Christians and Alcohol
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-380

As we come, tonight, to the Word of God and to our discussion of a subject at hand, I want you to open your Bible to the fifth chapter of Ephesians and just that eighteenth verse that we looked at last time, Ephesians 5:18. And it's really going to be a launching point for us into our discussion tonight.

Now this will be a little bit sermon and a little bit lecture, a little bit Scripture and a little bit history. But I hope it's going to be helpful for you. The latter half of the book of Ephesians is about the Christian life. It begins the practical section of Ephesians in chapter 4 verse 1, where we are implored or begged to walk in a manner worthy of the calling…that's that same effectual calling we talked about this morning. We have been begged to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called. And then starting at that point and sweeping all the way through the final three chapters, 4, 5 and 6, the Apostle Paul talks about what the worthy walk looks like and what kind of life we are to live. And there are many, many elements of instruction there.

At the heart of this worthy walk, at the heart of living a godly life that honors the Lord is this reality called "being filled with the Spirit." Verse 18 speaks of being filled with the Spirit. Filled, not in the sense of filling a glass, but at filling a sail. Moved along in the direction that honors God by the power of the Holy Spirit, parallel to that is Colossians 3:16, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." So it is having a Word-centered life and thus a Holy Spirit controlled life. It is moving through life under the power of the Holy Spirit by conformity to the revelation of the Spirit on the pages of Holy Scripture. So we talked about the idea of a worthy life being a life filled with the Holy Spirit, moved and controlled and empowered by the Spirit of God.

In the morning sessions we've been talking about what the Spirit does for us and that is what we are responsible to do as we minister alongside in our humanity, the Holy Spirit's supernatural work in us. We are to be passive, being kept filled with the Spirit. We are to yield to the wondrous work of the Spirit as He conforms us to Christ, as He moves us in the path of obedience, as He frees us from sin, as He attaches us with delight to the Law of God and enables us to live righteously. That's how we are to live.

We went into that in some detail last time. We won't go back to that again, leaving it where we did last Sunday night. But I want to go back to the same verse to pick up the front half of it because this is a strange contrast at first reading, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." There's no question that that is a strange connection. Don't be drunk but be filled with

the Holy Spirit.

Why is that contrast here? Why is the filling of the Holy Spirit contrasted with drunkenness?

Obviously, and we're going to see a little bit of it tonight, the Scripture denounces drunkenness as sin. Drunkenness is associated with…in both Scripture and experience, of course…with unrestrained evil behavior. Here the word is dissipation…dissipation, recklessness, immorality, a lack of restraint, a loss of self-control. A person who lives that way is designated in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10, as a person who cannot, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. This is behavior characteristic of a non-Christian. In fact, you can find about four or five lists of characteristic sins of unbelievers in the writings of the Apostle Paul that where you will find drunkenness included. We understand that unrestrained, evil, dissipated, reckless, irresponsible, out-of-control behavior which is induced by being drunk is sinful, is characteristic of non-believers as a way of life and ought not to be characteristic of Christians at all. But why is this contrasted with being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Some have suggested that it's as simple as being under the influence. But that's kind of the notion here. It's kind of an analogy. You…you are not to be under the influence of the wrong internal power. Alcohol is an internal power that brings you under its influence. And the Holy Spirit is an internal power albeit spiritual that brings you under His influence. So rather than be brought under the influence of alcohol, you need to be brought under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Well that's a reasonable contrast and not a bad analogy in truth. But that's not the point here because the point here is not a secular context, the point here is a religious context. This is all about religion here and how we worship. That's the theme here.

Having said that, let's dig in a little bit on this point. It was standard conduct in pagan religions to express their worship in a drunken gluttonous orgy with other worshipers that even involved temple prostitutes. The idea was that religion was a transcendent experience, an esoteric experience, a metaphysical experience, an elevated experience and the only way you could get yourself in to that realm where you could actually commune with the deities was by loosing all inhibitions. Drunkenness was not just social, it was religious and therefore, in terms of religion, it was not only acceptable, it was expected. It was an essential part of the religious experience in the Greek and Roman world.

Now let me go back, a little bit, in the history and help you will this. Greek mythology said that the great god Zeus gave birth to a son and god…the god Zeus…gave birth to this son in a very, very strange and bizarre way. According to Greek mythology, the child god was snatched from its mother whose name was Semele. The child god was in the womb of this goddess named Semile and the child god was somehow snatched out of Semile's womb when she was just about to be incinerated by the burning glory of Zeus. So, Semile being an inferior goddess comes under the blazing glory of Zeus, she's about to be incinerated, she has a baby in her womb. The baby is taken out of her womb,

the child then…here's the bizarre part…is sown into the thigh of Zeus until time to be born. The infant god in the thigh of Zeus is to be the world ruler. However, this infant god when born was kidnapped…kidnapped by the envious Titans, sons of earth, who took this infant god and tore the child limb from limb, cooked him and ate him. His heart, however, was rescued by Zeus and Zeus swallowed his heart and became reborn as Dionysius. Is that weird? That's it.

