

THE CASE FOR TOTAL ABSTINENCE FROM ALCOHOL

(by George Battey)

There is a hesitancy on the part of some to condemn all non-medicinal use of alcohol. The common idea is that drunkenness is condemned in scripture, but not necessarily taking a single drink. Furthermore, two problem questions arise when Christians assume the position of "drunkenness is wrong, but it is not wrong to simply take a single drink."

First, no one seems to know exactly what constitutes drunkenness. For example, is one drunk only when he passes out? Is he drunk when his vision is blurred? Is he drunk when his speech begins to slur? At what point is a person drunk? Those advocating drinking-but-not-getting-drunk position do not know how to answer these questions.

Second, no one will say what constitutes "a drink." Is "a drink" a shot-glass of whiskey? A glass of wine? How large can the glass be? A can of beer? How large can the container be? Is "a drink" one swallow? Those advocating the drinking-but-not-getting-drunk position do not know how to answer these questions.

It is not surprising, then, when members of the church drink. The drinking-but-not-getting-drunk position leads to drinking. One preacher taking this position was asked, "Why do you believe it is okay to drink alcohol – at least to a limited degree?" Surprisingly, no scripture was ever cited. Instead, a reference was made to several books written by authors who were not Christians with the explanation, "These books make a compelling case that some alcohol may be consumed by a Christian." To say the least, this was shocking. Surely only scripture should be compelling to a Christian – not uninspired literature. Some in the Lord's church not only have a problem with alcohol, but also have misguided attitudes about authority in religion. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20). (Scripture quotations are taken from the NKJV.)

Another preacher carefully distinguishes between "social" drinking and taking-a-drink. He teaches "social" drinking is a sin, but he cannot say taking-a-drink is a sin. This is an unusual position. When this brother explained his position in detail, here is what was learned: "Social" drinking (according to this preacher) means *when other people are present*; taking-a-drink" means when one is *all alone at home*. Think about this for a moment. "Social" drinking is sinful according to this position. Therefore, if someone drinks when other people are present, (s)he has sinned and is in a lost condition. However, if that same person takes-a-drink at home, alone, (s)he has not sinned. The following is an excerpt from a letter written by this preacher:

I am adamantly opposed to Christians drinking any form of alcoholic beverages at any time. I have stated to people before, however, that because of the different uses of the word wine in the bible

(sometimes alcoholic and sometimes not), and because of the differences in wine made and used in the first century as compared to today, it is difficult to prove from scripture that it is a sin to take a drink.

I always remind people in such contexts of my fierce opposition to a Christian drinking any form of alcohol today because of influence, the fruits of alcohol, wisdom, the exhortation to be sober, etc... (Personal letter to Ronny Wade, April 12, 2006.)

Because this brother wrote, "it is difficult to prove from scripture that it is a sin to take a drink," he was accused of teaching "social" drinking. He became angry because the word "social" was added to the equation. He complained he was being misrepresented. Here is what he wrote in August of the same year:

You say, "I don't see where the misrepresentation has occurred." The misrepresentation is your leap from the sentence, "taking a drink cannot be proven to be sinful" to "it's okay to drink socially." Can you not see that you've added the word "socially?" I have never taught anyone in any context that I believe it to be acceptable for a Christian to drink socially. Whenever a person asks me if it is a sin for a person to take a drink in the privacy of their home, I do not think one can prove from scripture that it is. If you believe that you can, I will gladly look at what you have to say. (Personal letter to George Battey, August 15, 2006)

Consequently, this brother is "adamantly opposed" to "social drinking." He will not tolerate that. It is sinful to drink socially and he teaches against this. However, taking-a-drink is not necessarily wrong he says. How confusing is this? When people have been taught this doctrine, it should be no surprise when Christians begin to drink recreationally. Drinking and drunkenness have all been relegated to a nebulous, hazy field of subjectivism wherein each one "does what is right in his own sight" (Judges 21:25). This is truly a dangerous position. It is, in fact, wrong.

THE CASE FOR TOTAL ABSTINENCE

This present study will present the case for total abstinence from all non-medicinal uses of alcohol. Scripture will be cited – not uninspired literature. All Christians need to know what the scriptures clearly teach on this most important subject.

