it out of the grape and drank it, obviously it wouldn't necessarily be fermented. But what was called gleukos or new wine could be just days, weeks, or a few months from absolute freshness and it would still be fermenting. By the way, the Old Testament word for that is tirosh, T-I-R-O-S-H, and tirosh also means new wine. I read you earlier Hosea 4:11 and it says new wine and it is tirosh and listen to this: It says in that same verse that drunkenness goes with new wine. So new wine, tirosh, new wine, gleukos, both cases could create drunkenness. So the fact that it was new wine didn't mean that it wouldn't happen.

All right, now I want to give you another word. Another word you need to know in the Old Testament is shakar and shakar means strong drink and that means unmixed. The New Testament word is sikera, it means unmixed. So now you got three things. Number one, oinos and yayin are mixed wine, wine mixed with water. That's the predominant use. And then there is gleukos and tirosh, that's that fresh new wine which, by the way, was also mixed with water, as far as history tells us. Thirdly, there was shakar and sikera, which was unmixed, straight wine, right out of the grape into the glass into the mouth, nothing in between. Now, based on these terms – and I want to give you some historical insights and all that stuff is going to come together, and I think you'll find it fascinating – my conclusion is this – I give you the conclusion first so you know where I'm going: The wine of Bible times was not necessarily the same as the wine we have today.

The wine drunk today is unmixed with water. It is straight wine. That is not true of biblical wine and I'll show you why. First of all, some of the wine of the Bible times was absolutely unintoxicating. It was just not fermented. It was unintoxicating in any sense. Professor Samuel Lee of Cambridge University says this, he says that yayin, that's mixed wine, or oinos, in the New Testament word, does not refer only to intoxicating liquor made by fermentation but more often refers to a thick, unintoxicating syrup

or jam produced by – watch this – boiling to make it storable, which indicates that it was very common for them to take that which came out of the grape, the wine that came out of the grape, and then boil it, which would cause the evaporation of all the liquid, the loss of fermentation capacity when the liquid departs, and they would have a storable kind of paste, which they would put in jars. Now, this is no different than women canning things today to preserve them, and they would preserve this thick, syrupy substance. The grape juice, by the way, that was left after the boiling process could not ferment in that condition. It was then stored in new wine skins.

There were times and places when they definitely wanted to eliminate any alcoholic or fermentation capability of what they would use. So it is not simple enough to just say they drank alcoholic beverage because there was no refrigeration. They got around that this way. And the thick syrup similar to grape jelly, by the way, they very frequently squeezed on bread like jam. Did you know that? And when they wanted to drink it, they would squeeze it into something and mix it, according to Pliny, the Roman historian, with up to 20 parts of water. If you had a thick paste, they'd have to put the water back in that went out at evaporation, right? And they would mix it again and they would drink it so that it would be unfermented and totally un-intoxicating. And by the way, as best as I can tell from my research, that was the preferred kind to drink. That's why Samuel Lee said that was the most common way of storing and preparing wine. And don't you know that it was obviously easier to store it that way than to store it in liquid form because it would be too what? Too bulky. So that's the way it was common to do.

Now, classical writers have spoken about this, and I want to show that to you so you'll know that there's some real sources. Horace, in 35 B.C. – this goes way back – says, "You can quaff, under a shade, cups of un-intoxicating wine." So they recognized they had that. Plutarch, in A.D. 60, wrote that filtered wine neither inflames the brain nor infects the mind and the passions and is much more pleasant to drink. In other words, Plutarch is saying, "I like the kind that has no alcoholic content, doesn't inflame the mind or anything. It's much more pleasant to drink." Aristotle said, "The wine of Arcadia was so thick, it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottle in which it was stored and dissolve the scrapings in water." Virgil, in 30 B.C., talked about the kind of wine that is boiled down to the luscious juice and then preserved.

Homer, in the ninth book of his *Odyssey*, tells us that Ulysses took in his boat a goatskin of sweet, black wine and when it was drunk, it was diluted with 20 parts of water. Of course, because it was so thick, it had to have water to be able to be consumed as a beverage. Columella and other writers who were contemporaries with the apostles inform us that in Italy and Greece, it was common to boil the wines which, of course, would not have been done if they wanted to preserve alcoholic content. Archbishop Potter, born in A.D. 1674, in his *Grecian Antiquities*, Edinburgh edition 1813, Volume II, page 360, says the Lacedaemonians used to boil their wines over the fire and then later drink them. He refers to Democritus, a celebrated philosopher who traveled across the greater part of Europe, Asia, and Africa who died 300 B.C., to Palladius, a Greek physician, as making a similar statement.