So all of a sudden, the child appears again revived, resurrected as Dionysius. Zeus then blasted with lightning the earthborn Titans from whose ashes mankind arose. It makes as much sense to me as evolution. Dionysius then, this resurrected, reassembled, thigh-born deity spawns a religion, a religion of ecstasy, a religion of emotionalism which saturated the Greek and Roman world. The worshipers, for example, ate the raw flesh of bulls, committed the atrocities with human private parts and even worshiped them…scandalous, bizarre, orgiastic, sexually, perverted behavior.

The cult of Dionysius was recognized for cultivating madness with music, drunkenness, gluttony and sexual activity. One famous ancient writer, Euripides wrote of some of its horrifying rituals.

Dionysius, the Greek name, became known as the god of wine because drunkenness was such an important part. And the Roman name for Dionysius is Bacchus, you remember that name? B-a-c-c-h-u-s, Bacchus is the Roman wine god. And you will see pictures of artifacts, drawings from ancient times representations of ancient pieces of art where the wine god Bacchus has around him nymphs and satyrs all engaged with people in ecstatic orgies of demonic possession and sexual perversion in a state of drunkenness. A Bacchanalian feast is a drunken brawl. I visited, a number of years ago, the city of Baalbek, east of Beirut, Lebanon, and there in Baalbek…Baalbek was one of the great temples of Bacchus and it is one of the best preserved ruins in the Middle East and it's a stunning thing to see. You can still see the main floor where there was a deep hole for the people to regurgitate so they could go back and eat even more, and where they regurgitated because of their drunken stupor. There are on the remaining pieces of stone and pillars that are there, grape vines everywhere and nymphs, musical instruments celebrating these horrific orgies.

So you see, against the background of the Greek, Roman, Mediterranean culture involved in this kind of religion which essentially was a kind of religious false experience induced by drunkenness, liberating people from all their normal self-control and inhibition and restraint so that they behaved in a completely uncontrolled way. This was the kind of religion that many of the believers in the early church were very familiar with and saved out of.

So the Apostle Paul is saying don't get drunk with wine. That's not how you commune with God. That just produces dissipation, be filled with the Spirit. There is no real communion with any deity by drunkenness because there's only one true God and communion with Him is created by the Spirit and enjoyed by those who are filled with the Spirit.

In fact, there were such strong inroads of this into the culture that it was very hard to get it out of the church. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians who had essentially lived this kind of religious life before their conversion, he addresses himself directly to this kind of behavior. You…you have to understand that you can't go back to the old ways.

Go down to verse 20 of 1 Corinthians 10, "The things which the Gentiles sacrificed, they sacrificed to demons and not to God." I don't want you to become sharers in demons. You can't drink the cup of the Lord at the communion service and then go back and get drunk with a cup of demons. You can't partake at the table of the Lord and go back to the table of demons. And do you remember that Paul even further in this chapter had to correct the way they handled the Lord's Table? Some of them were gluttonous at the Lord's Table. Some of them were indulging even at the Lord's Table in a manner of drunkenness.

You look at chapter 11 verse 21, in your eating, each one takes his own supper first, one is hungry and another is drunk. There was so much of this in their experience that there was a grave danger of dragging it in to the life of the church. The Apostle Paul then is contrasting the counterfeit communion with gods with the true communion with God that comes from being filled with His Spirit.

So that's the nature of the contrast. Now having said that, I want just to talk about this whole issue of do not get drunk with wine, to become drunk, *methusko* is the Greek verb, it's used three times in the New Testament, it means don't get drunk…don't get drunk. This isn't the only place in the Bible where we're told not to get drunk, there are lots of places, as I said, that's listed among those kind of characteristic sins of the unregenerate and there are many warnings in the Scripture against drunkenness and the sin of drunkenness. There also are constant calls for self-control, clear mindedness, sober mindedness, right? Repeatedly from the Holy Spirit through the writers of the New Testament.

All drunkenness does is produce debauchery. It produces dissipation is the word if you're there in Ephesians chapter 5, dissipation, *asotia*, recklessness, unrestrained debauchery. That's what drunkenness produces.

So we are warned here, "Do not get drunk with wine even for supposedly some noble purpose, like believing you can commune with God." Maybe there were believers who thought they would try to commune with the true God that way, as they had in the past.

Now the word "wine" is an interesting word and I'm not going to do a lot of word studies, we've done those before. But the word wine is *oinos*, the Hebrew is *yayin*, *oinos* and *yayin*. And when you look at a Hebrew lexicon or Hebrew dictionary and you look at the word *yayin*, for example, the Jewish

Encyclopedia will tell you it refers to mixed wine…mixed wine. And as we shall see in a little bit, the wine in the Old Testament time was mixed and the wine in the New Testament time as well was mixed. There are a number of different Hebrew words that refer to wine but the common word is *yayin* . There are a few others, *tirosh, chamar. Tirosh* refers to new wine, *chamar* refers to something fermented. Then there's the Hebrew word *shakar* which refers to strong drink. And the root of that word means to be drunk, for stronger drinks from other than grapes and unmixed. *Shakar* would be the unmixed strong drink.

