

WINE AND THE BIBLE:
CHRISTIANTY'S SCANLON ERROR
Message 9

INTRO: In our series on "Wine And The Bible" we have given eight messages to prepare us to look at the difficult texts of the Bible on wine. By difficult texts, I mean texts that make my position difficult, which is that God condemns all consumption of alcohol. These are texts that seem to indicate God's approval on drinking fermented wine. Among them, of course, is the famous "Jesus made wine" passage.

So let me briefly summarize what we have covered. First, we saw that this is indeed a difficult subject and that by far the majority of Christians believe God approves of alcohol consumption if it is with moderation. We saw the various positions held by Christians: 1 Alcohol consumption with moderation is fully approved by the Bible. 2 God condemns the use of alcohol. 3 The Bible approves alcohol consumption with moderation, but it is not wise to drink any. 4 Please do not tamper with my freedoms.

Then I said I believed that wine in the Bible means grape juice; whether fermented or not, and that fermented wine is bad and unfermented wine is good. I proposed to you that the Hebrew word 'tirosh' is fruit, not wine. And that the word shaykawr is 'fruit juice' not 'strong drink'. Furthermore, the denotation of the word shawkawr means 'to be full' not to be drunk; and that the connotation of the word in some contexts indicates drunkenness.

Then we saw that vineyards and the production of grape juice was a very big thing in Israel and that they produced multiplied thousands of gallons each year. If the view that God forbids the use of alcoholic wine is correct, then there must be ways of keeping that juice unfermented and we proved that to be true by the various methods of preservation.

Last message we dealt with the word 'merry' when it occurs together with the word wine and said that there was both induced and real merriment, and that grape juice need not be fermented to cause people to be glad or to rejoice.

I believe we are now ready to consider the texts in Scripture that seem to give God's approval on alcohol consumption. We will take them in the order they occur.

VI. DIFFICULT TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

A. Gen. 49:12

Now I will read this passage for us from the KJV, because it is the version that has created rather serious misunderstanding on this subject. In Genesis 49, Jacob blesses his twelve sons, and in 49:11-12 is the last part of His blessing on Judah. It says, "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes *shall be* red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."

Let me just say that I do not wish to take much time on this text because no matter what I did, this message got too long. So I will summarize briefly and treat it in greater detail if I have time somewhere later.

The problem in the passage is that part of the blessing of God on this tribe is that they will have such an abundance of grapes that their eyes will be red with wine. Now if that is a blessing from God, I do not know this God. He is not the God of the Bible, a God who is holy to the utmost.

Furthermore, listen to Proverbs 23:29-33: "29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? 30 Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, *When* it swirls around smoothly; 32 At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. 33 Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things.

I think the answer to the difficulty is simply one of translation. To summarize my conclusions, let me read a comment from Ellicott's commentary, "The word rendered *red* occurs only here, and is rendered in the Versions, *bright, sparkling,* and in the Vulg. *beautiful.* They also give the word rendered in our Version with a comparative force, which seems to be

right: 'His eyes shall be brighter than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk'" (Vol 1: pg. 170).

This passage has a very simple answer but the next is more difficult.

B. Leviticus 10:8-11

(Read the passage.) It is the usual position of commentaries that the sin of Nadab and Abihu in this passage is that they consumed too much alcohol and thus erred in the service of the tabernacle. That is the position taken by most commentaries.

To avoid this danger, according to this position, God's remedy is given in verse 9-11 (read). The reason they were not to drink alcoholic beverages before they serve in the temple is so that they may be able to distinguish between holy and unholy and between clean and unclean; and that their teaching would remain correct. This statute was to remain forever throughout their generations.

So we want to look at this passage from two perspectives. First we will look at it from the view that it was fermented wine, and second from the view that it was grape juice.

1. The text speaks of fermented wine

The position we are taking here is that Nadab and Abihu failed God in the service of the tabernacle because they had had too much to drink and that the wine and strong drink in verse nine is fermented drink.

For this view, the context indicates that the wine and strong drink of verse 9 is fermented drink because the priests failed to discern between holy and unholy fire (v. 1). From that we learn that fermented drink is dangerous to the discerning faculties. Too much drink can cause the priest to fail to discern between holy and unholy and between clean and unclean.

Since the priests were to have nothing to drink when in the service of the tabernacle, we can

learn that to keep the discerning faculties sharp it is necessary to abstain totally from alcohol. The priests could not drink at all when in the service of the tabernacle.

The implication of this text then is that since the priest is to refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages when in service in the tabernacle, that once he is not in the service of the tabernacle, he may then once more drink alcoholic beverages. We may then come to a second conclusion, and that is that all non-priests could drink alcoholic beverages at any time.

We must then also conclude that since God knows that priests will be in danger of having their discerning faculties impaired if they drink alcohol before they go to work in the tabernacle, God is OK with the priest living in this danger when he is not in tabernacle service. I think it is only reasonable to conclude that a priest would be in danger of drinking too much when he is not in the service of the tabernacle, than when he is.

