

Wine! Its In The Bible

by Stan Schirmacher

Only eternity will reveal how many people have been misled by their ignorance and misunderstanding of the word "wine" in the Bible! Unbelievers and drinkers have wielded a whip tipped with scriptures and Christians have allowed the whip to continue to snap, because they don't know how to clip the point - not understanding that the message is against liquor, not for it!

Take Christ's first miracle, the turning of water into "wine" (John 2:1-10). What a well-worn whip that has proven to be! But listen, Christian, to the truth of the point: Many different Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic words or vocables used in the Bible have been indiscriminately translated as "wine" or "strong drink". In other words, in some cases the word "wine" in the Bible means a non-intoxicant, or a food! Fresh grape juice, to make it keep without fermentation, was boiled until it became thick like molasses, and in that form was stored away in large jars for future use, to be eaten spread upon bread, or to be mixed and stirred up in water to make a drink.

Read John 2:9-10. "The governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now." The Roman writer Pliny records that when grape juice was boiled down to one third of its hulk to secure the finest flavor, it was called 'Sapa' (the "best wine"). So, you see, the "tip of the whip" is but a "slip of the lip," for Jesus produced a non-intoxicating, unfermented wine!

Isaiah 55:1 says, "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Here the preserved grape juice, sometimes called "sweet wine" in the Bible, was mixed with milk!

Here's another "whip". "For thy stomachs sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23)! And here's the tip clipped off: "Stomach wine" or "wine for the stomach" according to the writers of old Greek medicine, was a grape juice prepared as a thick, unfermented syrup for use as a food for dyspeptic and weak persons! Pliny, who lived in the apostolic age, wrote, "The beverage is given to invalids to whom it is apprehended that wine may prove injurious!"

You see, it is no more true to say that the word "wine" always meant intoxicating wine than it is to say that the word "bread" always meant fermented (leavened) bread! The word 'oinos' (wine) was sometimes used to describe the grape juice when it was fermented, and sometimes when it was unfermented! In Haggai 1:11 we read, "I called for a drought ...upon the corn, and upon the new wine!" It is clear that the word "wine" in this case means the growing grapes, for if the wine had been in the skin bottles, the drought would have had no effect upon it! This translation, like many others, is misleading! Instead of saying "new wine," it should say "vine fruit" (thiresh).

Let Luke 5:37-38 show you how the word "wine" is used: "No one puts new

wine [fresh grape juice] into old wine-skins; otherwise the new wine [grape juice] will [spoil and] burst the skins, and the fermented wine will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine [juice] must be put into fresh [unused] wine-skins" and both will be unfermented and preserved!

And Isaiah 65:8 says, "As the new wine is found in the cluster," "Wine," you see, also means grape juice, and not only in the Bible; for Varro speaks of "hanging wine" (grapes on the vine); Catro, of "hanging wine"; Columella. of "unintoxicating, good wine." Ovid says, "And scarce can the grapes contain the wine they have within. Ibycus says, "And the new born clusters teem with wine, beneath the shadowy foliage of the vine." Goethe beautifully says, "And bending down, the grapes o'erflow with wine into the vat below."

But look, withal the ignorance of the various meanings of the word "wine," too many persons are guilty of using that misleading word where the Lord didn't even use it! The word "wine" (oinos) is used in none of the four passages that give account of the Lord's Supper) Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, and 1 Cor. 11:23-26). The word that is actually used is translated "fruit of the vine."

Here's the harm that that particular incorrect usage has done. "All the Sahib's servants in Calcutta are 'Christian' now," said Mr. Bayard Taylor's native attendant to him during his travels in India. "I did not know our religion had spread so much in India," the American answered. "Oh, yes it has," was the reply. "for they all drink brandy!" (The names "Christian" and "drunkard" are held in the popular mind of Asia to have the same meaning, all because "wine" was incorrectly substituted for "fruit of the vine"!)

So watch out for that word and be armed with the shears of truth. "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Bibliography: The Bible and Wine, Loizeaux Bros., Publishers.

This tract is intended to strengthen the believer by pointing out the truths contained in his handbook, the Bible. But we would think that we had failed if we produced a world of total abstainers, but left them all unbelievers; so here are some more truths:

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved' (Romans 10:9). Jesus said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved' (John 10:9).

'There is a Door - and only One,
Yet its sides are two:
inside and outside;
On which side are you?'

What about where the Bible says “give strong drink”?

“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” (Prov. 31:6-7).

This quotation is the write-up of Solomon’s mother, telling of the Jewish custom based on the old legal practice of giving a stupefying drink to condemned prisoners when they were going to execution. It was regarded as a means of tempering justice with mercy. We have a carry-over of that in the United States: Before a prisoner “walks the last mile’ he chooses his own menu. It usually consists of ice cream or strawberry shortcake, something to revive his drooping spirits for the last, woeful moments. King Lemuel (pet name for Solomon used by his mother), is asked to abstain from strong drink. Jesus, you will recall, was offered this legal strong drink as He was ready to perish: but, of course, He refused it. Scientifically (not religiously), you see, such a drink eases the struggle. ó S. S. and Sanden’s Scripture-Science Information Service. (Read Prov. 31:4-54)

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