But whether you had wine or something stronger than wine, unmixed, these had an intoxicating potential. *Oinos*, wine, the word that the New Testament uses, definitely has an intoxicating potential, and that's why there are so many warnings in the Scripture against drunkenness. The 1901, so I just want you to know this has been around a while, this is not new thinking, the 1901 Jewish encyclopedia distinguishes *yayin* which is wine from *shakar* which is strong drink strictly on the matter of how much alcohol content it had. So they were very aware of the potential of drunkenness. Wine was common in the New Testament. And because wine was so common in the New Testament, as it was in the Old, there are so many warnings about drunkenness. It carries the potential to make you drunk, to cause you to lose your control, restraint, sense, and therefore we would conclude that drunkenness at any level is a sin…it is a sin. Romans 13:13 is listed with vices. Galatians 5:21 it is listed with vices; 1 Corinthians 5, 1 Corinthians 6.

Drunkenness is an altered state of consciousness in which you don't have control. It's the opposite of being sober minded and self-control. For the Christian, it is unthinkable, it is an outright sin. And we are called to avoid it. These instructions that are given to us are not ambiguous in any sense. In 1 Peter 4:3 we read, "For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desires of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries." That all goes together.

You never see in these lists drunkenness sorted out from the rest. It's a package deal. Where there is sensuality, lust, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, abominable idolatries, there is sin. And it doesn't…it doesn't easy isolate itself from those kinds of behaviors, thus the warnings are very, very strong. The Bible constantly warns of the danger of drunkenness cause it leads to all these other kinds of debauched behaviors.

Now even in the Old Testament the warnings are the same. Proverbs 20 verse 1, wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging and whoever is deceived thereby is not wise…not wise. You do back things, stupid things when you're drunk. You say bad things, stupid things when you're drunk. And bad consequences come from them.

In Proverbs, I want you to go back with me for just a moment. Turn to this one, Proverbs chapter 23 is a good place to sort of get the summary of what the Bible talks about when it speaks of drunkenness.

You can start in Proverbs 23 and verse 19, “Listen, my son, and be wise and direct your heart in the way, do not be with heavy drinkers of wine or with gluttonous eaters of meat, for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty and drowsiness will clothe one with rags.” Don’t hang around people who get drunk.

Then in particular, down into verse 29, Proverbs 23, “Who has woe, who has sorrow, who has contentions, who has complaining, who has wounds without cause, who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long over wine and those who go to taste mixed wine.”

Everything in verse 29 sounds to me like a barroom fight, doesn’t it? I mean that’s what you get…what you’ve got. Woe, sorrow, contention, complaining, wounds for no reason and redness of the eyes, it’s a drunken brawl. Who has that? “Those who linter long over wine. Those who go someplace to drink.” Don’t look on the wine when it’s red and sparkles in the cup when it goes down smoothly. It bites like a serpent, it stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things. Your mind will utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. What fool would go on the top of a mast and try to take a nap? Only a drunk. That’s about the most dangerous…it is the most dangerous place on the ship. Who takes a nap on a mast? A drunk. What are you doing up there? But this is how drunks do. In verse 35, “They struck me but I didn’t become ill, they beat me but I didn’t know it. When shall I awake? I’ll seek another drink.”

Warnings the Scripture gives us of the idiocy and the folly of drunkenness. Isaiah chapter 5 talks about leaders who are drinkers, men of honor who are drinkers who are drunkards, who make wrong judgments. Isaiah 5, Isaiah 28, Isaiah 56, Hosea 4, all kinds of warnings about drunkenness. It is a trap.

Now on the other hand, we want to be faithful to the full picture of Scripture. There are in the Old Testament, Leviticus 23 and Exodus 29, offerings of the fruit of the vine brought to God. Judges 9 makes reference to wine being an enjoyable drink. Isaiah even uses wine in the fifty-fifth chapter and the first and second verse, very familiar, as symbolic of a blessing come by wine. It was a part of daily life in Bible times, it was even used medicinally, do you remember the Good Samaritan? The man who was wounded? Wine was used as an antiseptic in his wounds. Scripture recognizes wine. It has a place in society but it has a potential that can be highly damaging.

It wasn’t so damaging in ancient times because people didn’t drive cars. It would damage them and they might damage others in brawls and they might end up killing other people. But they didn’t wield the kind of weaponry that people who are inebriated wield today at 70 miles an hour, crashing and careening into crowds of people.

And I want to add, just a significant word, there were some people in the Old Testament times and apparently in the New Testament times as well, who never drank at all anything alcoholic. You say, “Well wine was so common, who wouldn’t drink?”

Well I want to introduce you to group number one that didn’t drink in Leviticus chapter 10, verse 9, “The Lord said to Aaron, the High Priest, be a head of the Aaronic priesthood, do not drink wine, *yayin*, or strong drink, *shakar*, neither you nor your sons with you when you come into the tent of meetings so that you will not die.” Wow! Don’t drink anything that is alcoholic when you come here or you may die because this is a holy place.

It’s a perpetual statute throughout your generations. Not just you, Aaron, this is perpetual. This goes on for all those who stand as priests unto God so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, the unclean and the clean. Unclean…drink wine; strong drink; clean…do not. Profane…drink wine, strong drink…holy do not so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses. You have a very important responsibility to teach all divine truth revealed to you to the sons of Israel, the people of Israel. You need to be clear minded, clear headed, and you need to set the highest example of holiness.