Eight Bible passages will now be considered which clearly indicate that taking-a-drink, even a single drink, for non-medicinal purposes is sinful and places the soul of a Christian in jeopardy. The scriptures clearly teach that when alcohol is consumed by a Christian: (a) It must be only a measured dose and (b) it must be for medicinal purposes.

PASSAGE #1

1 Peter 4:3-4

For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, **drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties**, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

This passage lists things which Christians may have done before conversion, but which they should no longer participate in. Three of these things have to do with drinking alcohol. Look carefully at the following three words and consider the definitions.

Drunkenness (οἰνοφλυγία) – "an overflow or surplus of wine, i.e. vinolence, drunkenness" (Strong, #3632). This refers to one who is an alcoholic. This person has to have a drink to start the day. He has to have a drink during the day. He drinks in the evening. He drinks just before he goes to bed. He is addicted. His day begins and ends with drinking.

Revelries (κῶμος) – "revel, carousal ... feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry" (Thayer, 367). This refers to someone who drinks until he becomes revelrous. This is the fellow who drinks at a "Superbowl Party" and gets loud and obnoxious.

Drinking parties (πότος) – "a drinking-bout" (Strong, #4224); "the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, not of necessity excessive, but giving opportunity for excess" (Trench, 225). This refers to one who simply has a drink at a cocktail party. Since it is listed separately from the one who becomes "tipsy" and also separately from the one who is an addict, it clearly refers to the person who simply has a "drink" – a martini at the end of a day or a glass of wine with supper.

These three terms cover all possible drinking scenarios – including taking-a-drink. First Peter 4:3-4 teaches first: Christians may not be addicted to alcohol. Second, Christians may not get tipsy, drunk or rowdy on the weekend. Third, Christians may not have "a drink" for non-medicinal reasons.

PASSAGE #2

Luke 12:45-46

But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and **begins to beat** the male and female servants, and to eat **and drink and be drunk**, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

This passage describes a wicked servant who cares not about the things of his master. The servant is condemned for three reasons: (a) he *begins* to beat servants, (b) he *begins* to drink and (c) He becomes drunk. The problem was not merely the final state of drunkenness, but the process involved in becoming drunk was also condemned. These words were spoken directly by the Lord Himself. This constitutes an actual quotation of the Son of God.

Study the following definition for "be drunk." Although two words are used in the English translation, the original Greek NT has only a single word. This word is a verb. A verb is an action word. Notice Vine's definition:

"Be drunk" (μεθύσκω) – "... to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in μεθύω), to become intoxicated, Lk 12:45; Eph 5:18; 1 Th 5:7a." (Vine, 1:341)

An "inceptive verb" means not just the final state of drunkenness is being condemned, but also the process involved to reach that final state. In other words, the wicked servant is wicked simply because he *began* to drink alcohol (period). If he "began to drink," but stopped, he still sinned.

PASSAGE #3

Ephesians 5:18

And **do not be drunk** with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

This passage uses the same inceptive verb as Luke 12:45. Literally the passage is saying, "Do not *begin* to be drunk with wine ..." In other words, "Do not become drunk with wine ..." or "Do not grow drunk with wine ..." Again, not merely the final state of drunkenness is forbidden, but also the process which leads to drunkenness. Taking a single drink for non-medicinal purposes is the first step of a process which leads to drunkenness. Hence, a single, non-medicinal drink is forbidden by this passage.

PASSAGE #4

1 Thessalonians 5:7

For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who **get drunk are drunk** at night.

The words above, "get drunk are drunk," envision not only the final state of drunkenness, but also the actions leading to drunkenness. Literally, the passage is saying, "Those who become drunk are drunk at night." "Become drunk" includes every drink leading to the final state of drunkenness. According to this passage, then, how does one "get drunk"? The answer is, one "gets drunk" by drinking alcohol for non-medicinal purposes.

For emphasis let it be stated again: Not merely the final state of drunkenness is forbidden, but also the process leading to drunkenness – that is, taking "a drink."

PASSAGE #5

Acts 24:25

Now as [Paul] reasoned about righteousness, **self-control**, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

Self-control is something a Christian does for himself. The Holy Spirit is not going to do this for a Christian. This is something a Christian does for himself, hence, the name self-control.

The very first drink of alcohol begins to affect one's ability to control himself. It affects the ability to make sound, rational judgments. The Anheuser Busch Company created a slogan: "Know when to say when." The problem is, the more one drinks, the less likely he will know when to stop because his judgment is impaired with each drink taken. All Bible passages teaching self-control are Bible passages forbidding non-medicinal usage of alcohol. Alcohol destroys one's ability to control himself.

