

## *Wine*

Opening Hymn: Appendix K—Take Time To Be Holy

Gen. 27:28 “God give thee of the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth and plenty of corn and wine.”

This is part of the blessing Isaac thought he was bestowing on his son Esau, but it was really Jacob who pretended to be Esau. The word “corn” should really be translated “grain.” The sense of this scripture is that the people in ancient times depended upon grain for their daily bread, and wine for their daily drink.

Grain and wine were found together in the special offering that was a part of the feast of unleavened bread:

Lev. 23:13 [the priest first waved a sheaf of the firstfruits of harvest and sacrificed a lamb for a burnt offering] And the meal offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil...and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine...

Wine is a fascinating study in scripture. It’s hard to find anything else that is simultaneously despised and condemned at the same time.

Prov. 20:1 (Knox) A reckless counselor is wine, strong drink a riotous friend; the man who is swayed by these, call not wise.

Psa. 104:14,15 [Bless the Lord, O my soul.] ...he brings forth food out of the earth, wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.

Water has always been in short supply in the Holy land. When I saw the Sea of Galilee, I thought it should be called the Lake of Galilee. I thought the Jordan River was more like the Jordan Creek. But a friend said these names demonstrated how important water was to the people. Though water was always present, it could be contaminated and cause disease. Wine was their drink, their medicine within, and even without as an antiseptic (the Good Samaritan treated the injured man by pouring oil and wine on his wounds [Luke 10:34]). The promise of future blessing to Israel includes wine:

Joel 2:24 The floors shall be full of wheat and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

Today is no different than those olden times: an excess of wine leads to intoxication, and that is universally condemned in scripture. Yet because it appears in so many places, it may be instructive to look at what wine symbolizes in the scriptures, whether or not wine should be used at our Memorial service, and whether or not Christians today should ever drink it.

### **Wine As A Symbol**

Making wine isn’t difficult. The grapes are gathered from the vines when fully ripe. They are put into a winepress and the juice is squeezed out. This mushy juice is called “must” and it starts to ferment almost immediately. This fermentation is caused by a natural yeast which appears on the grape skins just before

the grapes are gathered. The yeast comes from the air. It changes the grape sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. Normally the gas is vented back into the air, but not always. Champagne is a wine which is bottled with the gas retained in the wine.

When the fermentation is finished, the wine is separated from the skins, seeds, and sediment. It must then be kept from the air so it won't turn into vinegar. Thus natural yeast (or leaven) transforms grape juice into wine through an intense chemical reaction which produces the carbon dioxide as a side effect. We can thus understand these words of Jesus:

Matt. 9:16,17 [Rotherham] No one layeth on a patch of unshrunk cloth upon an old garment for the shrinking of it teareth away from the garment and a worse rent is made. Neither pour they new wine into old skins, otherwise at least the skins are burst and the wine runneth out and the skins are spoiled—but they pour new wine into unused skins and both are together preserved.

“New wine” is the mushy juice from the pressing of grapes and is ready to start fermenting. The “wine skin” was usually the complete hide of an animal into which the juice was placed. If new, it could give with the generation of the carbon dioxide gas and not split. But if old, it would have no elasticity and would split.

Jesus gave this metaphor in response to a question from some disciples of John: “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't?” Jesus is saying that he represents something new, something that can't be contained within the existing structure of Judaism. New wine (which is really unfermented grape juice) and unshrunk cloth are simply used to make this point, not that we are to see these as symbols for His teachings or doctrines, or whatever.

Most Bible Students say that in the Bible wine represents doctrines, although no scripture says this. At times it does represent doctrines, but depending upon context, it can represent other things as well:

Eph. 5:18 And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

Wine here represents the spirit of the world and Paul uses it as a contrast to filling ourselves with God's holy spirit. Using wine this way also fits its use in Revelation:

Rev. 17:2,4 And the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of [the woman's] fornication. [vs. 4] ... and she had a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.

The spirit of this woman Jezebel is a spirit of idolatry, worshipping anyone or anything except the true God. That's the picture in...

Rev. 2:20 Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel which calleth herself a prophetess to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto **idols**.