In the sixth chapter of Numbers we move from those who were in positions of leadership as priests, they were the officers of the theocratic Kingdom. To those who desire to take the highest vow for holy living called the Nazarite vow, meaning to be separated. When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazarite to dedicate himself to the Lord, this is the highest level of dedication and devotion to the Lord, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink, no vinegar, neither anything made from wine or strong drink, any grape juice or fresh or dried grapes all the days of his separation shall not eat anything produced by the grapevine from the seeds even to the skin. And it goes on to talk about some other things. So if you took that most severe, most devout of all vows, you would never drink anything that came from the grape or the fruit.

Another is in Proverbs 31, that famous chapter for which we turn to find about the woman’s role. But there’s more there, the first part of the chapter, talking about kings, rulers. And when it comes to rulers, there are specific words here, verse 4, “It is not for kings, O Lemuel,” Lemuel was a king based on verse 1, King Lemuel. This is what his mother taught him. “It’s not for kings, O Lemuel, it’s not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to drink or desire strong drink.” Why? They’ll drink and forget what’s decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing. Save the strong drink to somebody who is agonizing in the throes of death, like an anesthetic to ease his pain. Give wine to the one whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more, ease him with a little to calm his troubled spirit.

But a ruler? No. A priest? No. One who takes the highest level of devotion? No. A ruler? No. That is why Isaiah 5:22 brings judgment down on the leadership of Israel because they were engaged in

consumption of alcohol and it had perverted their leadership. In fact, they are designated by their drinking for judgment. “Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink.” What that verse means is judgment is going to come down on the heads of people in positions of leadership who are drinking. You know, you probably wonder why so many nutty things come out of Washington or Sacramento. There may be reasons that aren’t apparent on the surface.

If you turn to the New Testament, for a minute, 1 Timothy chapter 3, we all know about the behaviors of people in leadership who are inebriated. But let’s talk about people in positions of responsibility in the life of the church. Let’s talk about a pastor, an overseer, an elder here, 1 Timothy chapter 3. It tells us he must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, that’s a one-woman man, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not devoted to wine…not devoted to wine. And that’s the elder. What about the deacon? We talked about deacons earlier. What about the deacons responsibility? Is theirs any less? Deacons in verse 8 of that chapter must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, nor addicted to much wine, or fond of sorted gain.

Wine is an issue here. It’s an issue for priests. It’s an issue for kings. It’s an issue for people who take the highest level of devotion. It’s an issue for rulers. It’s an issue for pastors. It’s an issue for deacons. Why? Because there’s always the potential for drunkenness, and drunkenness leads to dissipation. It leads to foolishness, uncontrolled words and uncontrolled actions. And if you go back to Ephesians chapter 5, where we started all of this discussion, we understand that we have been called by God to wisdom, verse 15 of that same chapter, Ephesians 5, “Be careful how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise.” Verse 17, “Don’t be foolish, don’t get drunk.” That will guarantee the absence of wisdom and the presence of foolishness.

So, the Scripture is crystal-clear on this matter of drunkenness. And it’s also crystal-clear on the issue of people in leadership, staying away from that because they have responsibility before God not only to render right judgments and to teach truth accurately, but to set a pure example. Paul is saying, “Walking the worthy walk,” which he already talks about in chapter 4, being in humility and love and unity and holiness, a walk in spiritual wisdom, a walk in the will of God, as I just read, means the Christian believer does not put himself in an altered state of consciousness by being drunk. At what point are you drunk? When you lose your self-control, at any point.

Even in a non-religious sense, the Christian must avoid the sin of drunkenness because it is the path to debauched thinking and debauched acting. Drunkenness is the old way of life. We don’t live that way anymore.

Okay, that kind of introduction gets us going. Now, that leads to the issue that I want to bring before you. Okay, we’re not going to get drunk. Okay, that’s a sin, we agree with that. Any drunkenness at any level is a sin. And I looked it up this week to find out that the literature basically says three beers and you’re starting to lose control. Probably that varies from size to size, but it’s something like that,

just as an illustration. So if we avoid that drunkenness, have we done the will of God? Well, there's some questions that we have to ask and I'm going to…I have eight questions, okay? Tonight I'm going to give you one. (Laughter) You're going to understand why. Here's the one question…that…this is the question that has to be answered and this is the question that is not often answered. Is the alcoholic beverage today the same as it was in ancient times? Are we comparing apples to apples here? Because people who advocate the fact that believers are free to drink alcoholic drinks will always say they're in the Bible, they drank alcoholic beverages in the Old Testament. They drank alcoholic beverages in the New Testament. They drank wine in the Old Testament. They drank wine in the New Testament. The disciples drank wine. Jesus drank wine. We can drink wine. That's it!

That then begs the question, was the wine consumed in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the same as alcoholic drinks today? And again, that is very important because you even have a statement in the fourteenth chapter of Deuteronomy and the twenty–sixth verse that says you can buy wine if you want. You can buy strong drink if you want. If you want to do that, you can do that.

So doesn't that completely solve the problem? Well, you have to ask the question whether a behavior in the ancient world established an absolute that is transferable into the present world? Are we talking about the same thing?

