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Blog series on alcohol

1) Should You?

Should you? Absolutely not! It is wicked as the devil! It ruins marriages, takes food out of the mouths of little children, and kills thousands of people! Don't touch the stuff!

Should you? Well, historically, most Christians for the past two thousand years drank in moderation you know. After all, there was no such thing as preserved grape juice prior to Thomas Welch's discovery of pasteurization in 1869. Of course, we all realize that the Scripture never forbids drinking. It only forbids drunkenness. Why, even Jesus made and drank wine! How could it possibly be wrong?

Most of Christianity takes one of those two positions. Generally speaking, they often do so with a blithe ignorance that is breathtaking. Yet I must be careful here because for most of my life that last sentence could easily describe me. I held a position and held it firmly while having spent very little effort and time to determine why I held that position. About four years ago I made up my mind to change that. I gathered a number of books on the subject. I tracked every verse in the Scripture that mentioned anything remotely like alcohol and examined them carefully. I wanted to find what God actually said about it and I believe I have.

The word 'beer' is in the Bible but only two times as the name of a town. On the other hand, the King James Version uses some form of the word 'wine' 217 times, 'strong drink' 19 times, and 'drunk' 68 times so it clearly speaks much to the issue of alcohol

Beer ranges from 3-12 percent alcohol though usually it lands between 4-6 percent. Wine contains from 9-16 percent alcohol. Fortified wine, such as port, Madeira, sherry, vermouth, etc. is usually between 15-20 percent alcohol; this is usually a mixture of wine and spirits. Spirits are distilled wine. Sometimes these are called hard liquor. They range from 20 percent at the low end to an incredible 95 percent at the high end. These include brandy, gin, rum, tequila, vodka, whiskey and others. Thus we see that an examination of alcohol will cover each and every one of these from beer at the low end to vodka at the top end.

For the next three months I am going to wade right into the middle of this debate. We will look at where the weight lies in the biblical discussion. We will examine the consequences of drinking. We will discuss whether alcohol affects you. We will look at difficult passages which those on both sides often pretend not

to see. We will emphasize context. We will spend a fair amount of time examining historical evidence. We will try to do all of this carefully, accurately, and thoughtfully. Hopefully, by the end of it, you will be able to form and hold a more spiritually educated position. Then again, some of you will simply read it in order to fuss with me but that's ok too. I need all kinds of readers. =)

So join me, won't you, for the next couple of months? If you would like to subscribe to this blog you can do so by entering your email address on the top right hand side of the page. Together let us study to show ourselves approved unto God. Let us rightly divide His Word. And then let us obey it though all the weight of the world comes against us.

2) Where the Weight Lies

Often, in studying a biblical issue that is puzzling, I will ask myself this question: "Where does the weight lie?" In other words, if one were to pile up all the mentions or allusions to the topic in the Word of God which pile is the biggest? Admittedly, this is not the only or only necessary or even the first means of biblical interpretation but I find it helpful. **The whole point of studying the Word of God is to discover what God said and thinks.** Sometimes, He seems to say several different things about the same concept. So I pile them up. I place them on an imaginary scale in my mind to see where the weight is. What does God seem to say most often about this subject?

For instance God does instruct us once to hate our families (*Luke 14.26*) but repeatedly He tells us to love them. In this case the weight plainly comes down on the side of loving them. Understanding that informs how I view the passage instructing me to hate them as well as how I view family as a whole.

When I first began study what the Bible says about alcohol I used this method. I gathered all the mentions of it and began to sort them into piles. Many of those mentions have no specific contextual basis of good or bad. Some of those mentions have a contextual basis of good. A large number of those with a contextual basis of good are prefaced with the word 'new' as in new wine. Setting those aside for the moment (I will deal with them later) there are still a handful that mention wine, without the adjective 'new', as being a good thing. For example, *Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, And shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, For wheat, and for wine, and for oil, And for the young of the flock and of the herd: And their soul shall be as a watered garden; And they shall not sorrow any more at all. (Jeremiah 31.12)* In this passage God is clearly blessing Israel and He explicitly includes wine.

On the opposite side of the coin there are some passages with a contextual basis that is bad. A large number of those with a contextual basis that is bad define the beverage under questions as 'strong drink.' Setting those likewise aside for the moment (I will deal with these later) there are a still some that mention wine, without the explanatory phrase 'strong drink, as being a bad thing.

So which is it? Is wine good or bad?

My first attempt to answer that question came by trying to determine on which side the weight came down. In other words, with the remaining mentions in Scripture - setting aside those without a larger explanatory context and setting aside those with a direct explanatory adjective, good or bad - when I put them on the scale, did the scale tilt negative or positive?

The answer is clearly negative. The narrowed passages without underlying adjectives but with a contextual basis easy to understand overwhelmingly pile up on the bad side of the ledger. That is not only fact but the entire contention of my post today is that it is weighty fact. Indeed, some of the harshest language in the entire Bible is reserved for wine.

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? (Proverbs 23.29) In this one verse we see explicitly and highly negative things associated with wine.

Woe is a passionate cry of grief or despair. The dictionary defines it as trouble and anguish. The basic idea is that something really bad is headed your way. It is a word pregnant with warning as horrendously illustrated in *Revelation 8-11*.

Sorrow is pain caused by want. Alcohol causes children to want food, clothing, shelter, and parental affection. It causes wives to want security and a husband's affection. It causes husbands to want a chaste wife and an involved mother for their children. It causes society to want peace, quiet, a lessening of crime, and good health. When you drink alcohol it produces great want somewhere and always in those you love the most.

This stands in stark contrast to the image portrayed on television by beer commercials. This biblically defined sorrow also stands in contrast to the experience of many a young person who sees an alcohol soaked party as the penultimate example of a good time. But it is wholly false to judge a person's sorrow by how they appear to feel while drinking. The sorrow comes, in Solomon's eloquent turn of phrase, *but afterwards*. (*Proverbs 20.17*)

Contentions are strife caused by brawling. This is actually why some people ingest alcohol. They want to buck their courage up for a confrontation. Such people know that drinking leads to a feeling of invulnerability thus feeding

arguments and fights. How many fist fights broke out in churches this past weekend? How many broke out in bars?

Some of the most foolish things ever uttered by the tongue of man have come while men are in their cups. Drinking loosens normal restraints including those over the tongue. It produces vulgar speech, argumentative speech, abusive speech – especially toward loved ones – and nonsensical speech. Men under the influence of alcohol reveal all sorts of secrets. In short, they **babble**.

Alcohol produces **wounds without cause**. Such wounds are self-inflicted out of sheer stupidity. Brain cells die. People fall into the paths of oncoming vehicles. They lie outside in the cold and freeze to death. They wound thousands of people a year when they get behind the wheel of a car. Drinking causes you to lose control not just of your thought patterns and your speech but of your physical body as well. *They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. (Psalm 107.27)*

Additionally, your physical appearance takes a beating. There is **redness of eyes**. Your clothes, carriage, and especially your face over time reflect the alcohol you have ingested.

Who experiences these six negative things? *They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. (Proverbs 23.30)* I can hear some of you now. "Yeah, but you have to tarry long with wine to experience these six things." In response I would say it is the nature of alcohol to produce these results. If you tarry long at milk you might get indigestion but you will not have these six things happen to you. The only drink we ingest that produces intoxication and its side effects is alcohol. It is wine itself that has this nature. *Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. (Proverbs 20.1)*

Solomon went on to say in *Proverbs 23.31*, *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.* The devil is a master at making what is dangerously wrong look incredibly attractive. Wine is oft served from beautiful glass bottles via sophisticated waiters. It is poured into ornate glasses. The color and fragrance of good wine is in and of itself highly appealing. The whole experience is packaged exquisitely. It should not surprise us that it deceives so many.

A wise man does not even spare a glance for the pleasures implicit in such a situation. Why? *At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. (Proverbs 23.32)* One of the best tests you will ever place your decisions to is the test of later. If I have sex with this woman I will enjoy it now – but later? If I steal this money I will enjoy it now – but later? If I lash out in wrath I will enjoy it now – but later? Later alcohol bites and stings. This is true physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. (Proverbs 23.33) Alcohol consumption clearly incites immorality and indecency.

Where do men and women go to hook up? The library? I don't think so. They go to a bar. There is a country song that says, 'I'm in love with you baby and I don't even know your name.' In the dim light of that bar an alcohol soaked brain looks out of its eyes and says, 'Hey, that one looks pretty good to me.'

