

## God Expects His People To Always Be Sober-Minded

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines sober, “marked by self-control; of sound moral judgment.” Sober Christians deny themselves worldly pleasures (*Titus 2:12*). This allows them to always be alert, spiritually focused, able to guard against Satan’s ever-ready attacks (*I Peter 5:8*). When Christ returns, disciples will be ready and waiting, no matter the time of day or day of week it occurs: “Be on the alert, for you do not know the day nor the hour” (*Matthew 25:13*).

Read **I Thessalonians 5:1-11**. A Christian would not be interested in anything that can diminish sobriety to any degree. Disciples want to be ready and aware, and always able to help others be able and aware of the difference between light and darkness.

Sobriety is often placed in contrast against drunkenness and rightfully so. When one comes under the influence of alcohol, judgment is impaired. The ability to make wise choices is diminished. One loses control and cannot calculate, reason and weigh to the mind’s full capability. People often do things while inebriated that they would be hesitant to do if they were alert and sober. Inhibitions are often cast aside and dangerous behavior often results – if not that which produces physical harm, certainly the even greater issue of spiritual harm.

Alcohol is a threat to sobriety! Even the spiritually declining public and government note this. We are told not to drink and drive. We are informed about the dangers of inhibitions from alcohol starting with drink #1. Notice the California Driver’s Handbook chart below.

BLOOD ALCOHOL CONTENT (BAC) Table for Male (M) / Female (F)										
Number of Drinks	Body Weight in Pounds								Driving Condition	
	100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240		
0	M	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	Only Safe Driving Limit
	F	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	
1	M	.06	.05	.04	.04	.03	.03	.03	.02	Driving Skills Impaired
	F	.07	.06	.05	.04	.04	.03	.03	.03	
2	M	.12	.10	.09	.07	.07	.06	.05	.05	
	F	.13	.11	.09	.08	.07	.07	.06	.06	
3	M	.18	.15	.13	.11	.10	.09	.08	.07	
	F	.20	.17	.14	.12	.11	.10	.09	.08	
4	M	.24	.20	.17	.15	.13	.12	.11	.10	Legally Intoxicated
	F	.26	.22	.19	.17	.15	.13	.12	.11	
5	M	.30	.25	.21	.19	.17	.15	.14	.12	
	F	.33	.28	.24	.21	.18	.17	.15	.14	

Subtract .01% for each 40 minutes of drinking.  
1 drink = 1.5 oz. 80 proof liquor, 12 oz. 5% beer, or 5 oz. 12% wine.  
Fewer than 5 persons out of 100 will exceed these values.

This chart illustrates how quickly alcohol diminishes and dissipates full sober-mindedness. Notice that a single drink, defined as a beer, a glass of wine, or a liquor shot, impairs the consumer. By the second beverage, some people are already legally intoxicated. The message to drivers is not: “don’t drink too much” “don’t drink at all.”

Notice the three colors in the chart. The State of California gives only one green light to drivers: zero alcohol. Modern day beverages are simply too potent to exist in the system of someone who wants to maintain complete control. As sober-minded and fully focused Christians, with respect to modern day alcohol, there is but one green light from God: do not drink.

## God Categorically Denounces Drunkenness

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Let's lay down an absolute truth on which all intellectually honest people can agree. The Bible speaks against getting drunk, or in terms of our previous chart, ever going into the pink section.