PASSAGE #6

1 Corinthians 9:25

And everyone who competes for the prize is **temperate** in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

This passage uses the word "temperate" (ἐγκρατεύομαι). This word is the verb form of "self-control" used in Acts 24:25. This means to "exercise self-restraint" (Strong, #1467). As mentioned previously, alcohol destroys one's ability to control himself.

"Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses." (Leviticus 10:9-11).

But they also have erred through wine,
And through intoxicating drink are out of the way;
The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink,
They are swallowed up by wine,
They are out of the way through intoxicating drink;
They err in vision, they stumble in judgment. (Isaiah 28:7)

These passages confirm that alcohol destroys one's ability to distinguish between right and wrong. This has not changed with the changing of the covenants.

Furthermore, it is both wrong and illogical to argue about being "temperate" in drinking. Temperance, according to the Bible, can be exercised only on things that are lawful. It is no more logical to speak of a "temperate drinker" than it is to speak of a "temperate luster." Christians may not be "temperate" in unlawful actions. There are two important points to remember regarding temperance. First the action under consideration must be lawful to begin with. Second, any action interfering with one's ability to be temperate is unlawful.

All Bible passages teaching "temperance" are Bible passages forbidding non-medicinal usage of alcohol because alcohol destroys one's ability to restrain himself.

PASSAGE #7

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Every passage in the NT about soberness, vigilance, and temperance is a passage forbidding non-medicinal usage of alcohol.

Imagine yourself being placed in a jungle where it is known for a fact: a lion is lurking behind the forest growth. You know for a fact the lion is hungry and his intentions are to eat YOU. Suppose also you have a gun in your hand to defend yourself (cf. Eph 6:17). In all honesty, will you want a drink to "calm your nerves" or will you want to stay nervous so your reflexes are as sharp as possible?

When described in these terms, the average person would want to stay as alert as possible. He would want his finger to be on the trigger and want lightening-fast reflexes so that, when the moment arrives, he would be ready to shoot the lion when he bounds out from the bushes.

Sobriety is opposed to all recreational (casual) drinking. All Bible passages teaching "vigilance" and "sobriety" are Bible passages forbidding non-medicinal usage of alcohol because alcohol destroys one's alertness and sound judgment.

PASSAGE #8

1 Timothy 5:23

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Timothy was being an example of believers according to 1 Timothy 4:12. This passage tell the reader Timothy drank "only water." By putting the information from these two passages together, one learns to drink only non-alcoholic drinks.

In addition to teaching only non-alcoholic beverages for God's people, this passage destroys the oft-repeated but unsubstantiated argument that drinking water in Bible days was unfit for consumption. Timothy drank nothing but water (non-intoxicating drink). Paul now instructs him to use a "little" wine and it must be only for medicinal purposes.

If Christians were already drinking a little wine non-medicinally, why would Paul need to give these instructions? First Timothy 5:23 clearly indicates Christians who followed apostolic guidance did not drink alcohol non-medicinally.

COMMON ARGUMENTS

Now consider the following six common arguments wherein some misuse Bible passages in an effort to justify recreational drinking of alcohol.

ARGUMENT #1

Jesus turned water into wine in John 2.

An assumption is being made in reference to the events of John 2. The assumption is that Jesus turned water into alcoholic wine. Many Christians today do not realize the Bible uses the word "wine" to mean both fermented and unfermented

beverages. Only the context can decide which kind of wine is under consideration. Consider the following passages:

Thus says the LORD: "As the **new wine is found in the cluster**, And one says, 'Do not destroy it, For a blessing is in it,' So will I do for My servants' sake, That I may not destroy them all. (Isaiah 65:8).

According to this passage, if a cluster of grapes is taken and squeezed, "new wine" would come out of that cluster. People today would probably not call the liquid from a fresh-squeezed cluster of grapes "wine." Most would probably call it "grape juice." Yet the passage above clearly demonstrates that Bible writers used the word "wine" to describe even unfermented grape juice. Therefore, when the word "wine" appears in scripture, one must consider the context in order to determine if fermented or unfermented wine is under consideration.