Not only does alcohol make people seem more attractive than they actually are it also clearly lowers inhibitions. It lessens the natural restraint and control that God so graciously gifted to every person. Men utter perverse propositions under the influence of alcohol they would never say if they were sober. Women take off clothes in public under the influence of alcohol in ways they blush to think of the following day. Sexual sin and alcohol go hand in hand. *Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. (Hosea 3.1)*

Alcohol causes everything to move, swirl, and spin around you. Your sense of balance and discernment abandon you. *Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. (Proverbs 23.34)* Jimmy Stewart tries to hand a drunk man his hat in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life". The man staggers around and asks which hat. Jimmy calmly replies, "The middle one."

They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again. (Proverbs 23.35) It is no secret that people who hurt themselves while drinking actually do not feel it at the time. More, though, this verse stresses the addicting power of alcohol. I can buy alcohol legally within two hundred steps of my church building but just because it is legal does not mean I should. Many Christians believe Christian liberty allows me that same freedom in a spiritual sense but even if they are right just because I can does not mean I should. *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1 Corinthians 6.12)*

There is something intrinsic in the substance that is alcohol which turns many a functioning member of society into a junkie. A wise man stays far away from such a risk. After all, if anything has control over me then I have lost the ability to yield myself to the Lord. Alcohol controls you. We have just examined a bunch of ways in which it causes you to lose control over yourself. But alcohol not only controls you when you drink it; it also often controls you when you do not drink it. It reels you in with hooks embedded deep into the flesh of your mouth. As a Christian we are supposed to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. We are to be

yielded to God for His use. This cannot happen when alcohol enters the picture. *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.* (Ephesians 5.18)

Are there scattered references in Scripture that mention wine as a blessing, as a joy sent from God? Yes. But there are also scattered Scriptures that mention wine as a disaster. But beyond that dichotomy there is this one enormous passage in *Proverbs 23* that to say the least weighs in on the negative side of the scale.

So which is it? Is wine good or bad? Should I imbibe alcoholic beverages or not? Ask yourself this question: where does the weight lie?

3) Consequences

One of the mistakes people make when studying complex issues in the Bible is they often rush right to the passages that are most puzzling. They pull two contrasting statements out and assert a biblical contradiction, or perhaps they pull out one that supports their position that the other position has trouble explaining. The reason this is a mistake is that an attempt to actually understand a complex biblical issue must needs begin with a wider base. The pinnacle of the spire on the top of New York City's Freedom Tower only makes sense in the context of the foundation laid deep below. Above that foundation comes an entire superstructure and not until then is it finally crowned with a spire. Understanding it, grasping it must include the entirety of it.

Context is critically important. The English word "bank" may mean the edge of a river, a place to store money, or the turning of an aircraft. I determine an accurate understanding based on context. Someone asked me after my blog post last week on weight [<link>](#) where I got this new hermeneutic of weight. "I'd really like to hear an explanation to this. I'm not familiar with the 'hermeneutic of weight', but I'm sure that it could be said a different way somewhere? Maybe? Where does it stand within the rest of hermeneutical principles?" That is an excellent question and my answer was that weight is context.

The context of a passage is not just immediate. It is parenthetical. By that I mean the context expands out in ever larger brackets. The context of a word is the phrase, of the phrase is the sentence, of the sentence is the passage, of the passage is the book, etc. But beyond even the book there is the larger context of what God means about a certain subject as revealed in the entirety of Scripture. If I want to know what 'love' means in a particular verse I need to examine it through the light of all of those contexts. Weight is simply another way of saying the entire Bible context.

Thus it is that in writing this series on what the Bible says about alcohol I am purposely beginning with the broad strokes. I aim to show you the larger context in which the Scripture places the subject before we narrow our study down to the more complex passages. In saying that some will no doubt accuse me of seeking to instill a bias prior to examining problem passages. What they call bias I call context.

Today I want to examine some of the consequences of drinking. What does drinking produce? What does drinking bring? The world would no doubt answer that question with some variation of a good time. Beer is fun. Beer is All-American. Beer tastes good. Wine is sophisticated. Spirits are manly. I know all of these things because television tells me so. We shall look for our answer instead within the pages of God's Word.

Drinking alcohol produces poverty. *For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. (Proverbs 23.21)* I live in the heart of America's second biggest inner city. At every major intersection on my side of the city you will be accosted with beggars. Shambling through traffic, holding up a cardboard sign and an empty paper cup they stroll from car to car asking for spare change. Where does such desperate poverty come from? Studies show that 100% of the money put into those paper cups gets spent on drugs and alcohol.

In 2008, for instance, the people of America bought 213 million barrels of beer produced by 3500 different breweries. In the United States there are 521,000 places one can go to purchase beer. When you combine an addicted clientele and an ease of procurement what do you get? People who spend themselves broke feeding the monster. In my state alone that year the average consumption of alcohol was over thirty gallons per person!

Peapod has a twenty-four pack of Budweiser listed at \$18.99. At that price beer averages \$8.44 a gallon. At 6.6 billion gallons bought in 2008 that means America spent \$55 billion on beer alone that year. That \$55 billion did not get spent on education, health care, mortgages, rent, electricity, gas, bus fare, or car payments. Nope. Instead it took food out the mouths of children, clothes off their backs, roofs away from their heads, dentists away from their teeth, and ruined their family's financial present and future. *He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich. (Proverbs 21.17)*

Drinking alcohol produces spiritual delusion. *That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. (Amos 6.6)* Amos is here speaking of God's judgment being poured out on a rebellious Israel. Sadly, this judgment does not produce any spiritual sorrow in the people because the wine they chase dulls their spiritual perception.

You cannot give yourself to drinking alcohol and be spiritually sensitive at the same time. Another Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk, pronounced judgment on God's people and linked their spiritually disastrous state to their drinking. *Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people. (Habakkuk 2.5)* Daniel tells us that when Belshazzar was drinking he was so out of touch spiritually he could not recognize the finger of God when it appeared before him. Nabal would not give David provisions but was willing to throw a party and debauch himself into a drunken stupor totally ignorant of the great danger he was in spiritually and physically.

I love each person who attends my church, those who drink and those who do not. Yet those who do, curiously enough, do not tithe, do not give to missions, do not attend more often than the occasional Sunday morning, and have a life that looks no different than the lost world around them. At the same time, if you ask them, they think they are in pretty good shape spiritually. The fact of the matter is they are delusional. They are spiritually deluded.

Moses said it this way. *Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven. (Deuteronomy 29.18-20)*

Additionally, Hosea tells us **drinking and rebellion are found in concert**. *Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me. And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me. (Hosea 7.13-14)* I attended a strict Christian high school. Not coincidentally, when those churchified kids wanted to rebel against the rules of their parents and their school how did they choose to do it? Yep. You guessed it. By throwing alcohol soaked parties.

To this Moses again adds his agreement. *If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders*

of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, *This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.* (Deuteronomy 21.18-20) There are certainly many contributing factors that combine in a rebellious life. Alcohol is not the only one but it is one.

Drinking alcohol produces sadness. *Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.* (Proverbs 31.6-7) Some people use this verse to justify drinking. They fail to understand that Scripture is speaking ironically here. Think with me for a moment. When we are sad, what or who are we supposed to run to? *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.* (I Peter 5.7) Solomon speaks here specifically about poverty. When you are troubled about your financial state what are you to do? *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.* (Philippians 4.11)

Obviously drinking gives no permanent comfort to a man who is economically stressed or in a heart breaking situation. Drinking does not help him to deal with it all only to avoid it. Guess what is there when he sobers up? The heartbreak and the discontentment. Problems must be dealt with not papered over for problems avoided become problems enlarged. What really happens is that when the guy sobers up he is even sadder than he was before because now he has a hangover to go with his suddenly returned sadness. Drinking has never cured any ill, fixed any problem, or healed any heartache.

Ask yourself this question: How does God want me to best handle my stress and sorrow? If your answer is drinking rather than prayer and faith your concept of God and your understanding of God's Word is totally flawed. No, this passage does not teach permissible alcoholic ingestion when you are heartbroken; it teaches, rather, that heartbreak remains and worsens when it is dosed with alcohol. The context of *Proverbs 31* is plainly negative on the subject of alcohol. Solomon is saying that it is ridiculous to think alcohol helps you solve your problems. It is the last thing you would rationally want to do.

Lastly today, **drinking alcohol produces health problems.** It increases your risk of harming yourself due to accidents. It is the leading preventable cause of cardiovascular disease, coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, dangerous heart rhythms, and stroke. It prevents food digestion and produces gastritis and ulcers. It reduces brain activity (which is why your speech gets slurred). If you drink enough your brain actually shuts down (which is why you can't remember anything the next day). It robs the brain of the combination of water and glucose that it feeds on (which is why you have a hangover the next day). It destroys brain cells (which is why Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is so damaging; it severely impacts

the brains of developing babies). Since 90% of alcohol is metabolized in the liver the more you drink the more you risk cirrhosis (scarring) and hepatitis (inflammation). It depletes the lungs of glutathione which leaves them more vulnerable to infection and disease. In the pancreas it produces pancreatitis, diabetes, and ulcers. It can cause blindness. It lowers bone density. It reduces the immune system thus increasing the risk of developing pneumonia, tuberculosis, liver disease, HIV, gastrointestinal infections, and septicemia. I could go on and on and on along this line. Just google the health effects of drinking and you can spend hour upon hour scaring yourself to death.