**Luke 21:34** – *“that your heart will not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness”*

**Romans 13:11-14** – *“behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness”*

**I Corinthians 6:9-11** – *“neither fornicators...nor drunkards...will inherit the kingdom...”*

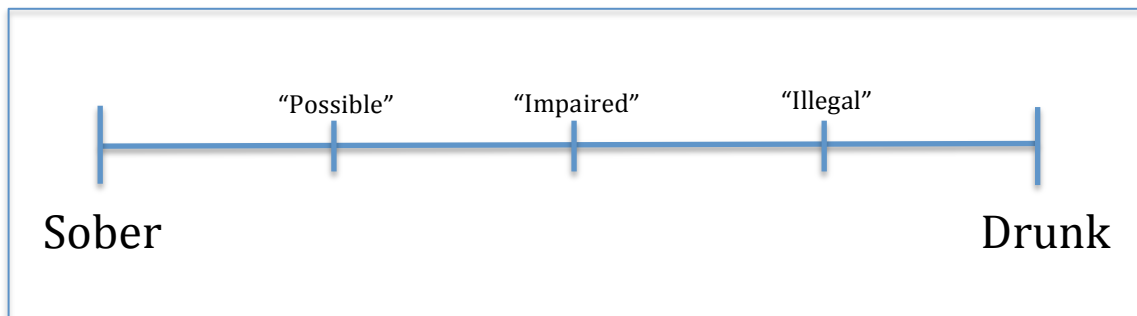
**Galatians 5:19-21** – *“those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”*

So, Scripture lays out two instructions: remain sober and do not get drunk. But what about the “real” questions of our study: What about all the room in between? What about drinking a single beer or a glass of wine with dinner? How can it be sin if I don't get drunk?

Those are important questions, and I hope our study sheds light on their answers. But maybe we aren't asking the right questions. Instead of “what about a little,” perhaps we should be asking, “why any at all?”

Read **I Thessalonians 5:21-22**. In the same text about being sober, the text teaches to abstain from every form of evil, having examined everything carefully. In our study, we will discover that almost any amount of modern day alcohol, once examined, is a threat to our sobriety and a dangerous step away from God's plan.

Consider this simple chart below. God has demanded one and denounced the other. Where do you want to be on this line graph at any point in time? How much alcohol takes us away from the left side? And is it possible that sin starts long before we get to the right side?



Even our page 1 California State driving chart used the term “Impaired” in the earliest stage of drinking. A disciple is not interested in that path. So we do not ask: “When am I drunk and in sin?” We ask, “When do I forfeit sobriety and sin against my God?”

It should be said that God's people aren't looking for a sin-line and walking as close to it as possible. Christians are “the light of the world” and want to bring glory to God by adhering to the principle of a sober mind and willing to make sacrifices to avoid “the appearance of evil.”

## The Use of the Word “Wine” in the Bible (Specifically the Old Testament)

Country star, Miranda Lambert, in her song “Heart Like Mine,” talks about beer drinking and says, “*And I heard Jesus He drank wine, I bet we’d get along just fine.*” This mentality simply believes that God’s Son drank wine, wine is alcohol, therefore I can drink beer. All sobriety and drunkenness arguments aside, this is a simple way some justify alcoholic beverages of all types.

It is important to understand the use of the word “wine” in the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, to show that all Bible wine is not alcoholic, and certainly not all Bible wine contained substantial amounts of alcohol.

The most common word for wine in the Bible is “*oinos*.” It is a Greek word used often in the New Testament, and when the Old Testament was translated into Greek from Hebrew, this word was frequently employed. But note: The Greek term *oinos* does NOT necessarily refer to a beverage with intoxicating content. The general term simply refers to the product of the grape:

**Isaiah 65:8** – “*As the new wine is found in the cluster*” is simply speaking of grape juice.

Therefore, when no danger of inhibition is present, *oinos* is often spoken of positively:

**Isaiah 55:1** – “*Every one who thirsts... come, buy wine and milk.*” (God is offering it!)

**Amos 9:14** – “*They will plant their vineyards and drink their wine...*” (His people produce it!)

**Genesis 14:18** – Melchizedek brought out bread and wine for Abraham.

However, this same word *oinos* is spoken of negatively in the Old Testament:

**Isaiah 5:11** – “*Woe to those... who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them!*”

**Joel 1:5** – “*Awake, drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you wine drinkers...*”

**Genesis 9:20-24** – “*Noah... drank of the wine and became drunk.*”

So, what’s the deal? Is *oinos* acceptable or not? The answer, of course, comes down to alcoholic content. When there was no danger of lowering one’s inhibitions, it was acceptable, perhaps in the form of grape juice or minute alcoholic content. But when it was fermented to a point of danger, it was not consumed by God’s disciples.