In the Bible thirteen words are translated "wine" (11 Hebrew words in the OT and 2 Greek words in the NT). If the word "wine" always meant alcoholic beverage, why use thirteen words in the original language? This fact substantiates the conclusion that the word "wine" can mean either intoxicating or non-intoxicating drink.

Gladness is taken away,
And joy from the plentiful field;
In the vineyards there will be no singing,
Nor will there be shouting;
No treading will tread out **wine in the presses**;
I have made their shouting cease. (Isaiah 16:10).

Joy and gladness are taken
From the plentiful field
And from the land of Moab;
I have caused **wine** to fail **from the winepresses**;
No one will tread with joyous shouting;
Not joyous shouting! (Jeremiah 48:33).

In both the above passages it is obvious that "wine" refers to non-intoxicating drink. A "winepress" was simply a vat. Fresh-picked clusters of grapes were thrown into the winepress and women (with clean, washed feet) would trample on the clusters and press out the "wine" inside the clusters. From the "winepress" came "wine." Today, most people would call this liquid from fresh-squeezed clusters "grape juice." But Isaiah and Jeremiah called the juice "wine."

When Bible says something good about wine, it is always non-intoxicating. When it says something bad, the wine is fermented.

More passages could be given (Hosea 9:2; Matthew 21:33), but this is sufficient to prove the point. "Wine" in the Bible can mean nothing more than unfermented, non-intoxicating grape juice.

The passage under consideration in this present argument is John 2. Here the Lord turned water into "wine." Christians can be confident the Lord did not convert

water into fermented, intoxicating wine and then give it to people at a wedding party to drink. How can one be so confident? Because the law Jesus lived under forbade giving alcoholic drink to people in order to make them drunk.

Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, Pressing him to your bottle,
Even to make him drunk, That you may look on his nakedness! (Hosea 2:15).

Since Jesus lived under a law that forbade giving alcohol to people that they may be drunk, Christians may be confident Jesus did not make fermented wine at the wedding party mentioned in John 2.

As a side-note, Christians need to remember that turning water into pure grape juice is just as much of a miracle as turning water into fermented wine. Some act like turning water into grape juice would be no miracle at all. Surely it is.

ARGUMENT #2

Jesus "ate and drank."

This argument is based on the following two passages of scripture:

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'
The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children." (Matthew 11:18-19).

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'
The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by all her children." (Luke 7:33-35).

Some believe they see evidence in these passages that Jesus drank alcoholic wine at least in moderation. The argument goes like this: "John drank no wine, while Christ did. Therefore Christians may drink wine."

Is this a valid argument? Is the conclusion sound? The answer to both these questions is simply no. These passages do not imply Jesus drank alcoholic wine for the following six reasons:

(1) **The word "wine" is not repeated in reference to Jesus.**

Notice carefully Luke's rendition of this story: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking." It does not say: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking *wine*."

As much as someone might want to argue that "wine" is implied in reference to Jesus, still the fact remains the passage does not explicitly use wine in reference to Jesus

nor is it necessarily inferred. If Jesus had wanted it known that, in contrast with John, He drank wine, He could have repeated the word "wine" for the sake of emphasis and clarity. But He did not do this.

(2) **An assumption is being made that John refused only fermented wine.**

In other words, when the passage says, "John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine," it is being assumed the wine John refused to drink was fermented wine only. Once this assumption is made, the second assumption made is that Jesus, in contrast with John, came drinking fermented wine.

Yet consider the first assumption – that the only wine John refused was fermented wine. The fact is, John drank no wine of any kind. He drank neither fermented nor unfermented wine. He drank and ate nothing produced from the grapevine. John was a Nazarite from the day of his birth (Luke 1:15). A Nazarite was not to eat or drink anything produced from the grapevine:

[The Nazarite] shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin. (Numbers 6:3-4).

When Jesus made the statement, "John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine" (Luke 7:33), He did not mean John abstained only from fermented wine. John abstained from wine period – whether fermented or unfermented. He drank nothing from the grapevine.

(3) **An assumption is being made that Jesus came drinking fermented wine.**

Keep in mind the word "wine" is not repeated in reference to Jesus. The scripture never says, "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking *wine*." That is an assumption. Yet, for the sake of discussion, let it be assumed momentarily the scripture implies Jesus actually drank wine. Since scripture uses the word "wine" to refer to unfermented, fresh-squeezed grape juice (see Isaiah 65:8; 16:10 and Jeremiah 48:33), the scripture (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34) could be merely saying Jesus came eating bread and drinking grape juice. It is an assumption to argue Jesus was drinking fermented wine.