I suspect many of you will not agree with everything I have written today but I want you to honestly ask yourself this question: Where does the weight lie? When you place the positives of drinking on one side of the scale and the negatives on the other side how does it tilt? Ask it in the privacy of your heart and the integrity of your conscience. Ask it the context of how drinking affects not only your life but the lives of others around you. Ask it in the context of how your drinking influences those who follow you. Where is wisdom? Where is foolishness?

Maybe the real question is not whether you can but whether you should...

4) Under the Influence

There are three basic positions when it comes to drinking alcohol. Teetotalers refrain from all alcoholic beverages. This is usually a Christian position. The opposite extreme views drinking to be perfectly wholesome in all situations. This is usually the perspective of the unsaved man. In between both of those, however, is a substantial number of Christians who are against drunkenness but in favor of moderate alcoholic consumption. They maintain that God created wine to be a blessing as long as it is consumed in moderation. They believe Jesus drank wine. They believe the historic Christian position is that alcoholic beverages are allowed via Christian liberty.

I have a number of Christian friends who hold this latter position and they do so for a number of reasons. One of those reasons is that they maintain that drinking alcohol does not affect them. In other words, they believe that the line between allowance and sin is getting drunk. At that point, the alcohol has negatively affected you and so you have crossed the line into sin. But since they do not allow the alcohol to affect them they don't believe they have crossed the line into sin.

One of the great problems with this reasoning is that it is dangerous. It is playing with fire and hoping not to be burned. The fact is alcohol does influence

you, pushing you toward a set of wrong behaviors and actions whether you intend to be pushed there or not.

To illustrate, notice drinking affects your natural sense of modesty and propriety.

The sex drive is one of the most powerful human appetites. God tempered this somewhat by putting within us a natural modesty in relation to our bodies. He created us with a natural sense of propriety in relation to sexual activities. This is seen in the fact that people instinctively cover up their bodies and their intimate activity is done in private. Of course I full well realize our culture has undermined this natural sense of modesty but it still comes built in to every human being born since the Garden of Eden. Infants and toddlers have no shame about nakedness. Children though do and that is a good thing. It is a God-given thing.

One of the marks of a culture that is moving away from God is an increased acceptance of public nakedness. This is a bit of a gross exaggeration but the less of God there is the less of clothes there usually are as well. But each individual is still born with a natural sense of modesty and propriety. The devil knows this and so he sets up a system that tries to gradually beat that out of people via music, television, leisure activities, fashion, etc.

Similar to this gradual coarsening or hardening of the natural sense of modesty by our culture so the same thing can be developed within hours by ingesting alcohol. Drinking obviously affects the natural sense of modesty and propriety which God put inside of every person.

This is seen in the very first mention of wine in the Bible.

*Genesis 9:20 And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:
21 And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.*

22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

23 And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

I doubt Noah intentionally set out to get drunk, take off his clothes, and invite judgment upon his family. Intent is not the issue however. The issue is the result and the result was that Noah's natural sense of modesty was affected.

We see this again in one of the most difficult stories to read in the entire Bible. A mature Lot, disconsolate over losing his home and life in Sodom, commits incest with his own daughters under the influence of alcohol.

Gen 19:30 And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.

31 And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth:

32 Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.

33 And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

34 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.

35 And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

36 Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that my Christian friends who believe in a moderate consumption of alcohol are committing incest with their children. I am saying that alcohol moves you in the direction of some awful behaviors, activities that would never be contemplated by those of sober mind. I do not believe for one moment that Lot intended to do as he did. But he did drink alcoholic wine and he could not control the affect it had on him. It loosened his sense of propriety and decency to put it mildly.

The adverse effect of alcohol is so well known that people who act erratically are automatically assumed to be under the influence. *I Samuel 1* tells us that Hannah prayed so intensely, albeit silently, that Eli thought she was drunk. Obviously she had not been drinking but Eli assumed she had because her behavior appeared unusual. *Acts 2* shows us the same common perception. The Apostles were speaking in tongues and the crowd around them could only explain it in terms of drunkenness.

Under the influence – why is that phrase understood by one and all to mean that a person has been drinking? Because we know that drinking affects people, whether they intend for it affect them or not. Alcohol is a narcotic. Inherent in its chemical structure is a sure and certain effect on human reason, speech, motor control, and propriety. Alcohol loosens the governors God placed on us.

Don't tell me that drinking alcohol doesn't affect you. It may affect you to varying degrees at varying times but it absolutely affects you. The only way to avoid being affected is to avoid ingesting it entirely. Go ahead. Take a drink. You will be under the influence whether you are willing to admit it or not.

5) Greater Responsibility; Greater Disaster

The more responsibility you carry the more caution you should exercise about alcohol. If I give a dog a bowl of beer and he gets drunk he staggers around and amuses everyone. If I give a father several cans of beer he will eventually stagger around. If he does it often enough he will deprive his children and his wife of all that they need him to be. When you study drinking in the Bible this concept – that there is greater danger in it for those with greater responsibility – comes up again and again. Solomon said it well in *Proverbs 31.4-5*. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*

The Old Testament contains four separate examples of the folly of kings and princes when it comes to alcohol. *I Kings 16* tells us that King Elah of Israel was murdered while *drinking himself drunk*. This palace coup resulted in Elah's chariot captain, Zimri, becoming the next king. I wonder if Elah would have been able to defend himself if he hadn't been drinking.

Two chapters later we find the story of the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad. His army greatly outnumbered the Israelite army. Ben-Hadad marched to Samaria and demanded the right to search the Jewish king's house and take whatever he wanted. The king of Israel refused. Ben-Hadad, under the influence of alcohol, declared war. *And it came to pass, when Benhadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in his pavilion, that he said to his servants, Set yourselves in array. ...And they went out at noon. But Benhadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him.* In this case a war entered into and fought by men well soused resulted in a stunning defeat for Syria. *And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.* I wonder how much different that battle would have turned out if the Syrian leadership wouldn't have been drinking.

King Ahasuerus of Persia made a snap decision to set aside one queen and find another. He made that decision under the influence of alcohol. *The heart of the king was merry with wine. (Esther 1.10)* In so doing he set on course a series of events that nearly resulted in the destruction of the Jews and did result in the death of his good friend, Haman. I wonder if he would have made the same decision to get rid of Vashti if he had not been drinking.

Amnon, a son of King David and thus a prince in Israel, raped his half-sister Tamar. When Amnon's brother, Absalom found out Absalom arranged Amnon's murder. *Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark he now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. (II*

Samuel 13.28) I wonder if Amnon would have lived longer and if Absalom would have been prevented from becoming a murderer if Amnon had chosen not to drink that night. I wonder how the course of Israel's history might have been changed if it were not for that one night of drinking.

These admonitions are not found alone in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the great John the Baptist was forbidden alcohol in an angelic message brought to his father Zechariah. Pastors likewise are explicitly warned. *For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry; not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre. (Titus 1.7)*

Do you have a place of responsibility? Do others look to you as parent, teacher, boss, or leader? Does someone follow you? Do your decisions carry ramifications? Do you lead an important life? I say again what I have said before: When you combine a high level of responsibility with a beverage so notoriously deceptive perhaps the real question you need to ask yourself is not can you drink – it is should you drink.

6) The Blessing of Wine

We have spent the last five blog posts examining by my count fifty seven different Scripture verses about alcohol. This large group clearly puts the subject in a negative light. Alcohol produces woe, sorrow, contentions, babbling, wounds without cause, and redness of eyes. Alcohol causes you to lose control of yourself. Alcohol is addicting. Alcohol's very nature is intoxicating. Alcohol prevents us from yielding to the Holy Spirit. People who drink are spiritually deluded. Alcohol and rebellion are found together in Scripture. Depression increases when it is treated with alcohol. Drinking produces serious health problems. Alcohol negatively affects your sense of modesty and propriety. People who act erratically are assumed to be under the influence. The greater your responsibility the greater the potential disaster you will cause by drinking. Whether you intend it or not alcohol will negatively affect you. As I said - a negative light. That is where the weight lies.