Now, these ancient authorities called the boiled juice of the grape wine. And some of you may have heard of Opimian wine, mentioned by Pliny, the Roman historian, and he said it had the consistency of honey. So I'm just trying to give you illustrations of the fact that this was really a historical fact. A Professor Donovan says in a Bible commentary, "In order to preserve their wines to the ages, the Romans concentrated the grape juice of which they were made by evaporation." It talks about how they did it to render them thick and syrupy. This wasn't just Roman. The Jews did it. The Mishnah, which is the codification of Jewish law, states that the Jews were in the habit of using boiled wine. W. G. Brown, who traveled all over Africa, Europe, and Asia in the 18th century, states that the wines of Syria are mostly prepared by boiling immediately after they are expressed from the grape until they are considered to be reduced in quantity when they are put into jars or bottles and preserved for use. Then there is a Dr. Newman who said – a professor of chemistry in Berlin in the 18th century, who said it is observable that when sweet juices are boiled to a thick consistency, they not only do not ferment in that state but are not easily brought into fermentation even when diluted with water. So even diluting them back again and leaving them stand, they might ferment but they would ferment very slowly.

So the point is this, people, that there was a paste that was used that was non-intoxicating. Concentrated grape juice, by the way, is still around and it's called today dibs, D-I-B-S. It is used today in vineyards in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon. It is used for food seasoning. It is used even to put on bread, and it saves the necessity of refrigeration to preserve a non-fermenting drink. So all I want you to understand from that, people, is this: that the wine that was consumed then was not necessarily what we know as wine today. It was a concentrated grape juice with its fermentation and intoxicating property removed. The point I'm making is this: You cannot defend wine drinking today on the basis that they drank wine then unless you can prove that you're drinking the same thing they were drinking. Okay? If you can't do that, then you got to leave that argument alone and you've got to say, "Well, I can drink wine for another reason," and okay, we'll go to another reason, but that one isn't going to work unless it's the same.

Let me add another thing. They not only had this paste but they also did store it as a liquid from time to time and liquid would ferment. Now, according to Robert Stein, who did the research on this in 1975, put it out in Christianity Today, they used to keep the liquid form of wine, which would be used on a daily basis, and maybe they wouldn't want to always have to take the paste and mix it if they couldn't – if they didn't have time or for whatever reason. They would store it in large jugs called amphorae. And they would do this: From the amphorae, they would draw out the wine, pure wine unmixed with water. They would pour it into kraters, K-R-A-T-E-R-S, kraters or kraters. And there in the krater, they would mix it with water so that they would pour the water in to mix it, and from the krater it would go to the kylix, which is the cup. They never served wine from the amphorae to the kylix without going through the krater. In other words, they didn't serve wine not mixed with water. If it wasn't the paste, if it was liquid and it did ferment, then they would mix it with water. And by the way,

we find that the mixtures, as we look at history, could be as high as 20-to-1 or as low as 3-to-1 – that's the lowest I found. From 20-to-1 to 3-to-1, they would mix it with water.

Now, listen to this: Drinking unmixed wine was looked upon, even by unsaved people, as barbarian. Barbarian. Athanasius quotes Menestheus of Athens with this statement: "The gods have revealed wine to mortals to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse." Now watch: "For it gives food to them that take it and strengthen mind and body. In medicine, it is most beneficial." Listen: "It can be mixed with liquid and drugs, and it brings aid to the wounded. In daily course, it is, to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer. If you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. Mix it half and half and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse."

You see, those people mixed it, and even to mix it 1-to-1 was considered barbarian. The lowest that I could find was 3-to-1. It is evident that wine was seen in ancient times as a medicine and, of course, as a beverage. And as a beverage, it was always thought of mixed. It was either mixed on a paste base or it was mixed from an amphora into a krater and then it was served – not unmixed. The ratio of water might vary, but only barbarians drank it unmixed, and a mixture of water and wine of equal parts, 1-to-1, was considered to be strong drink and frowned upon. So the term wine or oinos or yayin, Old and New Testament, is to be understood as wine mixed with water. And when they wanted to say unmixed wine, they said that the wine was akratesteron, in other words, it was akrater – there was no krater in the middle, it went right out of the amphorae into the kylix without mixing.