We must then also conclude that since it is OK with God for lay people to drink alcoholic beverages at all times, He also knows that any time they drink, they are in danger of drinking enough to cause them to fail to discern between holy and unholy and clean and unclean. And since lay people do not have the same responsibilities of priests, their danger of drinking too much is greater for them than for the priest. Our conclusion, I think, can only be that God is OK with them constantly living in this danger.

I think we must then also conclude that God, who is omniscient and knows the dangers of alcohol as a poison and a drug better than man, that God who knows it will kill multiplied millions of people, cause the murder of thousands and thousands of people, and that many millions of others will be born with fetal alcohol syndrome; is concerned mainly with priests not drinking while they serve in the tabernacle.

Now I find all this altogether unacceptable, for a God who knows everything; a God who says, "Be holy as I am holy", a God who cannot look on sin. I find in the Bible that God is deeply concerned about the priest's ability to discern between holy and unholy; between clean and unclean while in service but also in every other part of his life outside the service of the temple. I further find that God is deeply concerned about non-priests being able to discern between holy and unholy and between clean and unclean at all times.

We know that God is omniscient and knows the dangers of alcohol as a poison and a drug better than man and He knows it will kill multiplied millions of people. And since God is omniscient, He knows it will cause the murder of thousands and thousands of people. He knows that many millions of others will be born with fetal alcohol syndrome. I cannot conclude otherwise, than that it is entirely out of keeping for the God of the Bible to approve any consumption of alcohol, whether by the priest in the temple or anyone else whatever, and whenever.

So that calls for another view, and I propose to you that:

2. The text speaks of grape juice and fruit juice

Let me begin by making this observation that the text nowhere states that the error of Nadab and Abihu was drinking alcohol. That is a natural assumption, but the text does not say so. Second, the text does clearly say what the error of Nadab and Abihu was (read v. 10:1). They offered strange or profane fire before the Lord (10:1). Profane fire was any fire that did not come from the brazen altar as commanded by God (Lev. 6:12-13; 16:12).

Then I want to remind you of something we have learned earlier: the word translated 'wine' in verse 9, which is *yayin*, may refer to fermented or unfermented wine. I agree that the context may

seem to indicate it is fermented wine but it does not clearly say that it is. Furthermore, the word translated 'strong drink' here, I think refers to fruit juice of other kinds than grapes, and whether it is fermented or not must be determined from the context.

But, there is, as far as I can find, one major objection against the view that this text does not speak of fermented drink (read 9-11). The objection is this: How can the command to refrain from drinking unfermented drink help the priests discern between holy and unholy and between clean and unclean, and help them teach the people?

It is this objection that I want to seek to answer in the remainder of our time. I believe in this question lies the key to the command given in this passage. I want to suggest to you that the answer lies in what the treading of grapes and the juice expressed from such treading symbolizes in the Bible. The answer lies in the fact that the treading of grapes and other fruit in the winepress and the juice expressed from this treading symbolizes bloodshed and the wrath of God!

When we have communion, what does the cup of juice represent? Is it not the blood of Christ, as He bore God's wrath on mankind in Him? And let me mention here and I will prove this later, and I think you will agree with me then that the wine of communion was always to be unfermented.

So, let us look at some Scriptures with regard to the treading of grapes and the wine expressed from them symbolizing wrath and blood. You see, the juice of grapes is sometimes referred to as the blood of grapes (Gen. 49:11; Deut. 32:14). This is because most of the grape juice was red like blood. It is easy to see how it thus became a symbol of blood.

Turn to Isaiah 63 (read 1-3). Here we see the juice of grapes picturing blood, and the treading of grapes picturing God's wrath. This reference is to the very end of the tribulation when God's

wrath has reached its absolute highest degree.

Turn to Revelation 14 (read 18-20). Here we are very near to the close of the tribulation. This is the sixth angel. During the time of the seventh angel the greatest and final wrath of God is poured out on mankind. Turn to Revelation 6 for a description of this time (read 14-17).

Now turn to Revelation 19 (read 11-15). So we see very clearly what the treading of grapes and the product thereof symbolizes. And I have suggested that this is why the priest is to refrain from drinking either fruit juice or grape juice, for both were made the same.

Now turn back to Leviticus 10 (read v. 6). Two priests had died, and their close relatives were not to mourn them because they fully deserved to die. They were not to cry because they had died. Their death was well deserved. They had violated a holy command and that in the temple. Then notice carefully what it says in this verse, "Do not cover your heads, nor tear your clothes..." These were signs of mourning. And why should they not do it? He tells us, "...lest you die and wrath come upon all the people." You see, God's wrath had come upon Nadab and Abihu. If the people now violated this command, His wrath might come upon all the people. They needed to discern between holy and unholy living right here in this matter!