At the same time, it is also true that Scripture also speaks often in glowing terms about wine. For instance, consider these:

-Isaac asked God to bless Jacob with wine

Genesis 27:28 Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, And the fatness of the earth, And plenty of corn and wine:

-Isaac informs Esau he has asked God to bless Jacob with wine

*Genesis 27:37 And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and **with corn and wine have I sustained him**: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?*

-God tells Aaron that wine is a gift from Him

*Numbers 18:12 All the best of the oil, and **all the best of the wine**, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, **them have I given thee**.*

-Moses tells Israel that obedience will bring God's blessing on their lives including wine

*Deuteronomy 7:13 **And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless** the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and **thy wine**, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee.*

-God says He will bless His people with rain so that they may have wine

*Deuteronomy 11:14 That **I will give you the rain of your land** in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, **that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil**.*

-Moses tells Israel to rejoice in the Lord while drinking their wine tithe

*Deuteronomy 12:17 Thou mayest not eat within thy gates **the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand:** 18 But thou must **eat them before the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose**, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto.
(see also Deuteronomy 14.23)*

-Moses instructs Israel to support priests by giving them wine

*Deuteronomy 18:3 And **this shall be the priest's due from the people**, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw.
4 The firstfruit also of thy corn, of **thy wine**, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him.*

-with his last words, Moses prophesies a loving God's rich blessings poured out on a happy Israel; that blessing included wine

Deuteronomy 33:27 The eternal God is thy refuge, And underneath are the everlasting arms: And he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; And shall say, Destroy them.

*28 Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: **The fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine**; Also his heavens shall drop down dew.*

*29 **Happy art thou, O Israel**: Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, The shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! And thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; And thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

-Abimelech tells a parable in which he explicitly says that wine makes God happy
*Judges 9:13 And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my **wine, which cheereth God and man**, and go to be promoted over the trees?*

-Hezekiah led God's people in a revival that included obeying the old customs of tithing wine

*2 Chronicles 31:5 And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of **Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly.***

-Hezekiah was so blessed by God that he had to construct bigger storage facilities for his wine

2 Chronicles 32:27 And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels;

*28 Storehouses also for **the increase of corn, and wine, and oil**; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks.*

*29 Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for **God had given him substance very much.***

-Nehemiah tells the usurious moneylenders to give God's people back their wine
*Nehemiah 5:11 **Restore, I pray you, to them**, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, **the wine, and the oil**, that ye exact of them.*

-Nehemiah, like Hezekiah, led the people in obedience to the old customs of tithing, including wine

*Nehemiah 10:37 And that we should **bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God**; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.*

(see also similar passages in *Nehemiah 10.39, 13.5, and 13.12*)

-the psalmist said that God blessed him with joy and peace and likened it to a good harvest that produced wine

Psalm 4:6 There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, Lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

7 Thou hast put gladness in my heart, More than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

8 I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: For thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

-Solomon informs us that honoring the Lord via tithing results in His bountiful provision to us, including wine

Proverbs 3:9 Honour the LORD with thy substance, And with the firstfruits of all thine increase:

10 So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, And thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

-Isaiah tells us that God will richly bless His people, and this blessing will include protecting their wine from their enemies

Isaiah 62:8 The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; And the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured:

-Isaiah explicitly says that wine is a blessing

Isaiah 65:8 Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, And one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: So will I do for my servants' sakes, That I may not destroy them all.

-Jeremiah agrees with Isaiah, and specifically says wine is a blessing that flows to His people from the goodness of God

Jeremiah 31:12 Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, And shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, For wheat, and for wine, and for oil, And for the young of the flock and of the herd: And their soul shall be as a watered garden; And they shall not sorrow any more at all.

-Hosea mentions wine in a negative context but the usage is positive; God is here explicitly saying wine is a gift from Him

Hosea 2:8 For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, And multiplied her silver and gold, Which they prepared for Baal.

9 Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, *And my wine in the season thereof, And will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.*

-later in the same conversation Hosea says that God's mercy on His people includes the blessing of wine

Hosea 2:21 And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, And they shall hear the earth;

22 And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; And they shall hear Jezreel.

23 And I will sow her unto me in the earth; And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; And I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; And they shall say, Thou art my God.

-Joel tells us that God blesses His people with wine specifically in order to satisfy them

Joel 2:19 Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, And ye shall be satisfied therewith: And I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen:

(see also Joel 2.24-25)

-Zechariah says wine is a great goodness from the Lord

Zechariah 9:17 For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

Well, there you have it. Wine is a wonderful blessing from God. It makes Him happy. It ought to make us happy. Drink up.

...hold up for just one moment, though, before you rush out to the nearest package store. Anyone want to take a guess what every single verse in the above list has in common? **All twenty six of these passages that speak of wine in an extremely positive sense in the King James Version** all come from the same root word in the original language Hebrew – תִּירוֹשׁ (reversed) which transliterated into English is *tiros*. Anyone care to see how *tiros* is defined? You're ahead of me, aren't you? Some of you are growling right at the moment and some of you are grinning ear to ear. Yep, תִּירוֹשׁ (reversed) means fresh squeezed grape juice. That definition is supported by *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible, The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains, New*

American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition, and Logos Bible Software. I know. I have them all and I just looked.

So knock yourself out with both my blessing and His. Rush right down to the grocery store, pick up a bottle of Welch's grape juice, and drink up. It is a wonderful gift from God.

7) Context! Context! Context!

We have come now in this series on alcohol to the heart of the matter. For the next three weeks I am going to lay out for you an absolutely foundational concept, namely this – **the word 'wine' in the Bible does not always mean alcoholic wine.**

This is critically important for it cuts to the heart of the justifications used by our Christian friends who believe drinking is acceptable. If they are right – that wine in the Bible is always alcoholic (and I have had them tell me that repeatedly) – then drinking wine is sometimes acceptable according to the Word of God and sometimes not acceptable. Such a position then leaves it up to me to determine those times. On the other hand if I am right – that wine in the Bible is sometimes alcoholic and sometimes is not – then my position, which is complete abstention, is much more likely to be the correct one. To that end we are going to spend the next three posts looking at this matter, to wit, are there different kinds of wine mentioned in the Bible?

The first guide to answer that question and the one I will cover in today's post is the guide of context. Six statements...

First, it is clearly possible to misinterpret and thus misuse God's Word. Peter soundly establishes this. *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (I Peter 3.16)* To wrest means to twist or pervert.

Second, to guard against this we must study and we must compare God's Word to itself. *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (II Timothy 2.15)* Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; *comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (I Corinthians 2.13)* For instance, when the devil tempted Jesus the devil cited scripture. The devil wrested it, so to speak. Jesus' response was also to cite scripture. Thus, in comparing scripture with scripture the wrong understanding of scripture was refuted and the proper one was established.

Third, we must begin by interpreting Scripture at the word level. *That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour. (II Peter 3.2)*

Scripture uses some form of the word 'word' almost thirteen hundred times. Hundreds of these occasions reference the Word of God. I believe in plenary inspiration which means I believe all of the Bible is the Word of God. But I also believe in verbal inspiration which means I believe each word in the Bible is the Word of God. If you believe like I do, and it is likely that you do, we must then believe in verbal interpretation.

Fourth, to correctly interpret each word we must begin by properly defining it.

As I see it there are three primary tools at our disposal to help us with this. The first of these tools is the dictionary, just a common, ordinary, everyday English dictionary. Often in my experience what I think a word means is not actually what it means or at least not all that it means. It is no exaggeration to say that I end up using a dictionary dozens of times a week as I study the Word of God.

The second tool I use to define the words I study in the Bible is the original languages. Before some of you growl at me let me state for the record that I do not believe one must understand the original languages in order to understand the Bible. God never said we did and I dare not say it either. But that does not mean I should not study the original languages nor does it mean that there is not profit to be found in so doing. I use original language research for the same reason I use dictionaries – not to correct the Word of God but to understand it more fully. It helps me to understand which English dictionary definition applies in this case. It helps me to expand on the thought behind the word I am studying. For instance, *gay clothing* in *James 2.3* can have several different meanings. When I examine the original language it tells me which English dictionary definition James was intending to convey.

The third tool at my disposal and perhaps the most essential one is the Word of God itself. Oftentimes the best way to define a scriptural word is to see how the scripture itself defines it. For instance, one of the most enlightening studies I have ever done was to examine all the usages in the Bible of the phrase *God is*. The word that followed 'is' often gave me an insight into God's character, Who God is. In this case the Bible was itself defining Who God is.

Most of the time, however, scripture does not define a word with a flat 'this is such-and-such.' Most of the time scripture instead defines a word by revealing what it means in the context surrounding the usage. It is for this reason that the single most important rule of scriptural hermeneutics is context. Ask anyone who buys and sells real estate and they will tell you there is really only one rule –

location, location, location. So it is with the Word of God. There is really only one rule – context, context, context.