Americans of the twenty-first century are so accustomed to restricting "wine" to fermented drink, they cannot conceive of "wine" being used to refer to non-alcoholic grape juice. Yet the fact remains, fresh-squeezed, non-alcoholic grape juice was called "wine" in the Bible.

Could it be possible the Pharisees saw Jesus drinking something and concluded it was fermented wine? Did the enemies of Jesus ever treat Him unfairly and on many occasions draw conclusions about Him which were not true? If so, is it possible the same thing could be happening in Matthew 11?

(4) **The enemies of Jesus are wrongly being accepted as right.**

The enemies of Jesus were accusing Him of being a "winebibber" (οἰνοπότης) which means "wine drinker, drunkard" (Perschbacher, 51). To conclude Jesus drank fermented wine because His critics accused Him of being a glutton and winebibber is to accept as truth the word of Jesus' enemies. On one occasion the Lord's enemies said, "You have a demon" (John 7:20). Later they would say, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (John 8:48). Shall Christians conclude Jesus was a Samaritan and had a demon because His critics accused Him of such? All of these charges are baseless and untrue. Jesus was no more a "winebibber" than He was a "glutton." If He was guilty of one, He was guilty of the other. But, the truth is, He was guilty of neither (1 Peter 2:22). Jesus was sinless.

(5) **An assumption is being made that the charge has some validity.**

Unwittingly, some are assuming this: "If Jesus were not drinking fermented wine at all, how could anyone even begin to accuse Him of being a winebibber or drunkard? He must have been drinking fermented wine in moderation." Can the same logic be applied to the charge of possessing a demon (John 7:20)? Could someone assume: "If Jesus was not in league with demons at least to some degree, how could anyone even begin to accuse Him of being possessed by a demon? He must have had some moderate connection with demons." Is any Christian willing to argue this? Hopefully not.

What about the charge of blasphemy (Matthew 9:3). Could someone assume: "If Jesus was not blaspheming at all, how could anyone even begin to accuse Him of being a blasphemer. He must have been blaspheming at least in moderation." Again, no true believer would assume such an outrageous conclusion. Why then are some willing to assume there must have been some basis to the accusation of being a winebibber? The charge is ludicrous and absolutely baseless.

(6) **The contrast is between lifestyles, not eating and drinking habits.**

John lived in isolation from everyone. He associated with no one. When Matthew 11:18 says, "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon,'" it means John came neither eating nor drinking *with others*. He avoided human companionship. If Matthew 11:18 is taken literally, John ate and drank absolutely nothing at all. If such were the case, he would have died because John was a human and humans have to eat and drink something. The passage means John neither ate nor drank with others.

When someone does not associate with others (will not eat or drink with them), people conclude something must be wrong with that person. Those who were anti-social were either insane or demon-possessed and were driven into the wilderness. (See Mark 5:1-3; Luke 8:29).

Here, then, is John. He associates with no one. He "neither eats nor drinks" with anyone. He lives in the wilderness where only the insane and demon-possessed live. He must be demon possessed, the Pharisees wrongfully concluded.

On the other hand, Jesus was eminently social. He associated with people. He ate and drank with them. Even if He was drinking only unfermented grape juice, the passage would still be accurate in stating, "The Son of man came eating and drinking." Yet the Pharisees were never satisfied. No matter what course of action Jesus took, the Pharisees could not be pleased. They were like children in the market (Matthew 11:16-17) who did not want to play "wedding," but when someone suggested playing "funeral" instead, they still were not happy.

Because of these six reasons, it is safe to make the following conclusion: Neither Matthew 11:19 nor Luke 7:34 proves Jesus drank alcohol in moderation nor do these passages prove a disciple of the Lord may drink alcohol in moderation.

ARGUMENT #3

Deacons are told in 1 Timothy 3:8 to "not be given to much wine." This implies a little wine may be consumed.

The phrase, "not given to much wine," does imply that a little may be used. Yet a critical question needs to be asked: Is there a Bible passage which clearly teaches "a little wine" may be consumed and, if so, for what purpose may "a little wine" be used? The passage which teaches a little wine may be used has already been noticed in this study:

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. (1 Timothy 5:23).

