

# The Scripture & Use of Intoxicants:

*May the Christian 'moderately' consume intoxicating beverages for social or recreational purposes as long as he does not become intoxicated?*

## Modern Setting for Issue

- 1991 Univ. of Michigan study found:
  - 94.1% of those 19-28 use alcohol
  - 54% of 8th graders use alcohol
  - 72.3% of 10th graders use alcohol
  - 77.7% of 12th graders use alcohol
- 1989 statistics showed consumption of alcoholic drinks at 39 gal./ U.S. adult
  - 3.25 gallons a month per person
  - Total cost for alcoholic drinks = \$56 bill.
  - Twice amount paid for home furnishings
- 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings gives lower use figures
- 2001 Core survey of American college & university campuses also found higher rates of use
- Whatever the exact statistics, it is obvious that our society has a problem with the use of intoxicants

## *Have Our Brethren Been Influenced By Our Society*

### Examples from Brethren

- The following quotes are from brethren on a discussion list (Markslit - Marslist)
  - “There exists no restrictions against alcohol in the entire NT save that of drunkenness.”
  - “Many fear soooooo much accidentally crossing some line God has drawn, that they will draw the lines where God has not. I am opposed to sin, but drinking alcohol is not a sin.”
  - “Wine in the NT times was most likely 8-12% and maybe even Mad-Dog 20-20 style.”
  - “Jesus clearly did drink wine with enough alcohol to get drunk. I don't necessarily believe He got drunk. But could have if He kept drinking.”
  - “I doubt that that God would condemn to the fires of hell a person who, on drinking a single glass of wine, got drunk, and then realizing that they had such a physiological condition, never did it again. Markslit (Posted 5/17/95, at 6:18:16am)
  - Drunkenness and gluttony are sins of a kind. They both reflect taking to excess that which is permissible in moderation. Markslit (Posted 5/18/95, at 7:54:35pm)
  - Remember that one of the qualifications for a deacon is "not given to much wine." A necessary inference of this phrase is that he can drink some wine. Markslit (Posted 9/6/94, at 5:21:41pm)

### What Is “Moderate” Use?

- We hear an increasing number who try to justify a “moderate” non-medicinal use of modern intoxicating beverages
- Does the Bible approve such?
- If so, what passage does so & how do we understand passages warning against it?
  - If only drunkenness is wrong, define “drunk”

- Some say may get “a buzz,” but not drunk
- In essence, this gives message identical to liquor industry
- Can we mirror the call of the world & yet be holy as God is holy?
- Must look closer at Bible teaching

## What Is "One Drink" of Alcohol?

Standard drink generally considered to be 12 ounces beer, 5 ounces wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits. Each contains roughly the same amount of absolute alcohol -- approximately 0.5 ounce or 12 grams.

## *Old Testament Teaching on "Wine" & "Strong Drink"*

### O.T. Condemns Use of Intoxicants in General

- **Prov. 20:1** Folly & danger of use
- **Prov. 23:29-35** Warning of its effect
- **Prov. 31:4-7** General rule - don't drink
  - Exceptional case of medicinal need noted
  - exception is not rule by which we reinterpret
- **Isa. 5:11, 22** “Woe” upon user
- **Hosea 4:11** Wine & harlotry enslave
- **Lev. 10:9-10** Violates holiness of priest
  - “that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.”
  - parallel of priests & Christians in holiness

### O.T. Words for “Wine”

- **TIROSH** (used 38 times)
  - Usually refers to what we call “grape juice”
  - Isaiah 65:8; Joel 2:24; Hosea 9:2; Proverbs 3:10
  - Generally approved for consumption
- **SHEKAR** (used 22 times)
  - Word denoted & usually translated “strong drink”
  - Alcohol raised by more sugar or non-grape
  - Generally condemned for consumption
  - Modern alcoholic beverages fall in this group
- **YAYIN** (used 135 times)
  - generally used of wine with some alcohol
  - about half of references clearly forbid use
  - approved for non-consumptive uses
  - Jews of later period noted 3 distinct kinds

### ***Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 16, p. 538***

Wine was a popular beverage in talmudic times... the newly pressed wine, prior to fermentation, was known as *yayin mi-gat* (“wine from the vat”; Sanh. 70a); *yayin yashan* (“old wine”) was wine from the previous year, and that from earlier vintages, *yashan noshan* (“old, very old”). The last was usually diluted by one-third with water in order to reduce its potency.

[See Isa. 16:10 & Jer. 48:33 as O.T. parallels of *yayin mi-gat* above]

### ***The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, p 529***

There were three kinds of wine, called *yayin*, *tirosh* and *shechar*. *Yayin* was ordinary, matured wine, and was usually drunk diluted with water. *Tirosh* was new wine, and *Shechar* was old, strong wine used undiluted.

## ***New Testament Teaching***

### **Condemns Drunkenness & Intoxicants**

- **Gal. 5:21** Work of the flesh
- **1 Cor. 6:10** Not inherit kingdom
- **Rom. 13:12f** Work of darkness
- **1 Pet. 4:1-4** Desires of the Gentiles
  - need to examine distinct meaning of three words used in verse 3
- **Eph. 5:18** “Wine, wherein is riot”
  - “riot” or “excess” said to be in the wine, not in the drunkenness
  - was there any other kind of wine in NT time

### **“Wine” (oinos) in New Testament**

- Greek word for “wine” was *oinos*
  - could refer to juice freshly squeezed from grape or fermented wine in origin
- Whatever the origin, mixture of water & above was called “wine” (*oinos*)
  - **Plutarch (Symposiacs III, ix):** “We call a mixture ‘wine’ (*oinos*) although the larger component parts is water.”
  - **Everett Ferguson (Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, p. 939):** “The ordinary table beverage of the Mediterranean world was a mixture of wine and water.”