Someone will say, “I think it was just talking about moderation. Perhaps most of this wine, good or bad, had substantial alcoholic content, but was lawful only in small doses.” Firstly, this cannot be proven. *Oinos* in the Bible can simply refer to unfermented grape juice. Secondly, I would ask, “then why did Solomon warn people to stay completely away from certain wine?”

Read **Proverbs 23:29-35**. This text does not teach moderation. This wine contained the potential to compromise, inebriate and addict the user. “*Do not look on the wine!*”

Read **Proverbs 31:4-7**. This passage is not about justifying consumption for those who aren’t kings. Solomon, who had everything at his fingertips, instructs kings not to drink wine!

Did you see the word “strong drink” in **Proverbs 31**? This word is used alongside *oinos* quite often, and we definitely need to take a closer look at its meaning.

## **“Strong Drink” is Consistently Denounced in the Bible**

The word “*shekar*” in Hebrew was used of every kind of drink designed to intoxicate, whether made of grain, date-palms, figs or the juice of apples. So, whether they called it “beer” or “liquor” or “wine,” if it had the potency to compromise sobriety, it was condemned. We have already seen this in the Proverbs 31 passage, but note a few other Old Testament passages.

**Judges 13:4,7** – *“Be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing.”*

**Isaiah 28:7** – *“reel with wine and stagger with strong drink...”* (Sinfulness of priests)

**Luke 1:15** – *“he will drink no wine or liquor”* (Greek translation of *shekar*)

One might think that *shekar* and some more potent wines had very high alcohol content. One might reason that once the alcohol content reached a certain level it should be avoided completely. Perhaps true, but here is perhaps the most important question in our study:

### **How Much Alcohol Content was in Bible Wines and Strong Drink?**

**10%** - Underline that number. Circle it. Draw stars around it. Never forget the number 10!

Bible wines, even up through the First Century had a maximum alcohol content of roughly 10%.

**In the Bible, alcoholic wine was limited in content and is not like wine today.** The sugar of grape juice can only ferment to 3% alcohol. For grape juice to exceed 3% alcohol, yeast must be added. The yeast added to ancient wines produced between 4-10% alcohol. Alcohol kills yeast cells and prevents levels of alcohol from exceeding 10%. Today, wines average 12-15% alcohol due to distilling that was invented centuries after the Bible was completed (International Biblical Encyclopedia, Wine Makers Magazines, and Alcohol in Moderation Digest). Today’s wine is not Biblical wine in regards to alcohol content. Due to distilling, strong drinks like liquor exceed 20% alcohol. When we read the word “wine” in the Bible, it may be simply grape juice or intoxicating wine never exceeding 10%, but certainly not like wine today. <http://godsbreath.net/2011/05/20/did-jesus-drink-wine/>

This maximum content was not the form in which it was dispensed for public consumption. Instead, from this point, it was most often diluted with water.

**In The Bible, The Saint & The Liquor Industry**, Jim McGuiggan contends that because the ancients could only produce a naturally fermented wine with the alcoholic strength of 11% per volume, they would often “fortify” their drinks with various drugs (p. 41). To keep wine from spoiling, they could subject it to heat, cold, filtering and other techniques. A common practice was to boil the wine, and this explains the mixing of water with wine. Boiling wine caused it to thicken since it reduced the water content. Alcohol content would largely or completely be removed because it evaporates at a lower temperature than water. The sugar concentration would then be increased by volume so the wine would be sweeter. A higher sugar content hindered fermentation. Thus, by boiling, they made wine sweet and prevented decay. They added water in differing ratios to render it free-flowing and more drinkable.

So let’s be clear before turning the page: Bible *oinos* and *shekar*, contained a maximum of 10-11% alcohol, though often diluted by fruits, sugars and water before consumed publicly.

At this point in our study, a sincere Bible student should conclude that some very mild wines in the Bible are acceptable to drink, while wine with the danger of intoxicating is not for the Christian, and certainly any and all strong drink must be put far away from the child of God.