And so, from this time forward, when the priests were to serve in the temple they were to refrain from all grape juice and fruit juice. Why? A reminder of what this juice symbolizes. It would be a reminder of the wrath that came upon Nadab and Abihu. It would remind them every time that if they failed to discern between holy and unholy, God's wrath would come on them. So important was the ministry of the tabernacle. In order to be reminded of what arouses the wrath of God and what results it brings, they were forever to refrain from drinking these drinks, showing that God would refrain from pouring out His wrath as long as they did right.

Now you might say, OK, that gives some support to your view. Is there any other support? Well, listen to this comment by John Calvin on these verses, who allows that the drink here is intoxicating drink: "The second cleanness required in the priests is that they should abstain from wine, and strong drink; {1} in which word Jerome says that everything intoxicating is included; and this I admit to be true; but the definition would be more correct, that all liquors expressed from fruits are denoted by it, in whose sweetness there is nearly as much to tempt men as in wine." So Calvin, though he agrees it speaks of fermented drink, says it also includes unfermented.

I think there is further biblical evidence that the drink in this text is not fermented. Turn with me to Numbers 6 (read 1-5). Here we see that the restrictions placed on the Nazarite were even stricter than those of the priest. Now notice in verse 3, what he was all to refrain from. First, wine and similar drink or yayin and shaykawr or as I would translate, grape juice or fruit juice. He is not to drink vinegar which is made from wine or from other fruit juice. The NKJV then says he is not to drink any grape juice, but the KJV says it is liquor of grapes. This word occurs only once and its meaning is hard to determine. But neither is he to eat fresh grapes or raisins, which are dried grapes.

Verse 4 then sums it all up like this, "All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin." Now the reason for all this certainly cannot be because of intoxication. The grapes would not cause intoxication. The seeds would not cause intoxication. The juice without the skins would not cause intoxication. The skins without the juice would not cause intoxication. So the reason the Nazarite was to abstain from all these parts of the grape is NOT because of intoxication.

By the way, you might ask, "Did they use all those things?" One writer I read said they use everything from the branches to the seed. They

were with the vine like our Mennonites are with pork. I have heard said by outsiders that Mennonites eat everything except the squeal. So the Jews were with grapes and modern science will give you the health benefits even of the seeds and skins of grapes.

So why should the Nazarite, who is a servant of God like the priest, abstain from every part of the vine and from juices made from grapes and all fruits? Again, it is not because of drunkenness caused by these things since most of the things listed would never cause drunkenness. You cannot get drunk on grape seeds. You cannot get drunk from eating grape skins. So why is it then? I believe it is because of what the fruit of the vine symbolizes, and that is the wrath of God.

Our study has been in Leviticus 10. In Leviticus 11, we have the 7 feasts of Israel. I have mentioned these earlier. The first four feasts occur during the grain harvest. They speak of Christ as the bread of life, as we have often mentioned in our communion services.

During the last three feasts was the time of the grape harvest. As the first feasts spoke of Christ as the bread of life, so the last feasts speak of Christ's return and the wrath of God. In our Church holidays we commemorate three of the first four feasts; Passover; firstfruits and Pentecost. But of the last three, we commemorate none. Why not? Because they have not yet been fulfilled. They speak of the future and the wrath of God.

These four feasts give us the symbols we have in communion, the bread and the grape juice; which should be unfermented as we will see later.

CONCL: So in conclusion, I think the usual interpretation of these two texts has contributed to Christianity's Scanlon error. As I see it, to believe that Genesis 49:12, redness of eyes from drinking wine, is a blessing from God is nigh to blasphemy. God Himself says that people who drink until their eyes are red have woe. And in Proverbs 29, God clearly reveals what He thinks of drinking wine

until the eyes are red, and it is anything but a blessing. The blessing of God in Genesis 49 on Judah is that this land would provide a lot of grapes and a lot of milk, two very special and meaningful products.

And to conclude that Leviticus 10 speaks of fermented wine, is to conclude wine is a danger to a discerning life. It is also to conclude that the only safe life to keep the discerning faculties sharp is to abstain from alcohol altogether. And yet, one must then conclude that God is OK with priests drinking fermented wine, and living in this danger as long as they are not in the service of the tabernacle. And one must then also conclude that God is OK with all non-priests drinking a beverage He knows will be a constant danger to their mental faculties losing their discerning ability. This is unthinkable.

I believe rather that in this passage, God asks the priests to refrain from their normal habit of drinking grape juice, as was commonly done, to remind them of the wrath that would come on them if they failed to obey Him. In Scripture, it is unfermented grape juice that is a sign of the wrath of God because it is the treading of the grapes that gives this message. Grape juice was not fermented during the treading of the grapes. Grape juice is a picture of blood and wrath. It is for this reason that they were to refrain from it just like the Nazarites, who had a special place in the kingdom of God.