Now, the point that I'm trying to make, people, is this: Unmixed wine was even unacceptable to that culture. Strong drink was unmixed, and that was for barbarians to drink. As we move away from the church of the New Testament, we get into the church after the New Testament church, the early church we call it, they wrote about this in a volume called the Apostolic Tradition. And in the Apostolic Tradition, it says that the early church followed this same custom, serving only mixed wine, whether from a syrup or a liquid base.

Now, you say, "Well, what is the significance of all this? What are you trying to say?" What I'm trying to say is this: If you want to defend the fact that you can drink wine today on the basis of the fact that they drank it in the Bible, then you need to reexamine whether what we drink today is the same as what they drank then. And we find out as we get close to the subject that they drank what was either totally unintoxicating, such as the syrup base, or what was so diluted with water that its intoxication level was very, very minimal. Let me illustrate it to you. I called the Alcohol Council, their information center at the library, and I found out this information. Beer has 4 percent alcohol, wine has 9 to 11 percent alcohol – and that doesn't matter how long it sticks around, that's just the range of alcohol which it produces, that's the fermentation level, 9 to 11 percent. Brandy, which is fortified wine, has 15 to 20 percent alcohol, and liquor, which is whatever liquor is, scotch and rye and all that stuff, has 40 percent or 50 percent. In other words, if it's 80 proof, it has 40 percent alcohol; if it's 100 proof, it

has 50 percent alcohol.

Now, anybody who drank anything from 15 to 50 percent alcohol in Bible times would have been considered definitely a barbarian. So I don't think we even need to discuss whether a Christian should drink hard drinks, hard liquor. I think that it's very apparent – in fact, you realize that even to drink it at all and maintain your sanity, you got to take it in little tiny sips because of the power it has. That's how much of it is alcohol. And I'm not even taking the time to go into the medical factors involved in what that alcohol does. All you have to do is find somebody in a gutter sometime, take him to a hospital, and watch him die of sclerosis of the liver and you get a little idea.

But let's take a very conservative estimate. Let's say, okay, wine ferments to a 9 to 11 percent alcohol content, okay? All right, let's take a very – let's take the lowest mixture level that I could find, 3-to-1. Just the lowest I could find – say nothing of 5-to-1, 10-to-1, 15-to-1 or whatever – 3-to-1, the lowest I could find. All right, if you took that 9 to 11 percent alcohol fermented wine in that amphorae, you mixed it in a krater with a 3-to-1 water ratio, the product would be this: The alcohol content in the final product mixed with water would be 2.25-to-2.75 percent alcohol. Now, that's very low. By the way, something has to be 3.2 percent alcohol to be classified as an alcoholic beverage. So you have a sub-alcoholic beverage, the point being this: In order for you to get drunk on wine mixed with three parts of water, you'd have to stay there all day drinking that stuff. And that's exactly why the Bible says of elders in the church, "Do not linger long beside your wine."

In other words, to get drunk in those times on wine, you would have to purpose to get drunk because you would have to override your bladder, for one thing. If you just determined in your mind you were just going to get drunk, you'd go out and you'd just knock out a whole bunch of strong drink, right? You wouldn't mix it, you'd act like a barbarian. But the warnings of Scripture are this: that wine with – and such a low alcohol content, be careful that you don't, in a situation, just sit there so long that it has that effect on you. But the idea is this, that the wine that was consumed then if it was 3-to-1 would be 2.25 or an average of 2.50 alcohol content, which is so minimal it doesn't even classify itself as an alcoholic beverage.

So the point is this, people, whether you're talking about the paste or whether you are talking about the mixture, the wine that was consumed in those days was a wine with a nonexistent or a negligible alcohol content. And drunkenness was something that you set out to do, to get drunk, and people who did it just lingered long until they got drunk. You know something? I've seen a guy lose his faculties on wine in 45 minutes by taking just three or four glasses of it. Well, that couldn't have happened in the Bible times. You'd have to linger with your wine a long time to do that. So the point, people, is just that. You cannot use that which was consumed in the Bible as a basis for what we drink today. They would look on what we drink today as barbarian. Barbarian. That was not what they consumed.