Before learning about the percentage of alcohol in Bible wines and liquor, we probably would have measured up the comparison between Bible beverages and modern beverages in this way:

<u>Bible Description</u>	=	<u>Modern Day Assumptions</u>
<i>Low alcohol content wine</i>	=	<i>Beer and Wine Coolers</i>
<i>Higher alcohol content wine</i>	=	<i>Fermented and Fortified Wine</i>
<i>"Strong Drink" (Shekar)</i>	=	<i>Whiskey and Vodka</i>

"Therefore, some beer and wine coolers are fine, we should probably stay away from wine, but in moderation it is not a big deal, and hard liquor is really the only thing we should not consume."

However, our conclusions would be off base. Notice the diagram below.



Do you see what I see? The maximum alcohol content in the Bible was barely over the content of an average beer! All table wine and anything stronger in your grocery store is far beyond the "shekar" that is explicitly prohibited throughout the Bible!

To try and compare modern day beverages with wine in the Bible is Apples to Oranges. But our point goes far beyond just the numbers. If I have a six pack of 5% Budweiser, I might argue that it is well within "Bible range" and therefore is acceptable. Here are a few problems with that:

1. The chart from page 1 indicates that a single beer renders us "possibly influenced."
2. Beer is usually sold in 6 packs or larger because few rarely settle in on one beer.
3. The intent of beer is often its effect, which was not the purpose of wine drinking in the Bible.
4. Bible beers were not 5-10%, but diluted with water and fruit and sugar to ultimately be just a fraction of that amount of alcohol, therefore eliminating the risk of compromised sobriety. Some sources say 10:1 or even 20:1 with water. This would allow the wine to have a nice flavor, kill bacteria in the water, but NOT include a risk of compromised sobriety!
5. The mildest of alcoholic beverages in the grocery store contain a risk of dissipation not allowed in socially consumed wine by children of God in the Bible.

## New Testament Passages Used to Justify Modern Day Drinking

With a better education of what God has said about alcohol in the Bible, as well as an understanding of Bible wine potency, and their cultural practice of diluting it, coupled with our examination of modern day alcohol content in beverages, we are now prepared to examine a collection of passages often used to justify modern day social drinking.

**John 2:1-11** – Jesus turned water to wine. Argument: “If Jesus made wine, I can drink wine.”

1. *How do you know this wine had any alcohol content at all?*
2. *How do you know this wine had enough alcohol content to inebriate someone?*
3. *Knowing their max number of 10% and practice of diluting, how can we compare?*

The passage indicates that good wine was usually served first. This does not demand that they would get tipsy and then be tricked with less potent wine. But even if that was the practice for wedding feasts in Cana, this statement does not demand that the people were drunk in this case, nor that Jesus produced high alcohol content wine.

**Romans 14:16,21** – Argument: “Drinking wine is “good” unless it causes another to stumble.”

1. *How do you know this wine had any alcohol content at all?*
2. *How do you know this wine had enough alcohol content to inebriate someone?*
3. *Knowing their max number of 10% and practice of diluting, how can we compare?*

Notice this wine is not being spoken against here because of its alcohol content, but because it was associated with idol worship, which would have offended some brethren.

**I Timothy 5:23-25** – Argument: “Timothy was told he could drink wine, and so can I.”

1. *How do you know this wine had any alcohol content at all?*
2. *How do you know this wine had enough alcohol content to inebriate someone?*
3. *Knowing their max number of 10% and practice of diluting, how can we compare?*

Notice in **verses 20-25**, Paul is speaking of sinful deeds being found out. He certainly is not suggesting a small sinful deed here. In fact, Timothy is told to drink a “little” (prohibitive in portion) and also “for stomach’s sake” (prohibitive in purpose). Likely it was used because a little alcohol could kill the bacteria in the water he was drinking.

**I Timothy 3:3,8** – Argument: “Only addiction is addressed, not consumption. And in the case of deacons, it was ‘much wine’ being prohibited, indicating a little is okay.”