Clearly the passage in 1 Timothy 3:8 harmonizes with this passage. Christians may indeed use "a little wine," but it must be for medicinal purposes only. Otherwise, Christians must drink non-alcoholic drinks only.

ARGUMENT #4

Paul implies wine may be consumed by Christians in Romans 14:21.

First, look at the passage under consideration in this argument:

It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. (Romans 14:21).

It is assumed this "wine" in this passage is fermented. However, this must be proven – not assumed. Assumptions prove nothing especially since it has already been demonstrated "wine" can mean merely grape juice (see Isaiah 65:8; 16:10 and Jeremiah 48:33).

However, if Rom 14:21 is referring to mere grape juice a new question arises: How could drinking mere grape juice cause anyone to "stumble" or be "offended" or "made weak"? The answer is: People could be encouraged to sin in the same way eating meat could cause someone to sin. In context, this refers to liquid libations ("drink offerings") used in sacrifice to idols. Notice the following passage:

[The Lord] will say: 'Where are their gods,
The rock in which they sought refuge?
Who ate the fat of their sacrifices,
And **drank the wine of their drink offering?**
Let them rise and help you,
And be your refuge. (Deuteronomy 32:37-38).

The point of Romans 14:21 is that if anything used in pagan worship causes someone to get weak, the Christian should not eat the meat nor drink the drink – even if the drink were merely grape juice.

Romans 14 deals with matters of liberty. Matters of liberty are things which are neither required nor prohibited. Matters of liberty are things which are permitted. Therefore, before one can use Romans 14 to prove alcoholic beverages may be consumed, he must first prove drinking alcoholic beverages for non-medicinal purposes is neither required nor prohibited. Enough evidence has already been presented in this study to demonstrate that non-medicinal usage of alcohol is not permitted. It is, in fact, prohibited. Since it is prohibited in the eight passages already studied (1 Peter 4:3-4; Luke 12:45-46; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:7; Acts 24:25; 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 Timothy 5:23) Romans 14 cannot be used to justify drinking alcohol for non-medicinal purposes. Casual, recreational drinking is prohibited; it is not a permission. Romans 14 deals with matters of permission, not matters prohibited.

ARGUMENT #5

"New wine" can mean alcoholic wine because the apostles were accused of being drunk with "new wine" (Acts 2:13).

When the apostles were speaking in others tongues on the Day of Pentecost, some mocked saying, "They are full of new wine" (Acts 2:13).

"New wine," does not necessarily make anyone drunk. Perschbacher defines "new wine" (γλεῦκος) as "sweet new wine" (Perschbacher, 433); "must, the sweet juice pressed from the grape; sweet wine" (Thayer, 118). In other words, "new wine" can mean freshly squeezed grape juice. The context must determine whether "wine" refers to fermented or unfermented drink. Consider the following passages:

But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, Which cheers both God and men, And go to sway over trees?' (Judges 9:13).

So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine. (Proverbs 3:10).

Thus says the LORD: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, And one says, 'Do not destroy it, For a blessing is in it,' So will I do for My servants' sake, That I may not destroy them all. (Isaiah 65:8).

"New wine" can be simply grape juice. However, the mockers on Pentecost were probably referring to alcoholic wine. Their mockery is baseless and foolish. Alcoholic wine does not enable men to speak in new languages they never studied. In fact, alcoholic wine slurs the one language men do know. Furthermore, Peter points out it was only the third hour since sunrise (Acts 2:14-15). Men do not "get drunk" early in the morning, but rather they get drunk at night. "For those who sleep, sleep *at night*, and those who get drunk are drunk at night (1 Thessalonians 5:7). Peter assures the audience that none of the apostles were drunk merely because of common sense.

Those appealing to Acts 2:13 to justify non-medicinal drinking of alcohol are truly desperate because the passage justifies no such thing.

ARGUMENT #6

Wine must be used in communion; therefore it's acceptable for a Christian to drink a little alcohol.

Fermented wine was not used in the communion according to the Bible. Nor does any passage ever say Jesus used fermented wine. The word "wine" is never used in any passage discussing the Lord's supper. The expression is always "fruit of the vine."

Jesus instituted the Lord's supper (communion) during the Jewish Passover. Notice:

Now on the first day of **the Feast of the Unleavened Bread** the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'" (Matthew 26:17-18).