So – first question: Is it the same? Answer: What? No. Second question: Is it necessary? Is it necessary? Now, I realize that in biblical times, it was somewhat necessary to drink wine. And there may be times today when it's necessary. I mean the Bible doesn't say you can't do it because the Bible knows that in times in history, there's going to be situations where you don't have much choice. I mean if you're in a particular country of the world where that's all there is and you were dying of thirst and so forth and so on and you got little choice, then you're going to take advantage of what is available. So the Bible doesn't just flat-out blank – wipe it out. So we have to go to this question – Is it necessary? – today.

The Lord produced wine and the Lord talked about drinking wine and they used wine in the Old Testament because it was of necessity in their society, but don't conclude that it was fermented and don't conclude that it was intoxicating because it may not have been. There may have been times when they had wine that was a 1-to-1 mix because that's what the host offered and that's all that was available and they had to be very careful. There may have been times when strong drink was offered and in the midst of thirst, they took a small amount because they had no choice. There may have been times when all these things were there, but we have to keep in mind that in that day and in that age and maybe in some parts of the world today there is a necessity for this and that's why God doesn't give us a blanket statement.

But the point is this. If we ask ourselves, "Is my drinking necessary?" that's a very important question. In those days maybe they had wine, fruit juice, milk, and water. That was it. They had little choice. Today, you can drink anything, I mean the cupboards in the markets are just jammed full of stuff – everything conceivable. We would have to say this: Is drinking wine necessary today? What's the answer? No, it is not necessary. So it moves out of the category of a necessity into the category of a preference, right? It has to be in the category of a preference, of a want. That's the only place we can put it. So really, if you're going to say that you drink, you can't say, "I drink because they did in the Bible." Just say you do because you want to. That's fair, you prefer that. You'd rather drink wine than Coke or tea, iced tea or I don't know what. Just admit that and that's basically what it is in our society.

But don't use this argument. People say, "Well, I really think it's necessary, because if I don't do it, then people are going to be offended. I have a lot of unsaved friends and they drink and I feel that I need to just have a beer with the boys or I need to drink some of this with the gang, and I mean I just really need to be a part. I just think I don't want to offend them." Frankly, people, that is the dumbest argument I ever heard. Really. That's no argument at all. That is no argument at all. I mean if a whole bunch of people get together and they all scratch behind their left ear, do you scratch behind your left ear so you'll be a part? I mean if everybody on your block doesn't use deodorant, do you not use deodorant? What is that? That's no argument at all. That's a non sequitur. That isn't saying anything. That's silly. You know, there are probably as many non-Christians who don't drink as there are Christians who don't, in this age.

There are a lot of unsaved people who don't drink. You can meet them all in one place if you just go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. There are a whole bunch of people who've sworn off altogether. You'll meet people all the time who aren't Christian people who don't drink. I've even been in a situation with Christians and non-Christians where the Christians drank and the non-Christians didn't. That is no argument. People aren't going to make a big theological conclusion about your inability to develop human relationships because you don't drink. They're not going to say that. In fact, there are a lot of people who wish to God they didn't drink – a lot of them.

So I don't really buy the argument that you got to do it to be accepted. I've been in South America, I've been down in Latin America where people drink, I've been in Mexico where people drink, I've been to every baseball game we played in the several years then I went down there for those baseball tournaments we played against the national champions of Mexico a few years back, and every time we'd go somewhere, after every game, they'd throw this huge, big party for us – I mean a big one. They'd take us to the local restaurant or country club, whatever it was, and man, I'm telling you, the stuff would flow. I remember we went to this one place and in front of every plate was this huge bottle of stuff, just huge. I mean I don't know what it was, it was probably a couple of liters. Just a huge thing. And we all kind of looked at each other and ordered Coke, you know, but they just had a great time.

I mean they drank theirs and ours, you know, they just – you know? And the great part of it was, we all had a terrific time, only we knew what was going on. We enjoyed the reality of the time; they enjoyed their fantasy. And when it was all over, they loved us, they put their arms around us, they invited us back next year, it was the greatest – that isn't an issue. That wasn't an issue in Mexico. I've been in Israel, I've been in Europe, I've never seen it be an issue where somebody would denigrate my Christianity or somebody would think less of me because I chose not to do that. I don't think that's any argument. I do say this: If it's a necessity, if you're in a situation where that's what is available and that's what's there and you have little or no choice, then, with discretion, you need to deal with it as a necessity. But admit in our society, it is a preference. It is a preference.