These passages indicate there was dangerously potent wine available (maximum 10%) and that an elder would not be addicted to such. This does not, however, defend the consumption of a smaller amount. Likely it indicates elders may have drunk safely diluted wine but would not have consumed wine with the potential danger of addiction.

The phrase “not addicted to much wine” is simply another way of stating the same point. It does not defend addiction to a little wine. Coupled with what we know so far, and God’s emphasis on complete sobriety, this can in no way be used to defend modern beverages.

## Potent New Testament Passages to Consider

Okay, the defender of social drinking has suggested a few passages, as seen on the previous page. There is no ample evidence to support consuming beverages with dangerous potency. Now let's look at a few passages that must be considered and applied by every disciple of Christ.

**I Peter 4:1-6** – Christians have vowed to live the rest of their lives free from certain things:

**“Drunkenness”** – *oinphlugia* – This word is exactly what it appears to be. This is someone who no longer has a measure of sobriety. This person is foolish and in sin.

**“Carousing”** – *komos* – This word is a milder drinking term and often defined as “half-drunken,” including elements of nightlife and social atmosphere. Not for the Christian!

Note **Romans 13:11-14** – *“Make no provision for the flesh.”*

**“Drinking Parties”** – *potos* – This is milder yet, while still absolutely condemned. This is a derivative of the word for “a drink.” This word is not about excessive drinking, but giving opportunity to excess. In a social scene, this is not drunk, nor half drunk, but in a place and with people where drinks are served that inhibit sobriety!

The text indicates that old friends will be surprised we do not join in these things any longer. They will use arguments like: “It’s just one night” or “It’s just one drink” or even “We won’t even drink anything.” But these reasons do not matter. God’s people have put all forms of spiritual compromise out of their lives, including drunkenness, carousing and drinking parties, public or private.

There will still be people who believe much of what has been presented here, but consider themselves unique. They can drink just the one beer, one glass of wine, take only one shot and no more. They are never compromised by this and will not be around people who go too far. Most who say this are not being honest, but even if they are, God has finally and importantly called us to be a people who put greater concern on our influence than our perceived liberties.

**I Timothy 4:12** – Alcohol is potentially very dangerous; everyone knows that. Self-control when ingesting modern day alcoholic beverages is nearly impossible while maintaining total sobriety. How can a Christian engage in such, encouraging others to follow suit, putting their influence and the future of others in jeopardy?

**I Timothy 2:22-23** – And what about the word “flee?” This word is a root word for our term “fugitive.” A fugitive runs as far away from the captor as possible. He runs away from them and toward safety. So with youthful lusts, which include all 3 terms from **I Peter 4**, how does one draw close to them and also flee them? How can one consume a beverage with at or above maximum Bible wine potency, with all of the dangerous possible effects, and claim to be running from lust and toward “righteousness, faith, love and peace?” And finally, don’t we realize that wherever we run, others will follow us? And sometimes when we stop, they keep going. If that were true of your loved ones, family and friends, which way should you be running?

Ultimately, this study is less about the facts and more about faithfulness. Do we want to stand with God, above all reproach, and in holiness? Then we will abstain from modern day alcohol in all portions, purpose and places. *“Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all behavior”* (**I Peter 1:15**).

## Historical Evidence that Bible Wine was Diluted with Water

### Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times by Robert H. Stein

As evangelicals we maintain that the Bible is for us the only infallible rule of faith and practice. It is our final authority in all matters of doctrine (faith) and ethics (practice). Yet the Bible was not written to evangelicals living in the twentieth century. The science—or better, the art—of interpreting the biblical text so that the revelation of God written centuries ago is meaningful and correctly understood today is called “hermeneutics.” The basic principle of hermeneutics, to be somewhat simplistic, is that the question “What does it mean for us today?” must be preceded by the question “What did it mean for them yesterday?” If we do not seek first to understand what the text meant when it was written, it will be very difficult to interpret intelligently what it means and demands of us today.