But the symbol of wine shifts a bit when we read about her punishment. God's judgment of this woman is also equated to wine:

Rev. 16:19 And the great city was divided into three parts and the cities of the nations fell and great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

A similar use of language is found in:

Rev. 14:19,20 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city and blood came out of the winepress.

Wine is the “blood” of grapes (see Gen. 49:11). Jesus used wine to represent his blood:

Luke 22:20 (Weymouth) He handed them the cup in like manner when the meal was over. “This cup,” he said, “is the new Covenant ratified by my blood which is to be poured out on your behalf.

Partaking of this wine indicated their willingness to be sacrificed as their Master.

Matt. 20:22,23 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup.

Once each year Bible Students gather together and celebrate the Memorial of our Lord’s death. We partake of unleavened bread and the “cup.” But from time to time, there’s controversy about what should be in that cup.

### **The Memorial Cup**

What should we be in our Memorial cup: Wine or grape juice? Why should we care? There appear to be two reasons, both of which are suggested by those who think we should use wine: (1) Grape juice contains yeast or leaven, a type of sin. Since the bread had to be without leaven, the cup should not have yeast, yet ordinary grape juice does contain leaven. (2) If we are so careful to celebrate on the right date according to the Jewish calendar, we should be equally careful to use the same drink as our Lord.

Every ecclesia must decide for themselves what to do. Some classes do use wine, most use grape juice, and others might provide both, or follow Br. Russell’s suggestion of adding a few drops of wine to grape juice. We don’t want to change the procedure of any ecclesia. But let’s look at these two arguments.

First, there’s the question of leaven. Although it’s true a natural yeast forms on the grape skins which later causes fermentation, there is no place in scripture where yeast or leaven is associated with grapes. It is always associated with bread and there it is specifically a picture of sin:

1 Cor. 5:8 Let us keep the feast not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Today, however, we know more. Do we really want to knowingly drink leaven when we partake of the cup? No we don’t, but in fact we are in no such danger. If there were yeast in grape juice, it would start

to ferment. So the juice is heated—pasteurized—to destroy these organisms. The yeast disappears either by pasteurization or by the action of changing grape sugars into alcohol.

What about using the drink Jesus used. Did Jesus use wine at the Memorial supper? Yes he did. The grape harvest had occurred six months before. It was associated with the feast of booths which occurred on the 15th day of the 7th month, six months before Passover (Lev. 23:39-42). Grape juice could not be kept without fermenting for six months. Wine was the standard drink much as coffee is in our culture. So if Jesus used wine, why don't all Bible Student ecclesias do the same?

The reason is because of the physical harm it can do to some. Grape juice cannot harm anyone. Therefore if there is a possibility that wine would be injurious to any, many ecclesias prefer to use grape juice. But doesn't this violate our Lord's instruction? No.

Luke 22:17,18 And he took the cup and gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I say unto you, I will not drink of the **fruit of the vine** until the kingdom of God shall come.

The three gospel writers who record the last supper use the expression “fruit of the vine.” If wine were the only acceptable drink, surely they would be careful to say so. This is the only context where the phrase “fruit of the vine” appears in scripture. We believe the vagueness of the phrase indicates a choice of liquid according to the dictates of the conscience of those who partake.

Br. Russell at first started Memorial celebrations using wine. In 1883 he reported that raisin juice was also available but only one person used it. But as time went on, he realized there was danger to some and he stopped using wine, suggesting that a few drops in grape juice was sufficient.

Why not let brethren have a choice by providing both wine and grape juice? Years ago the elders and deacons of Los Angeles discussed this. We decided not to do this on the basis that we risked confusing some of our brethren. They would have to read labels on the tray when they had never done so before. Or some might accidentally get a cup of wine when they did not wish it. Changing the past policy of the class which was to use grape juice exclusively did not seem wise. So we continue to use grape juice in our class.

The importance of the Memorial cup is not what is in the cup, but what that cup symbolizes. When we partake, we acknowledge our participation in sacrifice with our Master:

1 Cor. 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless [or: for which we give thanks], is it not the communion [or: participation] of the blood of Christ?