### **Robert Stein, “Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times,” *Christianity Today*:**

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

### **Ratios of Water to Wine**

- **Homer (*Odyssey* IX, 208f.): 20 to 1**
- **Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* XIV, vi, 54): 8 to 1**
- **Athenaeus (*Learned Banquet*): 3 to 1**
- **Alexis (*The Nurse*): 4 to 1**
- **Hesiod: 3 to 1**
- **Ion (*On Chios*): 3 to 1**
- **Talmud (*Shabbath* 77a): 3 to 1**
- **Nichocharas: 5 to 2**

- **Clement** (*Instructor* II, ii): “It is best for the wine to be mixed with as much water as possible.”

### Best Case for “Moderate” Drinking

- Wine from grapes of Bible land would only yield about 6% alcohol at maximum
- That fermented wine was then cut:
  - Ignores fact that wine could be kept without fermentation
  - Assume wine reached full 6% alcohol content to start
  - Normal cut was 3-6 water to 1 wine, but will assume 3/1
  - Yields drink of 1.5% alcohol by volume
    - Typical beer is 8%
    - Modern wine is 12-18%
    - Distilled spirits & liquor range from 25% - 50%
  - 22 glasses of N.T. wine vs. 2 modern drinks to intoxicate
  - If 6% cut 4/1, must drink 2.5 - 3 gallons an hour
- Most liberal case for N.T. time far from modern use!

### Words Used in 1 Peter 4

- Two ways of life are addressed:
  - *life of one with the mind of Christ*
  - *life of the flesh lived to lust of men*
- List of sins includes those dealing with decreasing effects of alcohol:
  - “Winebibblings” or “excess of wine” (*oinophlugia*)
  - “Revellings” (*komos*)
  - “Carousings” or “banquetings” (*potos*)

### Winebibblings (*oinophlugia*)

- Also translated “drunkenness”
- **Trench:** “marks a step in advance of *methe*”
- more dissipated state described in Gal. 5:21 and Rom. 13:13
- One in *oinophlugia* has lost all control
- Word used by Aristotle for state which may permanently harm the body (*Eth. Nic.* iii. 5. 15)
- Arrian used the word to describe the drunken debauch which caused the death of Alexander the Great (vii. 24, 25).
- **Summary: drunk prone to passing out**

### “Revellings” (*komos*)

- **Arndt & Gingrich:** “originally a festal procession in honor of Dionysus, then a joyous meal of banquet, in the NT... only in the bad sense excessive feasting” (461).
- **Thayer:** “a nocturnal and riotous procession of half-drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Bacchus or some other deity, and sing and play before houses of their male and female friends; hence used generally, of feasts and drinking-parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry” (367).
- **Summary:** those in party mood at Mardi Gras

## Carousings (*potos*)

- **R.C. Trench** (*Synonyms of the N.T.*): drinking "not of necessity excessive, but giving opportunity for excess" (225)
- **Kistemaker** (*in Commentary on 1 Pet.*): noted the same point (160)
- Primary definition by lexicographers for this word is simply "a drinking"
- Other forms of word illustrate point:
  - *poterion* - "cup"
  - *potidzo* - "I drink"
- In context, a drinking of intoxicants
- **Summary:** modern "moderate" drinker

## Where Is Case To Justify "Moderate" Drinking?

- Condemnation of "**wine wherein is excess**" eliminates modern intoxicants
- 1 Peter 4 leaves no room for such:
  - Condemned to be drunk to loss of control
  - Condemned to drink for "buzz" or partying drinker (has a drink to "get happy")
  - Condemned to drink to level of lesser effect than above - a drinking of intoxicants
  - What level of use would that condemn?
- Where is the passage authorizing a "moderate" use of intoxicants?

## Efforts to Justify Practice

- **1 Timothy 5:23** "For thy stomach's sake"
  - shows that medicinal use is authorized
  - not authorize non-medicinal "moderate" use
- **John 2:1-11** Water turned to wine
  - word "wine" not equivalent to modern use
  - amount made was 106-160 gallons
  - if intoxicating, Jesus provided for total drunkenness to point of unconsciousness
- **Luke 7:33-34** Jesus called "winebibber"
  - no truth necessary in charge made by critics
  - difference due to John being Nazarite
- **1 Tim. 3:3 vs. 1 Tim. 3:8 or Titus 2:3**
  - all deal with what one is not to do
  - none of the passages authorize "moderate" use

## What Can We Prove Right?

- Can we justify the use of alcohol to point of "getting a buzz" ?
- Can we justify one drink of 50 proof liquor in the bar? At home?
- Can we authorize a glass of modern wine (12-14% alcohol) by Bible?
- Does it make a difference whether that wine is at home, a party or a bar?
- What passage would allow us to drink a beer (8% alcohol) to unwind?
- **What practice can we prove right, good & holy?**