This is absolutely critical for a number of reasons but one is surely because the words the Bible uses often have more than one meaning or definition in scripture. Take for example the well-known phrase *meat offering*. When we come across that phrase in the Old Testament we automatically assume it is speaking of a bull or a goat or at least a dove. But when we examine the word *meat* a little more closely in the Bible we discover something fascinating: meat does not always mean animal flesh. *And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is **the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.*** (Genesis 1.29) You read that correctly. The first use of the word 'meat' in the Bible was not actually talking about meat. It was talking about fruits and vegetables. Now plug that into the phrase *meat offering* and you discover the meat offering did not have any actual animal flesh in it at all. *And when any will offer a meat offering unto the Lord, his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon.* (Leviticus 2.1) Of the 113 times scripture uses the phrase *meat offering* 36 of them specifically mean just flour and oil. Further, in the New Testament, 'meat' can mean either animal flesh, food, or spiritual understanding.

But how do we establish that one word or phrase in the Bible does not necessarily mean what we automatically assume that it means? By examining the dictionary, the original language, and the context of how it used. We absolutely must begin by properly interpreting the word. In situations where the word may well have more than one meaning we are well advised to use all three of these tools.

Fifth, in cases in which a word may mean something different in one place of the Bible than it does in another we must let the Bible define it for us.

This is precisely the case with 'wine.' Sometimes wine means the fruit of the vine. Sometimes wine means fermented, intoxicating alcohol. Sometimes wine means medicine. Sometimes wine is used symbolically for blessing. Sometimes wine refers to the opposite, God's wrath. Wine must have more than one meaning otherwise we have obvious contradictions in the Bible. For example, pastors are forbidden to drink wine in *I Timothy 3.3* (this is a generally accepted interpretation) – yet two chapters later Paul instructs Timothy *Drink no longer water, but use a little wine **for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.*** (*I Timothy 5.23*) Such an apparent contradiction is nothing of the sort. The context of the second usage plainly reveals Paul is referring to wine as medicine. The Good Samaritan likewise used the word 'wine' in the same context. *And went unto him, and **bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.*** (Luke 10.34) Just as there are many different types of 'oil' so there are many different types of 'wine.'

Alcoholic wine does not happen naturally or quickly. (I will speak to this in more detail next week.) *And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. (II Chronicles 31.5)* People have used this verse to support moderate drinking saying that God blessed His people with alcohol and then they actually tithed that alcohol back to Him. Last week we saw that the original language word used here for wine means juice. But we do not even need the original language. The context alone tells us this. Notice the word *firstfruits*. There has been no time for the fermenting process. What the field workers harvested included wheat, grapes, and olives, which were used to produce corn, grape juice, and olive oil.

Solomon gives us a similar example in *Proverbs 3. Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.* To say that wine in the Bible always means alcoholic wine is to say that God blesses you when you tithe alcohol. Notice the phrase *thy presses shall burst*. Only unfermented juice can burst from a grape press. Alcohol simply cannot come out of a freshly squeezed newly plucked grape.

Isaiah 65.8 furnishes us with yet another example. *Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it.* Is alcoholic wine here being pronounced as having a blessing in it? The original language tells us not but so does the context. Notice the phrase *in the cluster*. Obviously, the juice in the grapes hanging in the cluster on the vine cannot possibly be alcoholic in nature.

Judges 9.13 furnishes another example of context revealing non-alcoholic wine. *And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?* Would a grapevine carry alcoholic wine within its grapes or unfermented juice? Answer that and you have answered what kind of 'wine' brings cheer to God. Would it be the kind that brings intoxication to His children or the kind that simply quenches their thirst? Taken in context this wine must be non-fermented for no vine naturally carries anything fermented.

Sixth, in cases where the Bible uses 'wine' with no particular immediate context to define it I let the context of the entire Bible define it. In other words, if it is being used as a blessing it must be non-alcoholic wine – juice. If it is being used as a curse it must be alcoholic wine. How did I arrive at this conclusion? Largely because I have let the scriptures be my guide. I have let them interpret and apply themselves to me rather than my own preconceived 21st century mental image of 'wine.'

As I said – context, context, context. It is absolutely everything.

8) Wines in Bible Times

There are two basic Christian positions on alcohol. One says that it should be completely avoided. The other says that it can be consumed in moderation as long as you do not get drunk. One of the most frequently cited supports for the latter is the idea that the only kind of wine available in Jesus' day was alcoholic wine.

I have spoken with literally dozens of people who hold a moderate consumption position and almost all of them use this as a foundational reason for their position. Just last week, for instance, someone made this statement on my facebook page:

In biblical days there was no such thing as grape juice. Fresh crushed grapes have natural yeast and immediately begins to ferment. So all juice had some alcohol, the longer it sat the more alcoholic it became. The only reason we have grape juice is because of pasteurization, which didn't exist until 1795.

I find this reasoning frustrating simply because it is so completely incorrect. I do not mind disagreement based on reasonable difference of opinion about scriptural interpretation. I do mind disagreement based on careless inaccuracies. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not claim to be perfectly correct about everything I assert but – as God is my witness – I work incredibly hard at researching the facts behind what I say. I do my homework. This series alone has cost me seventy five hours of work. That amount of time spent does not make me right but it does make me annoyed with people who make ignorant pronouncements. The average person who holds a moderate consumption position on the basis that the only wine available in Jesus' day was alcoholic is intellectually lazy. They are simply repeating something they have heard someone else say. And they have built their position on sand.

Two weeks ago I showed you this is untrue via the original language in the Old Testament. ----- Last week I showed you this is untrue via the interpretation of context. ----- This week I want to show you this is untrue based on the laws of fermentation.

In our day we do not need to make wine. In ancient times they actually did for a variety of reasons. For instance, the scientific laws of medicine were mostly then unknown. This was true in many areas including germ theory and the corresponding importance of sanitation. By the same token, though, the ancients understood well that much of the water available to them would make them sick.

Consequently, they only rarely drank straight water unmixed with anything else. In other words, wine was primarily for them a safe way to drink liquids.

Not only that, but the ancients were limited in their ability to preserve food for lengthy periods of time. They did not have, for instance, access to freezers or knowledge of the process of canning. The preservative power of salt has been known for millennia and they used it extensively. They also used smoking/drying of food for the same reasons. They also discovered that they could decrease the space necessary for long term storage by turning their fruits and grains into liquid. At the same time, without losing nutritional value, they could preserve those foods in an edible condition much longer in this manner as well. For example, olives have longed been pressed and the resulting oil kept preserved for a much longer period than the fresh olives alone could have been kept.

I freely admit that alcohol accomplished both of these goals. No rational person I know disputes that alcoholic beverages have been made since the dawn of agriculture. Logic, history, and *Genesis 9* tell us this. Beer – alcohol made from grain – and wine – alcohol made from fruit – are healthier than unclean water simply because alcohol is already poisoned. Other kinds of germs do not like such a toxic environment. In ancient times alcoholic beverages thus prepared, properly stored, lasted much longer than fresh fruit and grain did.

I also freely admit that pasteurization was unknown until the nineteenth century. Frenchmen Nicolas Appert (1749-1841) and Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) led the way. American prohibitionist Thomas Bramwell Welch applied their techniques to fresh grape juice in 1869 and his heirs built the corresponding brand we know so well today.

For this reason it has been long and widely assumed that all fruit preserved in liquid form in ancient times was preserved as alcohol. But widely and long held assumptions are often simply widely and long held ignorance. Pasteurization is not the only valid method of preserving unfermented grape juice else why did the Romans have a law forbidding pregnant women from drinking fermented wine? There must have been an unfermented wine available if it was commanded as the only acceptable choice.

Fermentation occurs naturally but no one I know or have ever met drinks what ferments naturally. This is because the process produces beverages that are highly unpredictable and notoriously unsafe. A silo full of corn may smash the bottom layer into mush and time and heat may ferment it but no one I know bottles the resulting corn liquor and sells it at Wal-mart. Without exception, the alcoholic beverages consumed on the planet today are all made in carefully controlled, highly sterilized environments. Consumable alcohol is a man-made process. It involves carefully controlling the temperature and precise amounts of sugar, yeast, and oxygen.

A process that is now and was then so highly involved developed experts with a knowledge base that could run in more than one direction. And there was a demand for grape juice to be preserved in an unfermented manner. Some preferred it for taste reasons and others preferred to keep their judgment unclouded while drinking. So how did they do it? Specifically in regards to wine how did the ancients preserve grape juice in an unfermented state for long periods of time?