When God's people ate the Passover and observed the "Feast of Unleavened Bread," what were the rules? The rules explicitly stated all leaven had to be removed from the house.

For seven days **no leaven shall be found in your houses**, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall **eat nothing leavened**; in all your dwellings you shall eat

unleavened bread." (Exodus 12:19-20).

Notice carefully: Nothing leavened could be eaten during the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Fermented wine is leavened grape juice. Therefore, Christians can know for a fact that no fermented wine was used when Jesus instituted the Lord's supper (communion).

Remember, this discussion focuses on what the Bible says. This is not a discussion about what Jews today do. If someone wants to know what Jews do today, they need to go ask a Jew. However, if someone wants to know what the Bible says about Passover, he merely needs to open up his Bible and read.

The fact of the matter is: The Jews long ago rejected their own law and their own Savior. Looking to them to discover how to observe Passover is unreasonable. Jesus said they do many things contrary to the law of God (Matthew 15:9).

Furthermore, the Feast of Passover, in the Bible, actually had no drink element whatsoever prescribed and it certainly did not authorize the consumption of leavened wine. Jesus used pure grape juice:

But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:29).

"Fruit of the vine" means fruit produced by the vine. What does the grapevine produce? Fermented wine or grape juice? There is no vine on earth which ever produced fermented wine. The vine produces unfermented grape juice and that is what Jesus used.

CONCLUSION

No NT passage allows the use of alcohol for recreational purposes. Only a small amount may be taken medicinally. The inspired apostle wrote:

Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. (Romans 13:13).

The same prohibition placed on revelry and lewdness is also placed on drunkenness. May Christians revel moderately? Of course not. May Christians lust and be lewd moderately? Of course not. Neither may Christians be moderately drunk. The condemnation of excess does not mean moderation is allowed.

Is taking a single, non-medicinal drink of alcohol a sin? Absolutely. Christians should not hesitate in the least to answer this question. Anyone having worked with alcoholics and drug addicts knows the folly of "moderate usage" approach. It simply does not work. People must be told to stay completely away from all recreational, casual usage of both alcohol and drugs. If a leader in the church holds to the "moderate usage" position on drugs or alcohol, that leader will eventually find he has encouraged one to stumble into sin – something strictly forbidden (1 Corinthians 8:13).

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! (Matthew 18:6-7).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

To be saved from past sins, God requires the following four steps:

Belief in Christ as the only begotten Son of God (Jn 3:16).

Repentance of sins ("turning away from") (Acts 17:30).

Verbal Confession of faith in Christ (Rom 10:10).

Baptism (immersion) into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38).

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22:16).

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4).

Baptism is the "point in time" that God applies the blood of Christ to the sinner's life. The sinner is baptized into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3-4). Sinners were never told to "pray the sinner's prayer" as is commonly believed today (see John 9:31). Only Christians have the privilege of praying for forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:9; 2:1 – notice these verses were written to Christians, not sinners). Those who have not been baptized correctly must be rebaptized (see Acts 19:1-5) in order to be saved (1 Peter 3:20-21).

While it may be true that the "thief on the cross" was never baptized (perhaps he may have been – see Matthew 3:5), it must be remembered he was saved while the Old Testament law was still in force (Hebrews 9:16-17). After the Lord's death and resurrection a New Testament came into force (Hebrews 8:6-13). This new law (Hebrews 7:12) requires a "new birth" in water (John 3:5; 1 Peter 3:20-21). The Lord's requirement of baptism "for the remission of sins" came after His death and resurrection (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38).

After baptism, we must continue in "all things" which the Lord "commanded" (Matthew 28:20). We must be careful "lest we fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Even saved

Christians can "fall away" (Galatians 5:4), have their name removed from the "book of life" (Revelation 22:19), and suffer a worse fate than "death without mercy" (Hebrews 10:26-29). Christians must "make their calling and election sure" by "giving all diligence" (2 Peter 1:5-11).

WORKS CITED

New King James Version (NKJV). Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1988.

Perschbacher, Wesley J.. Refresh Your Greek. Moody Press. 1989.

Strong, James. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. Abingdon Press. 1890.

Thayer, Joseph Henry. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Zondervan Publishing House. 1974 edition.

Trench, Richard C.. Synonyms of the New Testament. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1975 edition.

Vine, W. E.. An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. Fleming H. Revell Company. 1966 edition.