

To Drink or Not to Drink

By Louis Rushmore

What has God revealed in His Word, the Bible, about the consumption of alcoholic beverages? What English words in our Bible translations identify alcoholic drinks? The word “wine” is represented in the Bible by 10 Hebrew and 3 Greek words. Sometimes “wine” means first fruits that are ripe first (Numbers 18:12-13). It can mean the cluster of grapes (Isaiah 65:8). Wine can refer to raisins (Hosea 3:1 ASV). Sometimes it equals the winepress (Nehemiah 13:15). Wine can be grape juice (Isaiah 16:10; Proverbs 3:10), or it can refer to alcoholic wine (Genesis 9:21).

The context is the overriding factor determining the definition of both the Hebrew and Greek words for wine. Since the words for “wine” do not indicate either an alcoholic or a non-alcoholic state by definition, only by examining the context can one determine which is meant.

There are two categories of “wine” as far as God is concerned – what He **approves** and what He **disapproves**. The simplest and most reasonable conclusion is that non-alcoholic references go in the “approves” column. Therefore, the references that are alcoholic belong in the “disapproves” column. Closer examination of the respective passages shows this to be the case. In addition to some occasions of the word “wine,” every occurrence of “strong drink” is condemned in Scripture.

Due to limited space, we concentrate herein on biblical references in the New Testament. That is appropriate since the New Testament alone is the covenant of God by which everyone now living is bound (Romans 7:6-7; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14) and will be judged (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The New Testament teaches sobriety in a number of passages (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). The word translated “sober” in each case here means to refrain from alcoholic wine. So, in addition to the negative, *prohibitive teachings* against the use of alcohol as a beverage, these passages result in teaching the same truth from *positive instruction*.

Clearly, “drunkenness” is sinful (1 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21), but when is one drunk? So-called social drinkers often split hairs on this subject. Both definitions of original language words and definitions for the English words “drunk” or “drunkenness” mean “intoxication.”

Drunkenness involves various stages of drunkenness or intoxication, but intoxication (drunkenness) begins with the first introduction of alcohol into one’s body; one drink drunk is true physiologically and more importantly biblically, too. Therefore, Ephesians 5:18 definitively teaches against consuming alcohol. “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (KJV). The Greek verb tense in this verse teaches not to engage in the process of drunkenness, which means to refrain from the first drink.

Defenders of alcoholic drinks characteristically resort first to Jesus making “wine” at a marriage feast, and they attempt to make it a proof text in defense of social drinking. Besides the condemnation of alcoholic wine in the Bible noted already, consider the grave ramifications of supposing that our Savior made and provided alcoholic drink to the partiers (John 2:1-10).

Jesus Christ was born under, lived during and died while the Old Testament was still in force. Under Judaism, it was sinful to give an alcoholic beverage to someone (Habakkuk 2:15; Proverbs 20:1). If Jesus had given alcohol to the partygoers, He would have violated the Old Law and would have been guilty of sin. Consequently, as a sinner, Jesus Christ could not have successfully offered Himself as our perfect sacrifice to take away our sins (Hebrews 4:15; 9:28). Then, humanity would have no hope of redemption because we would lack a Savior (1 Corinthians 15:19). Since “wine” can refer either to alcoholic or to non-alcoholic drinks, we must conclude that our Lord did **not** make an alcoholic beverage in John 2.

It is historically inaccurate to claim, as some do, that an insufficient supply of potable water required people in antiquity to drink alcoholic beverages. Canaan abounded in water (Deuteronomy 8:7). Grape juice was available, and the ancients preserved the abundance of grape juice without fermentation for later use. Grape juice with its high sugar content and the elevated temperatures of Palestine meant that it did not ferment well naturally. Therefore, to preserve the grape juice, people used various methods to keep it from spoiling.

First, boiling of grape juice for four to five hours reduces it to a condition where it will not spoil. Later, it can be reconstituted with water. Secondly, submerging grape juice in a cool water source (e.g., pond, cistern) of 45 degrees or lower for at least 40 days causes yeast to settle to the bottom of the container. Removing the grape juice from the top and transferring it to another container preserves it since there is no yeast to ferment or sour it.

Third, grape juice can be passed through filters several times to remove yeast. Fourth, if sulfur is added to grape juice, it neutralizes yeast so grape juice neither sours nor ferments. Fifth, if grape juice is placed in an airtight container, it neither sours nor ferments. After grape juice is removed from a container, the unused balance needs to be placed into a smaller, airtight container.

All the arguments in favor of social drinking are flawed, whether trying to appeal generally to history or attempting to make Scripture allow the practice. The author’s book, *Beverage Alcohol*, goes into much more detail regarding social drinking. It also covers the often ill-employed Scripture proof texts, anecdotal claims and supposed support from the medical world. You are invited to view it online free at <https://gospelgazette.com/library/pdf%20books/beveragealcohol.pdf>.

If you are interested in following the Scriptures and pleasing God, you will not engage in social drinking. If you want to spare yourself medical illnesses related to

alcohol as well as employment, money, social, legal and family problems, you will not be a drinker. Social drinking is a self-inflicted misery that afflicts individuals, families, employers and nations.



For additional, timely as well as important medical information about alcohol consumption, please follow the link to Cassiobury Court at <https://www.cassioburycourt.com/article/103/alcohol-and-breast-cancer-infographic>"><https://www.cassioburycourt.com/article/103/alcohol-and-breast-cancer-infographic>