Sometimes fresh grapes would be pressed and the juice drunk immediately. This was often, though not always, called new wine or sweet wine. Sometimes the grape juice was preserved in a concentrated syrup called "must" or "dibbs". Water would later be added or mixed with this concentrate to form drinkable wine. Sometimes this syrupy, thick concoction was even spread on bread like we would jam. In addition, this must was also sometimes called sweet wine, boiled wine, or even just plain wine.

But where did this concentrated solution come from? Boiling. And grape juice that is boiled cannot ferment. See Louis Pasteur for modern proof. But people were boiling grape juice millennia before he did.

Additionally, grape juice will not ferment if it is kept air-tight as oxygen is needed for fermentation. This was difficult to do back then but it was sometimes done by storing the juice in skins or jars literally under water. This had the added benefit of keeping the juice cold which also hinders fermentation. Fresh pressed juice in large amounts was placed into casks and then put under cold, flowing water all winter. Over time the yeast (which had not yet fermented due to the temperature) settled to the bottom of the cask. The resulting sweet/unfermented wine was poured off the top and the now yeast free juice would keep for quite some time without fermentation. Filtering and fumigating the juice with sulphur were also used to delay fermentation.

I do not mind if people reasonably disagree with my interpretation and application of Scripture. That is actually good for me. I do mind when people hold a position of moderate consumption under the mistaken impression that it was impossible to preserve unfermented grape juice in Jesus' day. In that they are just plain wrong.

9) Ignorance Is Bliss

The Scripture alone is authoritative. Such an approach, however, does not prevent us from illustrating, exemplifying, and illuminating the Word of God with historical evidences.

I am convinced that when the Bible speaks of wine it is sometimes referencing alcoholic wine and at other times it is referencing non-alcoholic wine.

To the modern ear such a sentence sounds asinine. After all, wine obviously means alcohol. Furthermore, the long term preservation of fresh grape juice is a relatively new discovery. Thus, it is assumed that there was no capacity in antiquity to preserve juice without fermentation. This assumption is widely used as the basis for a pro-drinking position in modern Christianity. Ergo the Bible speaks both positively and negatively about wine. Since wine is obviously alcoholic it then follows that as long as we control our drinking alcohol is both allowable and enjoyable. In essence, then, Scripture condemns drunkenness but encourages drinking.

To state it simply such a position is just plain ignorant. Today's post consists of a veritable plethora of quotes from verified historical sources. These quotes reveal that the ancient world knew perfectly well how to preserve juice in an unfermented state, that they did so often, and that they called this product wine. I do not get my biblical position on alcohol from these quotes but these quotes perfectly illustrate the validity of that biblical position.

Herman Boerhave, *Elements of Chemistry*, 1668

By boiling, the juice of the richest grapes loses all its aptitude for fermentation, and may afterwards be preserved for years without undergoing any further change.

Parkinson, *Theatrum Batanicum*, 1640

The juice or liquor pressed out of the ripe grapes is called vinum (wine). Of it is made both *sapa* and *defrutum*, in English cute, that is to say boiled wine, the latter boiled down to the half, or former to the third part.

William Patton, *Bible Wines*, 1874

Archbishop Potter, born AD 1674, in his *Greek Antiquities*, Edinburgh edition, 1813 says, vol. ii. p. 360, "The Lacedaemonians used to boil their wines upon the fire till the fifth part was consumed; then after four years were expired began to drink them." He refers to Democritus, a celebrated philosopher, who traveled over the greater part of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and who died in 361 BC, also to Palladus, a Greek physician, as making a similar statement. These ancient authorities called the boiled juice of the grape *wine*, and the learned archbishop brings forward their testimony without the slightest intimation that the boiled juice was not wine in the judgment of the ancients.

...

W. G. Brown, who travelled extensively in Africa, Egypt, and Syria from A.D. 1792 to 1798, states that "the wines of Syria are most of them prepared by boiling immediately after they are expressed from the grape, till they are considerably reduced in quantity, when they were put into jars or large bottles and preserved for use." He adds, "There is reason to believe that this mode of boiling was a general practice among the ancients."

...

Caspar Neuman, M.D., Professor of Chemistry, Berlin, 1759, says: "It is observable that when sweet juices are boiled down to a thick consistence, they not only do not ferment in that state, but are not easily brought into fermentation when diluted with as much water as they had lost in the evaporation, or even with the very individual water that exhaled from them."

...

The Rev. Dr. Jacobus, commenting on the wine made by Christ, says: "This wine was not that fermented liquor which passes now under that name. All who know of the wines then used will understand rather the unfermented juice of the grape. The present wines of Jerusalem and Lebanon, as we tasted them, were commonly boiled and sweet, without intoxicating qualities, such as we here get in liquors called wines. The boiling prevents the fermentation. Those were esteemed the best wines which were least strong."

...

Horace, liber i. ode xviii. line 21, thus wrote: "Hic innocentis pocula Lesbii Duces sub umbra." Professor Christopher Smart, of Pembroke College, Cambridge, England, more than a hundred years since, when there was no controversy about fermented or unfermented wines, thus translated this passage: "Here shall you quaff, under a shade, cups of unintoxicating wine."

...

We cannot imagine that Pliny, Columella, Varro, Cato, and others were either cooks or writers of cookbooks, but were intelligent gentlemen moving in the best circles of society. So when they, with minute care, give the recipes for making sweet wine, which will remain so during the year, and the processes were such as to prevent fermentation, we are persuaded that these were esteemed in their day.

Aristotle, 384 BC

The wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was contained, and to dissolve the scrapings in water.

Michael Donovan, *Bible Commentary*, 1830

In order to preserve their wines to these ages, the Romans concentrated the must or grape-juice, of which they were made, by evaporation, either spontaneous in the air or over a fire, and so much so as to render them thick and syrupy.

...

Those ancient authors who treat upon domestic manners abound with allusions to this usage. Hot water, tepid water, or cold water was used for the dilution of wine according to the season...Hesiod prescribed, during the summer months, three parts of water to one of wine...Nicochares considers two parts of wine to five of water as the proper proportion...According to Homer, Pramnian and Meronian wines required twenty parts of water to one of wine. Hippocrates considered twenty parts of water to one of the Thracian wine to be the proper beverage...Athenaeus states that the Taeniotic has such a degree of richness or fatness that when mixed with water it seemed gradually to be diluted, much in the same way as Attic honey well mixed.

Benjamin Parsons, *Anti-Bacchus*, 1840

Horace, born 65 B.C., says "there is no wine sweeter to drink than Lesbian; that it was like nectar, and more resembled ambrosia than wine; that it was perfectly harmless, and would not produce intoxication."

...

Pliny says "some Roman wines were as thick as honey," also that the "Albanian wine was very sweet or luscious, and that it took the third rank among all the wines:" He also tells of a Spanish wine in his day, called "Inerticulum" - that is, would not intoxicate - from "iners," inert, without force or spirit, more properly termed "justicus sobriani," sober wine, which would not inebriate.

...

Columella says the Greeks called this unintoxicating wine "Amethyston," from Alpha, negative, and methysis, intoxicate - that is, a wine which would not intoxicate. He adds that it was a good wine, harmless, and called "iners," because it would not affect the nerves, but at the same time it was not deficient in flavor.

John Kitto, *The Olive, Vine, and Palm*, 1848

The Mishna states that the Jews were in the habit of using boiled wine.

...

[quoting Pliny] "That wine is produced by care." He then gives the method: "Mergunt earn protinus in aqua cados donec bruma transeat et consuetudo fiat algendi." "They plunge the casks, immediately after they are filled from the vat, into water, until winter has passed away and the wine has acquired the habit of being cold."

Constantin Volney, *Travels in Syria*, 1801

The wines are of three sorts, the red, the white, and the yellow. The white, which are the most rare, are so bitter as to be disagreeable; the two others, on the contrary, are too sweet and sugary. This arises from their being boiled, which makes them resemble the baked wines of Provence. The general custom of the country is to reduce the must to two-thirds of its quantity...It is probably that the inhabitants of Lebanon have made no change in their ancient method of making wines.

Alexander Adam, *Roman Antiquities*, 1791

[referring to Pliny and Virgil] In order to make wine keep, they used to boil (deconquere) the must down to one-half, when it was called defrutum, to one-third, sapa.

...

...that the Romans fumigated their wines with the fumes of sulphur; that they also mixed with the mustum, newly pressed juice, yolks of eggs, and other articles containing sulphur. When thus defaecabantur (from defaeco, 'to cleanse from the dregs, to strain through a strainer, refine, purify, defecate'), it was poured (diffusum) into smaller vessels or casks covered over with pitch, and bunged or stopped up.