My subject here is the use of the term “wine” in the New Testament. Some readers may already be thinking, “Is he going to try to tell us that wine in the Bible means grape juice? Is he going to try to say that the wine mentioned in the New Testament is any different from the wine bottled today by Christian Brothers or Château Lafite-Rothschild or Mogen David?” Well, my answers are no and yes. No, the wine of the Bible was not unfermented grape juice. Yes, it was different from today’s wine.

In ancient times wine was usually stored in large pointed jugs called *amphorae*. When wine was to be used it was poured from the *amphorae* into large bowls called *kraters*, where it was mixed with water. Last year I had the privilege of visiting the great archaeological museum in Athens, Greece, where I saw dozens of these large *kraters*. At the time it did not dawn on me what their use signified about the drinking of wine in biblical times. From these *kraters*, cups or *kylix* were then filled. What is important for us to note is that before wine was drunk it was mixed with water. The *kylix* were filled not from the *amphorae* but from the *kraters*.

The ratio of water to wine varied. Homer (*Odyssey* IX, 208f.) mentions a ratio of 20 to 1, twenty parts water to one part wine. Pliny (*Natural History* XIV, vi, 54) mentions a ratio of eight parts water to one part wine. In one ancient work, Athenaeus’s *The Learned Banquet*, written around A.D. 200, we find in Book Ten a collection of statements from earlier writers about drinking practices. A quotation from a play by Aristophanes reads: “‘Here, drink this also, mingled three and two.’ Demus. ‘Zeus! But it’s sweet and bears the three parts well!’” The poet Euenos, who lived in the fifth century B.C., is quoted:

*The best measure of wine is neither much nor very little;  
For ‘tis the cause of either grief or madness.  
It pleases the wine to be the fourth, mixed with three nymphs.*

Here the ratio of water to wine is 3 to 1. Others mentioned are:

<u>3 to 1—Hesiod</u>	<u>4 to 1—Alexis</u>
<u>2 to 1—Diodes</u>	<u>3 to 1—Ion</u>
<u>5 to 2—Nichochares</u>	<u>2 to 1—Anacreon</u>

Sometimes the ratio goes down to 1 to 1 (and even lower), but it should be noted that such a mixture is referred to as “strong wine.” Drinking wine unmixed, on the other hand, was looked upon as a “Scythian” or barbarian custom. Athenaeus in this work quotes Mnesitheus of Athens:



The gods has revealed wine to mortals, to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse. For it gives food to them that take it and strength in 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 intercourse, to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer; but if you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse.

It is evident that wine was seen in ancient times as a medicine (and as a solvent for medicines) and of course as a beverage. Yet as a beverage it was always thought of as a mixed drink. Plutarch (*Symposiacs* III, ix), for instance, states. “We call a mixture ‘wine,’ although the larger of the component parts is water.” The ratio of water might vary, but only barbarians drank it unmixed, and a mixture of wine and water of equal parts was seen as “strong drink” and frowned upon. The term “wine” or *oinos* in the ancient world, then, did not mean wine as we understand it today but wine mixed with water. Usually a writer simply referred to the mixture of water and wine as “wine.” To indicate that the beverage was not a mixture of water and wine he would say “unmixed wine.”

One might wonder whether the custom of mixing wine with water was limited to the ancient Greeks. The burden of proof would be upon anyone who argued that the pattern of drinking wine in Jewish society was substantially different from that of the examples already ‘given. And we do have examples in both Jewish and Christian literature and perhaps in the Bible that wine was likewise understood as being a mixture of wine and water. In several instances in the Old Testament a distinction is made between “wine” and “strong drink.” In Leviticus 10:8, 9, we read, “And the **LORD** spoke to Aaron, saying, ‘Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting....’” Concerning the Nazarite vow Numbers 6:3 states that the Nazarite “shall separate himself from wine and strong drink.” This distinction is found also in Deuteronomy 14:26; 29:6; Judges 13:4, 7, 14; First Samuel 1:15; Proverbs 20:1; 31:4,6; Isaiah 5:11, 22; 28:7; 29:9; 56:12; and Micah 2:11.

