

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

NOT GIVEN TO WINE

We are measuring a godly man by looking at the spiritual characteristics required of leaders in the church. Even if you do not aspire to a position, your practice should be the same if you want to be a maturing, godly man.

Our eighth characteristic is “not given to wine.”

1 Timothy 3:1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

1 Timothy 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;

1 Timothy 3:3 **not given to wine...**

The word translated “given to wine” is variously translated as *drunkard*; *addicted to wine*; *given over to wine*; and *given to drunkenness*.

Interpretations by Bible teachers we would respect of what Paul intended range from total abstinence from alcohol to drinking in moderation without ever becoming drunk. *That’s a pretty broad range!* Let’s see if we can shed additional light.

We must all agree that it is sin to be drunk. Paul elsewhere clearly states,

Ephesians 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

What does it mean to be “drunk?” It’s a serious and important question. Does it mean under the set legal limit for blood alcohol when driving a car? Or does it mean the point at which alcohol begins to influence you? Is it a subjective analysis by each Christian?

I can't answer that question! For myself, I think that I would consider myself "under the influence" way below the legal limit because I could feel the effects of the brew at work in my system.

Maybe the place to start to get a real handle on this is to try to forget our own cultural biases and really study "wine" as it's used in the Bible.

In the year 1820 an American pastor by the name of William Patton set out on a study about alcohol as far as the ancients were concerned. He preached a sermon on the subject on September 17, 1820. The result of that sermon caused much uproar and even personal threats to him by the sellers of alcohol. His findings are in a book titled *Bible Wines, or The Laws of Fermentation and the Ancients*.

His basic analysis is this. There are two kinds of wine referred to in the Bible. One is fermented and the other non-fermented. In either case the same Hebrew or Greek word is translated as "wine." Thus we must examine the context in which we find the word "wine" in order to determine if it is fermented and alcoholic or unfermented and nonalcoholic (grape juice).

Ancient sources (and he cites many) refer to the value of fresh, sweet, unfermented grape juice as a beverage.

Patton cites many references that discuss and describe the various processes the ancients used to prevent fermentation. Among those processes:

- Boiling
- Filtration
- Subsidence (separating gluten from the juice)
- Fumigation

In all these cases, when fermentation was prevented, the resultant juice was nevertheless called "wine." One author claims "Facts show that the ancients not only preserved their wine unfermented, but regarded it as of a higher flavor and finer quality than fermented wine" (Professor M. Stuart, cited by Patton).

Let's look, then, at some of the verses in which we find the word "wine" that are commonly used to defend drinking alcohol

When Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana - was it fermented, alcoholic wine? *Not necessarily!* Where, then, is the miracle? **You** try turning water into grape juice without the natural processes of soil, plant, sunlight, and harvesting. We're talking delicious fruit juice - not Kool-Aid! Jesus did instantly what the course of nature would have taken months.

How about the Lord's Supper? Didn't Jesus and His disciples drink wine at it?

Maybe. Maybe not. There are a whole list of arguments against the use of fermented wine at Passover, including these:

1. The Passover law in Exodus 12:14-20 prohibited, during Passover week, the presence and use of leaven, yeast, or any agent of fermentation. It has been argued by conservative Jewish scholars that this extended to the wine rendering it grape juice.
2. Some Jewish sources affirm that the use of the unfermented wine at the Passover was common in NT times. For example, "According to the synoptic Gospels, it would appear that on the Thursday evening of the last week of His life Jesus with His disciples entered Jerusalem in order to eat the Passover meal with them in the sacred city; if so, the wafer and the wine of ...them communion service then instituted by Him as a memorial would be the unleavened bread and the unfermented wine of the Seder Service" (see "Jesus," The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1904 edition, V.165).
3. It is also interesting to note that the original Passover, in Exodus, makes no reference to wine whatsoever. The whole tradition of drinking several cups at Passover was added later by the Jews.
4. Paul instructed the Corinthians to put away spiritual yeast, i.e. the fermenting agent of "malice and wickedness", because Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). It would be inconsistent with the goal and spiritual requirement of the Lord's Supper to use something which was a symbol of evil. i.e. something with leaven or yeast.

Didn't His enemies accuse Jesus of drinking wine? They did and they most certainly meant fermented, alcoholic wine. But in the same breath they also accused Him of being a glutton and of having a demon. If we believe that their first accusation was true we must put the same weight on the other two - *and that is absurd!*

The text most used to justify temperate drinking is First Timothy 5:23.

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

Two things to note about what Paul instructed:

1. If this is a reference to fermented, alcoholic wine, it is instructive that Timothy was reluctant to drink it! He abstained until it was suggested by Paul as a medicine.
2. By no means does the context demand that the wine referred to be alcoholic. It is just as likely that this is a reference to pure grape juice.

There were, therefore, two kinds of wine in ancient [biblical] use. The one was sweet, pleasant, refreshing, unfermented; the other was exciting, inflaming, intoxicating. Each was called wine. Context determines which it was. Whether or not a Christian should drink is rendered a more complex question when we understand "wine" in its proper biblical context.

Dr. Herrick Johnson is quoted by Patton as a sort of conclusion. He wrote:

I do not believe that the drinking of [fermented] wine is a sin per se... But I do believe that the Christian who is known by precept or example to be an advocate of the use of the cup takes upon himself a fearful responsibility. The effect of such a precept or example is felt far beyond the circle of those with whom such [a] Christian comes into contact. The higher the position of the man, the wider will be the influence of his word or deed. And among the tens of thousands who are yearly swept away to ruin by alcohol, there may be those to whom his shining example has been a stumbling-block and an occasion to fall.

Bottom line: You can't be drunk; not ever. Can you drink?

Well, if you think you can, then it falls into the category of a Christian liberty. Liberty is always governed by these five principles:

1. Will your liberty lead you to greater freedom or is there a potential for it to enslave you? First Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.
2. Will your liberty make you a stumbling-block or a stepping-stone? First Corinthians 8:13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

3. Will your liberty build you up or tear you down? First Corinthians 10:23
All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.
4. Will your liberty please your appetites or will it bring glory to Jesus?
First Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
5. Will your liberty help win the lost or does it have the potential to turn them away from Jesus? First Corinthians 10:33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.