William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 1870

A considerable quantity of must from the best and oldest vines was inspissated by boiling, being then distinguished by the Greeks under the general name Epsuma or Gleuxis, while the Latin writers have various terms, according to the extent to which the evaporation was carried; as Carenum, one-third; defrutum, one-half; and saps, two-thirds.

...

The sweet, unfermented juice of the grape was termed gleukos by the Greeks and mustum by the Romans - the latter word being properly an adjective signifying new or fresh...A portion of the must was used at once, being drunk fresh...When it was desired to preserve a quantity in the sweet state, an amphora was taken and coated with pitch within and without, it was filled

with mustum lixivium, and corked so as to be perfectly airtight. It was then immersed in a tank of cold fresh water, or buried in wet sand, and allowed to remain for six weeks or two months. The contents, after this process, was found to remain unchanged for a year, and hence the name, aeigleukos - that is, 'semper mustum,' always sweet.

Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo*, 1851

The inspissated juice of the grape, saps vina, called here dibbs, is brought to the city in skins and sold in the public markets; it has much the appearance of coarse honey, is of a sweet taste, and in great use among the people of all sorts.

Inspissated defined - to thicken, as by evaporation; make or become dense

Eli Smith, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1846

The only form in which the unfermented juice of the grape is preserved is that of dibbs, which may be called grape-molasses.

Henry Homes, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1848

Simple grape-juice, without the addition of any earth to neutralize the acidity, is boiled from four to five hours, so as to reduce it one-fourth the quantity put in. After the boiling, for preserving it cool, and that it be less liable to ferment, it is put into earthen instead of wooden vessels, closely tied over with skin to exclude the aft. It ordinarily has not a particle of intoxicating quality, being used freely by both Mohammedans and Christians. Some which I have had on hand for two years has undergone no change...The manner of making and preserving this unfermented grape-liquor seems to correspond with the recipes and descriptions of certain drinks included by some of the ancients under the appellation of wine.

Plutarch, *Symposium*, 60

Wine is rendered old or feeble in strength when it is frequently filtered. The strength or spirit being thus excluded, the wine neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink.

...

The most useful wine has all its force or strength broken by the filter.

Samuel Lee, *Dr. Lee's Works*, 1783

Captain Treat, in 1845, wrote: "When on the south coast of Italy, last Christmas, I enquired particularly about the wines in common use, and found that those esteemed the best were sweet and unintoxicating. The boiled juice of the grape is in common use in Sicily. The Calabrians keep their intoxicating and unintoxicating wines in separate apartments. The bottles were generally marked. From enquiries, I found that unfermented wines were esteemed the most. It was drunk mixed with water. Great pains were taken in the vintage season to have a good stock of it laid by. The grape-juice was filtered two or three times, and then bottled, and some put in casks and buried in the earth - some kept in water (to prevent fermentation)."

...

Captain Treat says, "The unfermented wine is esteemed the most in the south of Italy, and wine is drunk mixed with water."

Columella, *De Re Rustica*, 4

That your must may always be as sweet as when it is new, thus proceed: Before you apply the press to the fruit, take the newest must from the lake, put into a new amphora, bung it up, and cover it very carefully with pitch, lest any water should enter; then immerse it in a cistern or pond of pure cold water, and allow no part of the amphora to remain above the surface. After forty days, take it out, and it will remain sweet for a year.

Frederic Millet, *Gardener's Dictionary*, 1731

The way to preserve new wine, in the state of must; is to put it up in very strong but small casks, firmly closed on all sides, by which means it will be kept from fermenting. But if it should happen to fall into fermentation, the only way to stop it is by the fumes of sulphur.

Alexander Henderson, *This History of Ancient and Modern Wines*, 1824

[commenting on the boiled wine preferred by Virgil] The use of this inspissated juice became general.

So what do these quotes reveal? Three things... First, that unfermented beverages existed and were commonly drunk millennia before the modern process

of pasteurization. Second, they achieved this mainly by boiling the juice and storing it in an airtight environment. Third, these were all called wine.

...but go ahead. Keep maintaining that no such thing existed in Jesus' day. Force your twenty first century definition of the word "wine" on a two thousand year old Bible. And then go quaff your alcoholic beverages with a clear conscience.

There is a phrase for that: ignorance is bliss.

10) Everybody Knows Jesus Drank...

The battle on the alcohol issue does not lie between those who are drunks and those who are teetotalers. It lies between those who believe a moderate consumption of alcohol is allowable and those who believe in total abstinence.

We have already examined several of the primary supports used for the moderate position and found them lacking. For instance, moderates say drinking is ok as long as the alcohol does not affect you – but this is impossible; Scripture teaches that alcohol does affect you. Moderates say that the only type of wine available in Bible times was alcoholic – this is intellectually ignorant and spiritually lazy. Moderates say that alcohol is spoken of as both good and bad in the Bible – I have shown you that most of the pro-drinking passages reference grape juice and that context reveals whether Scripture is speaking of alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine. In addition, we have seen that the Bible overwhelmingly portrays alcohol in a negative light, and that there are severe consequences to drinking.

In this post and the next one I want to examine the moderates last great support: drinking alcohol is permissible because Jesus drank and made alcohol.

He did? Really? I propose he did not and here are my reasons.

First, there are no scripture passages that say He did. Moderates often reference the Last Supper when Jesus transitioned the Passover into the Lord's Supper. (see loc ____) I am not afraid of the word wine but Scripture does not even use that word in that context. For instance, Paul said in *I Corinthians 11.25*, *After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.* The synoptic Gospels discuss the Last Supper in *Matthew 26*, *Mark 14*, and *Luke 22*. All three of them use this same word "cup." If you want to look it up in the original language you will find it has no alcoholic undertones. It simply means a small container.

Not only that, but each of these passages explicitly use the phrase *fruit of the vine*. Curious, huh? It is almost like God knew people would use Jesus as an

excuse for their own drinking so He was careful to make sure Jesus' actions could not possibly be misunderstood.

Jesus was offered wine on the cross but He turned it down. Jesus made wine (which I will discuss in the next post.) Jesus used wine as an illustration. But not a single one of the 233 references to wine in the Bible refers to Jesus drinking wine. He was, of course, accused of being a winebibber but that holds no weight with me. He was accused of all manner of things He did not do. Let me say it again just so the point does not get missed: there is not a single reference in the Bible that says Jesus drank wine. As I understand Scripture He did – the non-alcoholic variety but even that is not explicitly referenced as such. Go ahead. Look. It just is not in there. ...which means you might want to stop using it as a support.

Second, as our High Priest Jesus actually could not drink alcohol. *And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put a difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean. (Leviticus 10.8-9)* Never mind for the moment that Scripture here calls alcoholic beverages unholy and unclean just notice they were forbidden to the high priest. If the priest were to drink it would send a mixed message to the people to whom he ministered.

This was not just an idle admonition. A thousand years later in Isaiah's day the priests who violated this proscription were called on it. *But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. (Isaiah 28.7)*

Some will be inclined to mention that this rule was only applicable when the high priest was on duty. I tend to agree. I also think you will agree that Jesus was never off duty. Others will say He was not a high priest after the order of Aaron. Jesus, though a priest after the order of Melchizedek, fulfills in *Hebrews* the role of the Aaronic high priest to a T. Such is abundantly clear. Jesus – as our High Priest – has His nature described for us in *Hebrews* 7.26. *For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.* The High Priest whose name is the Holy One of Israel certainly would not have ingested a beverage Scripture names as unholy and unclean. Jesus could not have imbibed alcohol.

"Yeah, but everybody knows Jesus drank." Yes. And everybody also "knows" that the only kind of wine available in His day was alcoholic.

Me? I am just not very impressed by what everybody knows...

11) Water Into Wine?

I'm a teetotaler. That is just an old-fashioned term for someone who doesn't drink alcohol. I do not mean by this that I only occasionally imbibe, but rather that I never do. In fact, I'm one of those rare people in existence who never have. I know that beer smells bad, but I have no idea what it tastes like, let alone wine or spirits. I do this out of the conviction that drinking alcoholic beverages is wrong for God's people. This doesn't make me better than those who do - though I would argue it makes me wiser (Proverbs 20.1) - but it does mean I'm going to have this story (John 2.1-11) thrown at me about a million times in my life. It usually goes something like this:

'What? You don't believe in drinking? C'mon, man! Everybody knows that Jesus Himself turned water into wine. If it's good enough for Him it's good enough for me.'

I realize that there are many good Christians who disagree with me on this issue. They take the position that the Bible condemns drinking in excess, but not drinking in moderation. They, like I, believe drunkenness is a sin, but they, unlike I, see nothing wrong with enjoying an occasional alcoholic beverage. They point to a long tradition of such behavior being accepted by the Church, and they point especially to passages such as this as evidence that moderate drinking is perfectly appropriate for the Christian.