The 1901 *Jewish Encyclopedia* (Vol. 12, p. 533) states that in the rabbinic period at least “‘yayin’ [or wine] ‘is to be distinguished from ‘shekar’ [or strong drink]: the former is diluted with water (mazug’); the latter is undiluted (‘yayin hal’).” In the Talmud, which contains the oral traditions of Judaism from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 200, there are several tractates in which the mixture of water and wine is discussed. One tractate (Shabbath 77a) states that wine that does not carry three parts of water well is not wine. The normal mixture is said to consist of two parts water to one part wine. In a most important reference (Pesahim 108b) it is stated that the four cups every Jew was to drink during the Passover ritual were to be mixed in a ratio of three parts water to one part wine. From this we can conclude with a fair degree of certainty that the fruit of the vine used at the institution of the Lord’s Supper was a mixture of three parts water to one part wine. In another Jewish reference from around 60 B.C. we read, “It is harmful to drink wine alone, or again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one’s enjoyment” (II Maccabees 15:39).

In ancient times there were not many beverages that were safe to drink. The danger of drinking water alone raises another point. There were several ways in which the ancients could make water safe to drink. One method was boiling, but this was tedious and costly. Different methods of filtration were tried. The safest and easiest method of making the water safe to drink, however, was to mix it with wine. The drinking of wine (i.e., a mixture of water and wine) served therefore as a safety measure, since often the water available was not safe. (I remember drinking some water in Salonica, Greece, that would have been much better for me had it been mixed with wine or some other purifying agent.)

When we come to the New Testament the content of the wine is never discussed. The burden of proof, however, is surely upon anyone who would say that the “wine” of the New Testament is substantially different from the wine mentioned by the Greeks, the Jews during the intertestamental period, and the early church fathers. In the writings of the early church fathers it is clear that “wine” means wine mixed with water. Justin Martyr around A.D. 150 described the Lord’s Supper in this way: “Bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president sends up prayers and thanksgiving” (*Apology* 1, 67, 5). Some sixty-five years later Hippolytus instructed the bishops that they shall “eucharistize [bless] first the bread into the representation of the Flesh of Christ; and the cup mixed with wine for the antitype of the Blood which was shed for all who have believed in Him” (*Apostolic Tradition* XXIII, 1). Cyprian around A.D. 250 stated in his refutation of certain heretical practices:

Nothing must be done by us but what the Lord first did on our behalf, as that the cup which is offered in remembrance of Him should be offered mingled with wine. . . .

Thus, therefore, in considering the cup of the Lord, water alone cannot be offered, even as wine alone cannot be offered. For if anyone offer wine only, the blood of Christ is dissociated from us: but if the water be alone, the people are dissociated from Christ. . . . Thus the cup of the Lord is not indeed water alone, nor wine alone, unless each be mingled with the other [*Epistle* LXII, 2, 11 and 13].

Unmixed wine and plain water at the Lord’s Supper were both found unacceptable. A mixture of wine and water was the norm. Earlier in the latter part of the second century Clement of Alexandria stated:

It is best for the wine to be mixed with as much water as possible. . . . For both are works of God, and the mixing of the two, both of water and wine produces health, because life is composed of a necessary element and a useful element. To the necessary element, the water, which is in the greatest quantity, there is to be mixed in some of the useful element [*Instructor* II, ii, 23.3–24.1].

To consume the amount of alcohol that is in two martinis by drinking wine containing three parts water to one part wine, one would have to drink over twenty-two glasses. In other words, it is possible to become intoxicated from wine mixed with three parts of water, but one’s drinking would probably affect the bladder long before it affected the mind.

In concluding this brief article I would like to emphasize two points. First, it is important to try to understand the biblical text in the context in which it was written. Before we ask “What does the biblical text mean for us today?” we must ask “What did it mean to them originally?” Second, there is a striking difference between the drinking of alcoholic beverages today and the drinking of wine in New Testament times. If the drinking of unmixed wine or even wine mixed in a ratio of one to one with water was frowned upon in ancient times, certainly the drinking of distilled spirits in which the alcoholic content is frequently three to ten times greater would be frowned upon a great deal more.

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