Paul reminds us of our participation with the sacrifice of our Master in:

Heb. 13:11-13 For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

The world of mankind will never be given this opportunity. Once this age of sacrifice comes to an end, there will no longer be a narrow way. Only the highway of holiness which leads to perfect life on earth will be open to the world.

Mark 14:25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Instead of a cup of suffering and sacrifice, the cup is transformed into a cup of joy. And all who successfully lay down their lives in sacrifice in this age will participate in that joy in the kingdom.

2 Tim. 2:11,12 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.

### Should Christians Drink Wine?

Here is another question that brethren must answer for themselves.

Lev. 10:8,9 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.

This was said just after Nadab and Abihu died because they had used “strange fire” in the service of the Tabernacle. There is an implication that they did this because they were intoxicated with wine or strong drink. So the prohibition is made explicit: Priests are not to touch wine when engaged in the Lord’s service. That did not mean they could never have wine, however.

Deut. 18:3,4 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. 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.

So the type shows the priest was to treat the things of the Lord very carefully and was not to have his mind clouded by the effects of wine. But he was not denied wine when he was “off duty” so to speak.

Jesus himself drank wine as we saw in our examination of the cup. We also have his first miracle when he turned water into wine. He would hardly have done that if wine was prohibited. And he says this about himself:

Matt. 11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking and they say, “Behold a man gluttonous and a **winebibber**.”

The context is interesting. Jesus shows that that generation would be critical under every circumstance. John the Baptist was criticized because he didn’t drink; Jesus was criticized because he did.

Throughout scripture the prohibition is against intoxication:

1 Tim. 3:3 [A bishop then must be...] not given to wine...

Paul is not saying elders should never drink wine. After all, in the same letter, chapter 5 verse 23, he says, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake.” The correct thought is found in the margin: “A bishop should not be ready to quarrel and offer wrong, as one in wine.”

The temperate use of wine is not prohibited. The priests received it as a tithe from the people. Jesus drank it. Timothy was told to drink it instead of water. But Paul also outlined a higher principle:

Rom. 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. [vs. 17] For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. [vs. 21] It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended, or is made weak.

The general context of these verses has been whether it was permitted to eat meat which was first ceremoniously offered to idols. In verse 21 we have the introduction of drinking wine which had never been mentioned previously. Evidently there were questions about wine back in the days of the early church just as there are today. Paul points out that our decision on this question as on any other question of Christian behavior should be made on the basis of its impact on those around us. Since alcoholism is a problem in our day, we should be especially careful about our conduct. Whether we like it or not, we are an example to those around us. We need to be careful that our example is a good one.

Some have suggested we abstain from wine and alcohol in any form so that we can make yet another separation of ourselves from the world around us. In this respect, it is like the vow of the Nazarite:

Num. 6:2,3 When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow unto the Lord, He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink...  
[vs. 5] no razor shall come upon his head...  
[vs. 6] he shall not come in contact with a dead body.

Clearly in deciding this question we must decide for ourselves in accord with our consecrated judgment. We are not to force others to adopt our standard or our answers, however. The scriptures do not give us that right.

## Conclusion

In our study together, we have looked at wine in the scriptures. We have seen how it was a staple in the diet of the Israelites, and also the criticism it received when it was used to excess.

As a symbol, wine appears in a variety of contexts. We are not to be filled with the spirit of wine, but to be filled with the Holy spirit. The spirit of idolatry is shown in the golden cup which all the inhabitants of the earth have drunk from the hands of that woman Jezebel. God’s judgment is shown in another cup, the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

Wine is the blood of the grape. Jesus said the Memorial cup was his blood which they were to drink. Each year we participate in that cup, willingly sacrificing our hopes, aims, and ambitions to follow the example of our Lord.

We believe that each ecclesia should determine what should be in the cup when the Memorial is celebrated. However, in Los Angeles we see no compelling argument to change past policy: we will continue to use pasteurized grape juice in the cup.

Whether Christians should drink wine is something that is left to individuals to decide for themselves. Although our Lord drank wine and Paul suggested wine to Timothy, wine drunk to excess is universally condemned in scripture.

Perhaps the best advice of all is contained in:

1 Cor. 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

May that be our goal at the close of this age of sacrifice.

Closing Hymn: #171—Our King Is Marching On

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