For these reasons, amongst others, some years ago I decided I needed to study out the issue in some depth. I compiled a number of different books, and spent a good amount of time looking at both those books and the hundreds of Bible references to wine and strong drink. I am confident I have come to a good understanding of what the Bible teaches on the issue, and while I will not take time to present everything I learned on this blog at this time, I do want to briefly address this story from this perspective for it is something that comes up so often.

One of the mistakes we make in our generation is to take a twenty first century definition and put it to a first century biblical word or phrase. To us, 'wine' always means an alcoholic drink. In Jesus' day, this was not the case, as the word was used to mean grape juice preserved in both an alcoholic and a non-alcoholic manner. Christians who believe in moderate drinking take the position that it the secret to preserving grape juice over time in a non-alcoholic state was unknown prior to Thomas Bramwell Welch applying pasteurization to it in 1869. Those Christians are most assuredly wrong. There are literally dozens of extant quotes from historical sources that soundly establish a large variety of cultures, even back in Bible times, knew how to preserve grape juice in a non-alcoholic manner for a long period of time, and that people used the term 'wine' interchangeably to refer to both.

The simple truth is that 'wine' in the Bible sometimes means alcoholic wine, and sometimes simply preserved, non-alcoholic grape juice, and it is my understanding that we generally figure out which is which by examining the context of the usage.

This wine that Jesus made was not at the beginning of the feast, but later on, after they had already drunk what was there. Those who assert that 'wine' in the Bible is always alcoholic have to understand that the people at the feast in Cana were already well on their way to being soused when the wine ran out. A firkin is about nine gallons, so each stone water pot held between 18-27 gallons, and there were six of these, meaning these water pots held between 108 and 162 gallons. Let us take the middle number of 135 gallons. If what Jesus miraculously manufactured was alcoholic wine then we must understand that He just dumped into the laps of a border-line drunken crowd a staggering 135 more gallons of premium alcoholic wine. If that was the case, in light of all that the Bible has to say about the negative effects of alcohol, what kind of a wedding feast would have resulted? I propose to you it would be the kind of feast that Noah had in Genesis 9 and that Lot had in Genesis 19, a drunken, debauched, and sensual party.

Is that how Jesus would have wanted the holy institution of the marriage of this couple to begin? Is that how Jesus would have wanted to begin His public ministry? Is that how Jesus would have wanted to enter into the initial training of His few disciples? Is that the kind of wedding feast He would have wanted His mother to attend? No, no, no, and again, no! The Word made flesh would never have so contradicted the written Word of the Old Testament prophets.

For many years we have had small children in our home, and they drink a fair amount of juice. One of the cheapest places to buy it in our neighborhood is ALDI, and my wife will frequently bring home some apple or grape juice from there. Personally, and do not tell my children please, I refuse to drink it. I find the flavor to be completely unacceptable. The container says 100% juice, and I assume they are telling the truth, but I cannot bring myself to imbibe as the taste is so poor.

On the other hand, I contrast this in my mind with an afternoon walk I took in an orchard some years back. We had gone together, as is our custom, in the Fall to pick some apples together as a family. This particular day was unseasonably warm for October in our region of the country, and the sun was shining brightly. On the way back to the section of trees to be picked that day we happened to walk by a grape arbor. Seeing the plump purple grapes hanging down in clusters, on impulse, I grabbed a bunch, and as I walked I began to eat them. Much to my delight, I found those perfectly ripened and sun warmed grapes, plucked fresh just moments ago from the vine, to be absolutely divine. As I walked I began to squeeze them, one by one, into my mouth, popping them out of the skin, and savoring the taste until the red juice began to dribble down my chin. I have never

forgotten that taste, and although I've also never been able to replicate it, I have enjoyed it many times in my mind.

Yes, Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. I accept that, and indeed, even embrace it. It was the sweet beginning to our Saviour's public ministry. But, and if you will forgive the poverty of the illustration, what He did was replace the just run out of ALDI 100% juice reconstituted from concentrate with the just squeezed blood of perfectly ripened sun warmed grapes plucked moments ago from the vine.

...and the governor's eyes lit up, just as mine did, on that October walk in the apple orchard, a few years ago.

12) A Side Helping of Charity

Dear _____,

De 14:26 And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,

Some time ago you asked me a question about this verse, and I told you I would get back to you about it. I have spent some time studying the subject of the Bible and alcohol, and in fact preached a series of six sermons about it on Wednesday nights a couple of years ago. (If you want them I will be glad to send them to you). In that series I come down on the side of abstention, though at the same time I can be charitable in my mind to those of my brethren who disagree with me. I have zero patience for some of their arguments i.e. Jesus made alcohol, 'wine' in the Bible is always alcohol, etc. but there are at least two verses that I freely (albeit painfully) acknowledge give me a bit of a pause. One is the verse above and the other is I Tim 3.8. I don't believe these two verses allow a restrained use of alcoholic beverages, but I can certainly see why some would believe they do, so I can be charitable in my mind to those who disagree with me.

One of my guiding principles in hermeneutics is this: which side does the weight come down on? This is especially true when dealing with issues that are not particularly clear cut i.e. certain doctrinal aspects of soteriological terms, aspects of calvinism, dress standards, etc. In my six sermon series on alcohol I used literally hundreds of Bible verses to establish the danger and folly of drinking. On the other hand there are, at most, only two that seem to say the opposite, or that I cannot clearly reconcile in my own mind. So when I stack up several hundred verses on

one side (don't drink) against the only two I can't explain completely on the other side, I come down on the side of don't drink with a side helping of grace/charity for those who disagree with me.

That is the big picture of my approach. Now let me give you something more specific to Deut 14.26. There are some conservative Christians who assert that 'strong drink' here doesn't mean alcohol. I disagree. I do agree that 'wine' doesn't always mean alcohol, but 'strong drink' is rather clear to me, and as a KJV man who doesn't believe in correcting the Bible I cannot hold that position only until it is convenient for me to correct the Bible. IOW, I do believe Moses is here stating that one is free to purchase alcoholic beverages and consume them during the consumption of the tithe feast at Jerusalem.

Having admitted that potentially damaging statement into evidence, let me add two other thoughts with direct bearing on this verse.

1) This is in the direct context of an OT Jewish feast observance, or at least of a Jewish ceremonial law observance. I strongly believe the NT Christian is still under the moral code of the OT Law (nine of the 10 commandments) but I am convinced that the NT Christian is not under the ceremonial or civil aspects of OT Law. Deuteronomy 14.26 is not a part of the moral code of the OT Law. As such, it is no longer applicable to the Christian in the NT. Do you take your tithe to the Tabernacle/Temple @ Shiloh or Jerusalem once a year and use it to throw your family and employees a party? Of course not, and for good reason. Then an intellectually honest argument cannot use this verse to defend a pro-drinking position for the NT Christian. One cannot rationally say, 'I have the right to apply one part of this verse and the right to reject the rest.' Either apply it all or reject it all.

2) You are familiar, I'm sure, with the doctrinal concept of progressive revelation. God, in the process of giving His Word over 1600 years, became progressively more specific about Who He is and what He expects of us. There are certainly aspects of OT practice that the NT, in essence, frowns on. Polygamy is a great example of this. Divorce is another. It was allowed under Mosaic Law but Jesus revealed to us more of God's mind in that incredibly revealing statement, 'Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives:' To me, though here good men too disagree, the NT is clear. Divorce is not allowed, for God doesn't want it, even if He will allow you to do it b/c you want it so strongly. The expanded/progressive revelation contained in the rest of Scripture reveal God's full mind on the subject, and show that even though divorce is

allowed it shouldn't be done. I think that exact same thing applies to Deuteronomy 14.26. God allowed them to buy/consume alcohol b/c they strongly wanted to do so, but as the revelation of Himself progresses throughout the rest of Scripture we can see His mind quite clearly on the subject of alcohol - it is to be completely avoided.

I try to be intellectually honest with myself when studying/preaching/practicing the Scriptures. I'm sure I don't always do it correctly. But for these reasons, amongst others, I feel perfectly content getting up and preaching complete abstinence rather than just controlled drinking. I think I'm quite clearly on the right side of the issue as it is explained in Scripture. I don't assert that blindly, either, for I have studied it a bit. On the other hand, there is just enough murkiness in Bible statements on this so as to prevent me from absolutely trashing another person who disagrees with me on this. I'm right, and they're wrong, and I don't hesitate to preach that, but I do think I should do so with humility in my position - just in case I'm wrong. ;)

Hope that helps you to answer this question, and, of course, I would welcome your feedback when you get around to it. Praying for you all, and especially your upcoming trip to Texas.