Let me give you an illustration. Psalm 150 tells us to dance to the Lord. We don't do that. Why? Well Hebrew folk dance is a far cry from the sensual dancing of the modern culture. Churches long ago abandoned dancing. We didn't grow up in a simple-folk culture doing a folk dance? Some people do that. some people like to square dance and do a folk dance. Maybe a traditional Scottish or Irish dance…we understand that. That's a million miles from the sensual kind of dancing in the modern culture.

If dancing was done in that folk way, it would be honorable to God. It would not be sexual or sensual. But dancing disappears by the time you get to the New Testament. You don't even have anybody referring to dancing in the New Testament. You don't hear anybody dancing in the early church. They're praising the Lord, speaking to themselves in Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. They're playing instruments. We went over that. But there's no dancing. The world has changed and culture has changed and that didn't survive, it didn't survive at all to our time.

How about another one, slavery. In the Old Testament slavery was permitted, not kidnapping people to make them slaves. But what you know as slavery would be indentured service where someone would come to live and work for a person and give his life in work and employment in exchange for a home and care and food and a family and a life and security and a future. Slavery in the Old Testament as practiced by Israel was benevolent. The alternative to being a slave was destitution, homelessness, and starvation. People would go to someone and say, "Can I live here and serve

you?” Because that was a benevolent means of socially caring for people who otherwise would be destitute. Scripture speaks about that in the Old Testament, again we’re not talking about kidnapping people, buying and selling them as against their will. But Hosea talks about a slave market. And for some people, it was their only hope. In the case of Hosea, he found a slave and married her. That’s the most benevolent thing you could ever do. The Old Testament does elevate the responsibility of masters to care for their slaves and slaves to be obedient to their masters. And sometimes that relationship was so wonderful that a slave would go to his master and say, “I want to serve you the rest of my life, I never want to leave because you love me and I love you,” and he would put his ear up against the doorpost and an awl would be rammed through his ear and he’d have a hole in his ear and no doubt a ring on that hole to symbolize that he had voluntarily committed himself to that master for the rest of his days.

And by the way, every seven years in the Old Testament, all the slaves were set loose. And guess what? If we look at history, many of them didn’t want to go because the system was the only way they could survive. They couldn’t do it on their own, a benevolent, social provision. But slavery by capture, slavery by kidnapping…forbidden.

Folks, this has no relation to the exploitation, the human trafficking in human slaves that marred the Middle Ages and goes on even today in human trafficking. No comparison to the exploitation of Africans by other Africans, they were the first slave traders, the first people to sell Africans were other Africans. You understand that. Here’s one tribe, here’s another tribe…this tribe says let’s go kill this tribe because they hate them, they’ve been warring for generations. Somebody gets the idea…why should we kill them? If we capture them we can get money for them by selling them to the Arab slave traders. The only reason slavery flourished was because the tribes would capture the other tribes and sell them to the slave traders. Nobody would advocate that. It eventually ended up with a European slave owners and Americans and it’s very ugly.

So today, would you say this? “I’m going to go get some slaves. They had slaves in the Bible.” Oh really. You’re going to go get some slaves? “Yeah, I’m going to buy them, where do I buy them? Who do I pay? Can I put it on my credit card? Can I buy them on line?” Nobody sells people. People don’t sell themselves to you. You don’t have somebody knocking on your door saying, “I’m destitute, would you buy me?” People had slaves in Bible times. So we should have slaves.

Do you see? It’s not that simple. Nobody says that. Nobody would even advocate that. We have other ways to care for people. No one advocates slavery in our culture because the version that we are familiar with now is so unacceptable, we’re not talking about the same thing that used to be. And I really believe you have to view the whole issue of drinking alcoholic beverages in that same way by asking the question, “Is what we know today as wine, what they were drinking in the Bible? Or have we got something completely different?”

All right. A little caveat here. There are some cultures, agrarian cultures, agricultural cultures, generationally who grew wine, grapes. And wine became part of that culture, many of them in Europe…many, almost all of Europe, Latin America. And they consumed wine generation after generation after generation that was local, sometimes family, traditional holdover from agricultural history. And even today people in those countries and in those heritages still drink wine with a meal. They don't just drink, but it's a part of the culture. And they drink moderately with a meal as a part of that tradition.

I'm not going to condemn that, that's not what we're talking about here. The drinking of wine made by local families in agrarian societies culturally, traditionally, has not relationship to the multi-national corporate production by the alcohol industry that is marketed across the face of the world. They're not seeking to provide a necessary product or a simple amenity to a meal, they have a product with intoxicating power that they produce in massive quantities because they want to sell it in massive quantities and they want you to buy it in massive quantities and consume it. Do they know the destructive power of alcohol? Of course they do. It destroys individuals, we all know that. We know people it's destroyed. It destroys families, marriages, homes, careers, lives, 80,000 people a year in our country die of alcohol-related disease or accidental death, thirty-eight million, the last count, this is a week ago, alcoholics in the U.S. And alcohol is produced at such mass volume that there is an unlimited supply and there is an unlimited supply in our society, in modern society and there has been for centuries now, a virtually unlimited supply with a much higher alcohol content than the ancient counterparts.