So I have to ask you this third question, and I'm just going to introduce it and then I'm going to stop and we're going to finish up next time. I've just given you two – there are six more. But now listen, this third question, very quickly: Is it the best choice? All right, admit it, you're going to choose to do it. Is it the best choice? You say, "Well, it's a lot better for you than coffee. It's a lot better for you than Coca-Cola." Somebody else says, "I never saw a guy drink eight Cokes and couldn't walk a straight line." So we can argue about that. Is it the best choice? Let me just show you one thing, and then I'm going to get into this next time. I'm going to show you who was forbidden by God to drink at all in the Bible and we'll find out whether it's the best choice.

But before I do that and just in closing, Luke 1:15. I want you to meet the greatest man who ever lived, okay? This is the greatest man who ever lived – that’s what Jesus said. Up until his time – Matthew 11:11 – there hath none born of women, there is none greater than John the Baptist. Matthew 11:11, Jesus said up to his time, he was the greatest human being that ever lived. Very, very great man. And look what it says in Luke 1:15: “For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord” – now watch – “and shall drink neither wine” – oinos – “nor sikera” – strong drink. “He shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb.” Now, what’s going on here? The greatest man who ever lived was a teetotaler. God forbade him to drink a drop. Why? That’s for next time. Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we know that it’s easy for us to evaluate our spiritual lives on the do’s and don’ts that aren’t really the issue. We know You haven’t forbidden the drinking of wine and yet there are some things that are clear in the Scripture we’re going to try to see to help us make a decision. But God, may we always know that it isn’t the people who don’t drink who are spiritual and the people who do are not. Isn’t that simple. There are other things to consider. Not doing something never makes us anything. What we are is the issue and, Lord, wherever we are and wherever we’ve been in this issue, help us to see it the way You see it, help us to understand it the way You understand it. It’s so wonderful, Lord, that You’ve given us so much truth to deal with, so many things to protect us. We know we not only should avoid sin, but we should avoid anything that could even precipitate sin. So help us, Father, to rightly judge for ourselves what You would have us to do.

Just while you’re meditating for a moment, let me say this in closing. This message is unusual for us, to deal with something that’s technical like this, and yet it’s in the flow of God’s Word. It’s so wonderful how it touches every part of life. But you may have come this morning and you say, “Boy, I came here hoping to hear about God and Jesus Christ and get an answer to my life, to my problems, to the troubles and struggles of my heart, and you talked about this and it didn’t really meet me where I was.”

Well, let me tell you this: I’m going to pray and dismiss you in just one minute. To my right, in front of the auditorium, right by the piano is a prayer room and a counseling center. We have people there who would love to pray with you and share with you. They’ll tell you how you can know Christ, they’ll tell you how He can come in and fill the void that maybe you’ve tried to fill with drink from time to time, they’ll tell you how He can make your life joyful and He can settle you, give you peace in your troubled heart. They’ll tell you how He can forgive your sin and cleanse your heart and give you eternal life. And so we invite you to come when we’re dismissed. There’s no obligation, no coercion, nothing to join or buy or anything. We just want to pray with you and love you and share with you. Whatever your problem, they’ll be there.

And if, perchance, some of you have trouble with this area of drinking, we may have some here who would be identified as alcoholic, you have a drink problem. The Lord Jesus can change that. You

don't need to be a drunkard, you can come to Jesus Christ and He can wash you white as snow. Some of you as Christians maybe have trouble with drink; God can take care of that. As you yield to His Holy Spirit, He can begin to move your will and your bent away from that toward Himself. Don't be drunk with wine in which is excess, be filled with the Spirit. If God asks that, then God empowers that, and He'll do it in your life. He loves you whatever state you're in. Even if you're an alcoholic or a drunkard, He loves you and we do, too, but He wants to change you into the full use of your faculties for His glory. Let Him do that today. Our counselors will be glad to pray with you about it.

Father, thank you for our time this morning, for helping us to see at least the beginning of insight into this area. We love You because we know You care so much about us, even enough to tell us about these things so that we can guard our lives in decision making for Your glory. Bless everyone here, Lord. Draw us together again tonight as we consider what it is to be peacemakers. We'll thank you in Christ's name. Amen.

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