Furthermore, as we will see, alcoholic, fermented beverages in ancient times were designed to produce safety, not harm. They were designed to produce and protect life, not to produce death. How is this the case? Well, wine was low in alcohol content. The typical family vineyard that you would find in ancient times, biblical times, Old Testament, New Testament, this would be a local growing of grapes, a family would have some kind of a jar in a house and they would store the fruit of the grapes in there for best I can tell from looking at the history of it, two or three days…two or three days. Two to four percent alcohol content, the Greeks would have wine that sat longer than that, and there's some indications among the Greeks it could be as high as twelve to fourteen percent historically. But in the culture of the Bible, it had very low alcohol content. And it was also local and it was also limited.

For example, do you remember John 2, the wedding at Cana? And do you remember that they had a wedding for the whole village and let's assume there were 500 people in the village that would be probably be close to reality, they would all come. The wine ran out. The wine ran out. That's the biggest event in the village, that's the biggest event for the people and they didn't have enough wine for a week. A wedding lasts a week and a few days they're out. This is not a vast consumption of alcohol, and it was limited. Today there is an unlimited supply…unlimited. Now let me tell you something else about it. It was a thousand years after the New Testament that the process of

distillation was developed and invented…a thousand years later. What did distillation do? It increased the alcohol content potentially from 40 percent to 75 percent. That's what distillation did. A little after that, during the time of Napoleon, some kind of process known as chapitalization(?) was developed and that added another potential five percent alcohol. That's where you get things like whisky, hard liquor, with this high alcohol content. Today fortified wines would be as high as twenty percent alcohol and even higher than that.

So to start with, we're talking about a different amount of this available. We're talking about a different alcoholic content. Something else you need to understand, very important. Wine in ancient times was boiled or mixed…boiled or mixed. And I'm not just telling you this because Bible writers talk about it, I'm telling you this is secular history. Everybody knows this was the case. And if you take wine that was typically two to four percent and you boil it, what happens to the alcohol? It's gone. What you have left is a paste that can then be remixed with water.

On the other hand, if you just mix it with water, three parts to one would have been the average, three parts water to one part of wine, you dilute the alcohol content significantly. And I say, in ancient times, the wine was either boiled and out went all of its alcohol content, or it was mixed. Professor Samuel Lee of Cambridge University says that *yayin*, the Hebrew word for wine, or *oinos* the Greek word, does not refer only to intoxicating liquor made by fermentation. But both words, but in particular his interest is the word *yayin* refers to a thick, un-intoxicating syrup or paste produced by boiling to make it storable. This thick substance was stored then in skins. It is a thick syrup. It is, somebody said, to the grade of jelly and once it's put in the skin that's supple, it can be squeezed out of the skin on to bread like your grape jelly on bread, or dissolved in water and mixed to become a drink. So says the professor at Cambridge and he draws this from a description of this very process by Pliny, the ancient Roman historian who said this is what they did. Pliny talks about an un-intoxicating wine.

Another ancient writer from Athens and here's a direct quote that came from a wonderful article by Robert Stein. It says, "The gods," this is a Greek writer in Athens, "the gods have revealed wine to mortals to be the greatest blessing for those who use it right. But for those who use it without measure, the reverse, for it gives food to them that take it in strength and mind and body. In medicine it is most beneficial. It can be mixed with liquid and drugs and it brings aid to the wounded. In daily life to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer. But if you over-step the bounds, it brings violence, mix it half and half and you get madness, unmixed bodily collapse."

Plutarch in his symposiacs(?) says, as a beverage it was always thought of as a mixed drink. Quote: "We call a mixture wine, although the larger of the components is water. The ratio of water might vary," says Robert Stein, "but only barbarians drank it unmixed and a mixture of wine and water of equal parts was seen as strong drink, equal parts, half water, half wine was strong wine, and frowned on. The term wine, or *oinos* in the ancient world then did not mean wine as we understand it today, but wine mixed with water or from a paste, completely without any intoxicating power because it had

all been boiled out."

Strong drink would be half and half, or unmixed. And this was unacceptable to a cultured person to drink strong drink…unacceptable. A document called The Apostolic Tradition indicates that the early church followed this custom, serving only mixed wine whether from a syrup paste or a liquid base.

The wine then of biblical times could well have been unintoxicating from a syrup base, or marginally intoxicating because its fermentation had been diluted so much in the mixture with water. Taking a very conservative estimate, for example, if water is three-to-one mixed with wine, the level of alcohol would be between 2.25 and 2.75 percent which is well under the 3.2 percent alcohol necessary to be classified as an intoxicating drink. Four to one would take you down to 1.8 to 2.2. and the only way you could possible get drunk would be just to consume volumes of it.

Now what are we saying? Homer, Plato, Pliny, other ancient writers detail the practice of diluting wine with water, of also boiling it down to a paste. Homer's Odyssey, you remember that from your English Lit class, or from your European Lit class, Homer's Odyssey refers to mixtures as high as 20 to 1, twenty parts water, one part fermented juice.

The Greeks wrote of those who drank undiluted wine as barbarians. The Jewish Mishnah, the Mishnah is the codification of Jewish laws that are imposed upon the Jewish people, and in the Mishnah four cups of wine were poured out for the Passover, mixed with water two or three parts. So the wine consumed in the Passover, according to the Mishnah, called Modzug(?) is two or three parts water. And again, commonly wine was boiled so that all the alcohol evaporated. The residue was a paste mixed with water, alcohol free, common in Rome, common in Egypt, common in Jewish life called *yayin mabushov(???)* by the Jews.

When you look at the Scripture, you see this. Song of Solomon talks the beautiful talk between the bridegroom and the bride about mixed wine…mixing wine. Proverbs 23:30 talks about mixing wine. Isaiah 65:11, mixed wine.

In Proverbs 9, there is a statement there that relates to this in the category of wisdom, being wise, Proverbs 9, "Wisdom has built her house," verse 1, "Hewn out her seven pillars, prepared her food and mixed her wine. Come eat my food," verse 5, "and drink the wine I've mixed." Wisdom mixes the wine. Mixed wine is important in the Bible. Unmixed, strong drink is dangerous.

In Revelation 14 and verse 10, a picture of the wine of the wrath of God which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger. Even when God talks about the wine of His anger, it is mixed wine.

Okay, now why? Why did they mix it? You say, "They're taking out all the fun. Come on. We want the buzz. We like the buzz. We like the flavor if you put water in, you mess up the flavor, you take away

the fun." Let me tell you why they mixed it with water. And I'm just going to take it down to four things that I found in looking at the history of this. Number one, to conserve the supply. Obviously…obviously spread it out. Here's one you probably didn't think about, to increase the flavor. Yes, to increase the flavor. This was a shock to me since I don't drink anything that has any kind of alcohol content in it, never have, I don't know what the flavor of any of that is. I mean, once in a while when I have a communion service somewhere else and I get a little bit of it or something like that, I know the flavor but only very modestly has that happened in my life. But they mixed it in order to increase the flavor. Now that's not so obvious, is it? Your conventional wisdom would think that's the opposite of what should happen.

So, did a little digging on that. Found a New York Times article in July of 2010 and the article said this, "Water is a flavor enhancer in two drinks…wine and coffee." Water is a flavor enhancer in wine and coffee. They determined this in a laboratory by studying the properties of these two things, wine and coffee, and how they are affected molecularly by the introduction of water. And they determined in their studies that water mixed with coffee and wine releases the flavor and subdues the bitterness. The article went on to say that with wine above ten percent alcohol, the wine is pungent, irritating, and acidic and the flavor is not released. Add water and flavor molecules reduce the alcohol content in percentage, reduce the irritating features, they all disappear and the flavor is enhanced, and the same is true with coffee.

Try it with coffee. Okay. If you want to look that up, New York Times, July 28, 2010 and there's a lot more in that interesting article.

Third reason…number one was to increase the supply. Number two was to enhance the flavor. Number three, to prevent drunkenness…to prevent drunkenness. That's a pretty important one, don't you think? Have you been to Israel in the summer, or in the spring, or the early fall when it's 110? And your body is losing heat because you're walking. In those days you're working outside in the blazing sun. That would be true of all the Middle East, Mediterranean climate areas, they needed liquids. And there was always the danger that if you just kept taking it in, not only would you run out of the supply but you would of necessity put yourself in a position to be drunk. That's why sometimes it was mixed up to 20 to 1. But number four, and here's the really critical thing to understand. Wine was mixed with water as an antiseptic. The purpose of mixing the wine with the water was to sanitize the water…to sanitize the water. That's what's really going on. To make water safe cause you can't live without water. No one can. They were living in extreme heat and working hard and the world was unsanitary and bacteria was everywhere. It was not a sanitary world, would you agree with that? We don't even know what sanitary was until the end of the nineteenth century. Read the book, The Great Influenza it will change your view of the world when you realize that it wasn't until the nineteenth century that anybody knew such a thing as bacteria existed. No one ever had a disease diagnosed accurately until the late eighteen hundreds. They didn't know anything about where it came from. God knew. Part of the Fall was to produce fermentation because in the Fall bacteria were set loose in the

world and they were potentially destructive and deadly. Fermentation provided an antiseptic in the stomach that killed bacteria. In that sense, fermentation is a gift to a fallen world.

At Oregon State University, two microbiologists tackled this problem and this is available from October of the year 2002, The American Society for Microbiology. These two microbiologists at Oregon State University discovered that wine inactivated or killed virulent bugs called pathogens and they named them. They've reproduced that in the lab and they watched it happen. E coli, salmonella, staphylococcus, the staph that we all know about from hospitals, and clebsialla(??) and that wine within 30 to 60 minutes completely kills all that bacteria. And, by the way, they go on to say all kinds of other potentially lethal pathogens.

Now here's the interesting part. Their studies determined that it's not the alcohol that does it, it's not the alcohol. In the process of fermentation, malic and tartaric acid are produced in the process and malic and tartaric acid are what killed the bacteria so that they are even in the paste when all the alcohol has been burned off. In fact, they're so convinced of this that they are currently working, ladies, on a wine based spray disinfectant to kill the bacteria around your kitchen, your house, and at the hospital and their tests have proven it to be as effective as hydrogen peroxide. So wine in that condition becomes a gift from God so that people could drink water and have the bacteria that naturally exists in water be killed and wine becomes a drink of safety.

Others even say that the grapes and the skins of the grapes have resveratrol in them which aids in the cases of ulcers. So, God gave wine as a means of health and to prevent illness in the ancient world, a common grace it is.

You say, "Well then why don't you drink it?" I live in a sanitary world, right? I live in a sanitary world. I don't live in the world they lived in. I don't have any need for that. It was necessary then, it's not necessary now. But it was in low supply, mildly alcoholic, mixed with water, mixed with milk. Sometimes they mixed it with spices. Today, it's not necessary. Endless supply, gas stations, convenient stores, markets, drug stores. The lowest alcoholic content would be beer, four to five percent, all the way up 75 percent in some whiskeys. And what disturbs me is that the products are especially designed to sell to whom? Who are they trying to sell them to? The most irresponsible part of the population, who are they? Kids, young people. What they do is they market them with half-dressed women and macho men, right? You could watch a hundred beer commercials and you wouldn't know anything about beer. They also put high sugar content in it because they know kids are used to drinking sugared drinks along with high alcohol content and they make these sweet high alcohol content drinks 40 ounces to create the buzz. And then they spend four billion in ads and nobody needs any of it. But they need the money.

Now here's what's interesting about all of this. People even in our nation are starting to wake up to the fact that drinking is very dangerous. According to the Harvard Public Health Study, and this is

very recent, I just saw this a couple of days ago, the Harvard Public Health Study, fifty percent of people in America don't drink at all…50 percent. Probably surprises you. Only twelve percent drink ten drinks a week…a little more than one a day. Only twelve percent. Per capita, alcohol consumption has dropped from highs in the past down to 23 percent…I should say it's dropped 23 percent since 1990. Per capita, alcohol consumption is dropped in the U.S. 23 percent since 1990, so that's how fast it's gone down. And that means that the U.S. is number 22 among nations in per capita alcohol consumption. That's good news. Number one is Luxemburg, number two is France, number three is Italy, number four is Hungary, and so you go down the list. We're down to number 22. Abstention from all alcohol is more common in the United States than any other western country. This is good.

Why? Because kids are finding out they can die, that it kills. They're not fleeing, by the way, the destructive evils of illicit sex, they're not fleeing the stupors necessarily of drugs. But they are leaving alcohol and that's good.

By the way, 23 percent of the drinkers consume 76 percent of the alcohol. Most drinkers then are binge drinkers. They drink to get drunk. So any encouragement to drink ends up encouraging binge drinkers cause they're the largest percentage of people who drink and they are the most self-destructive and the most destructive of other people. In the face of that, it is amazing to me that we now have a generation of young so-called self-styled pastors encouraging their young people to drink alcohol. One very prominent pastor, Mark Driscoll, repented publicly for not drinking alcohol sooner.

There's a book written by Darren Patrick called The Church Planter, it's a book written to this young generation of sort of entrepreneurial pastors and in the book he says, "The biggest problem among these young pastors is drunkenness." And he actually says if you're having a problem with alcohol; take a break until you get control of it. Have you ever heard in your life in the history of the church that a big problem among pastors was drunkenness? This new freedom, this new liberation is damaging. Pastors shouldn't be doing that. They shouldn't be advocating that. What they're telling those kids to drink isn't anything like what was going on in the scriptures. Might as well tell them to have slaves.

One of their favorite verses, and I don't have time to go through all this, but I'm going to stop. This clock's not right, so it doesn't matter. Somebody turned it the wrong direction, plus it's not working. Just one other thing, Psalm 104, see if I give it to you tonight, you won't have to listen to this another time. Psalm 104…and this is just a point to be made, Psalm 104, they love to point to this. "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for the labor of man so that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine which makes man's heart glad." So they say, "See, it's supposed to have a buzz. Supposed to make you happy."

No…no, that's not what it's saying. What makes the heart glad here…I mean, look at it, it's obvious, the grass grows and the cattle flourish. The crops, the vegetation grow under the labor of the farmer and food comes from the earth and wine. All of which make the farmer happy. Why? Because his

cattle are healthy. His crop is growing. His vines are producing. That's what makes him happy. This isn't about being silly drunk. There are terrible things being advocated and verses like that used as support. No reason for that whatsoever.

Somebody else used the argument I read…"Well drinking is like eating. You're in trouble if you overdo it." Really! Do you know anybody who dozed off the road and killed all the people in the car because they had one too many tacos? I don't think so. Tacos don't alter your consciousness. Or somebody drove off a cliff because he had an extra slice of pizza. Or somebody raped a girl because he ate too many cheeseburgers.

The potential for loss of sense, loss of control, loss of judgment especially with youth, and potential for binge-drinking addiction is so high. So in the Old Testament times, Rabbi Eliezer forbade saying blessing over any unmixed wine. According to The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, communion, Last Supper in the New Testament and the tradition that followed out of it was of highly diluted wine.

Well we're not surprised by that. So, the point that I want to make tonight, just one point, seven more to go, wine wasn't the same, you got it? We clear. Okay, now you can go, let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the day You've given us. What a wonderful day of fellowship and a blessed day of enjoying Your Word together and worship together. Thank You for these faithful people. Thank You for all that You've done in our church, we thank You as we think about it and look at the little brochure, this is simply just a little bit of a glimpse of the work that you're doing here through all of these faithful precious people. Bless their lives; use them greatly for Your glory, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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