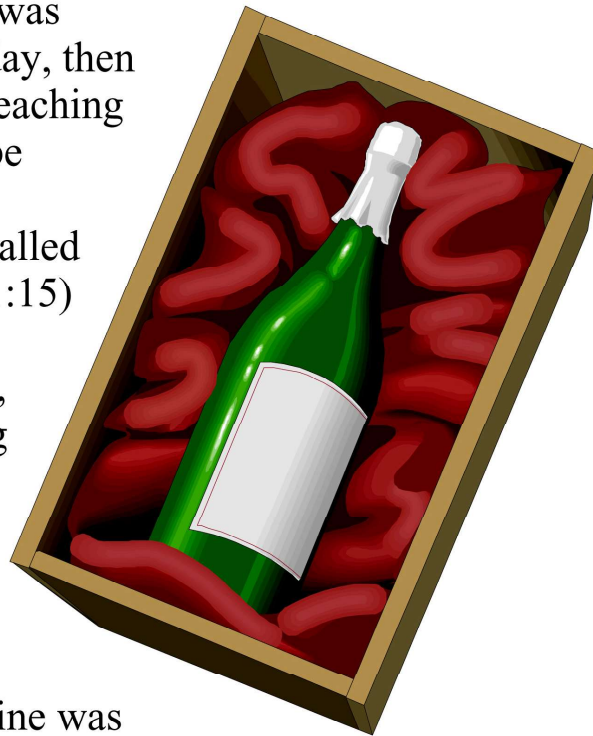


THE CHRISTIAN AND DRINKING

IS TODAY’S WINE THE SAME AS THAT IN BIBLE TIMES?

Our first task in answering this question is to determine exactly what kind of wine is referred to in the Bible, and the second is to determine how that wine compares to what is produced and drunk today. Many sincere, Bible-honoring Christians justify their drinking wine on the basis of its being an acceptable practice both in the Old and New Testaments. But if the kind of wine used then was different from that used today, then application of the biblical teaching concerning wine will also be different.

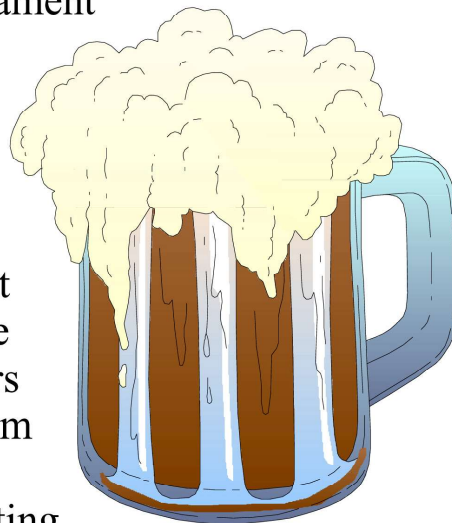
One kind of wine, called *sikera* in Greek (see Luke 1:15) and *shekar* in Hebrew (see Proverbs 20:1; Isaiah 5:11), is usually translated “strong drink” because of its high alcohol content and consequent rapid intoxication of those who drank it.



A second kind of wine was called *gleukos* (from which we get our English term *glucose*) and referred to new wine, which was especially sweet. Some of the onlookers at Pentecost accused the apostles of being drunk on this kind of wine (Acts 2:13). The corresponding Hebrew word is *tîrôsh* (see Proverbs 3:10; Hosea 9:2; Joel 1:10). Because freshly-squeezed juice would ferment rapidly and could cause intoxication even when not fully aged, it was generally mixed with water before drinking.

A third kind of wine, however, is the one most often referred to in both the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew word for that wine is *yayin*, which has the root meaning of bubbling or boiling up. The figure of bubbling did not come from the pouring of the wine but from the boiling of the fresh grape juice to reduce it to a heavy syrup, sometimes even a thick paste, that made it suitable for storage without spoiling. Because boiling removes most of the water and kills all of the bacteria, the concentrated state of the juice does not ferment. *Yayin* most often referred to the syrup or paste mixed with water and used as a drink (cf Psalms 75:8; Proverbs23:30). Even when the reconstituted mixture was allowed to ferment, its alcohol content was quite low.

The most common New Testament Greek word for this third kind of wine is *oinos*, and in its most general sense simply refers to the juice of grapes. Any accurate Jewish source will point out that *yayin*, mixed wine, or *oinos*, does not refer only to intoxicating liquor made by fermentation, but more often refers to a thick nonintoxicating syrup or jam produced by boiling to make it storable. In Jesus' illustration of putting new wine (*oinos*, not *gleukos*) only into new wineskins, He was possibly saying that it was thereby "preserved" from fermentation as well as from spillage (Matthew 9:17).



The practice of reducing fresh grape juice to a syrup by boiling or evaporation was widespread in the biblical Near East as well as in the Greek and Roman cultures of that day—and is not uncommon in Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon in our own day. In addition to being diluted for use as a beverage, the heavy syrup was used as a flavoring and as a jam-like spread on bread and pastries. Both the syrup and most of the drink made from it were completely nonintoxicating.

The Jewish Mishnah—the ancient oral and later written interpretations of the Mosaic law that preceded the Talmud—states

that the Jews regularly used boiled wine, that is, grape juice reduced to a thick consistency by heating. The “wine” used in the Passover meal was three parts water and one part wine (cf. 2 Maccabbes 15:39). According to the Mishnah, “they do not say the Benediction over the wine until water has been added to it.”

Aristotle described the wine of Arcadia as being so thick that it had to be scraped from the skin bottles in which it was stored and the

- scrapings diluted with water in order to make a drink.

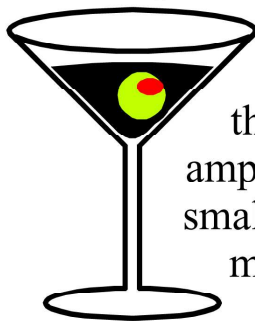
The Roman historian Pliny often referred to nonintoxicating wine. The Roman poet Horace wrote in

- 35 b.c., “Here you quaff under a shade, cups of unintoxicating wine.” In the ninth book of his *Odyssey*,

- Homer told of Ulysses putting in his boat a goatskin of sweet black wine that was diluted with twenty parts of

- water before being drunk. In A.D. 60 the Greek

- biographer Plutarch commented that “filtered wine neither inflames the brain nor infects the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink.”



Writing in *Christianity Today* magazine

(June 20, 1975), Robert Stein explains that the ancient Greeks kept their unboiled, unmixed, and therefore, highly-alcoholic wine in large jugs called amphorae. Before drinking they would pour it into smaller vessels called kraters and dilute it with water as much as twenty to one. Only then would the wine be poured into kylixes, the cups from which it was

drunk. It was this diluted form that was commonly referred to simply as wine (*oinos*). The undiluted liquid was called *akratesteron*, or “unmixed wine,” wine that had not been diluted in a krater. Even among the civilized pagans, drinking unmixed wine was considered stupid and barbaric. Mr. Stein quotes Mnesitheus of Athens:

The gods have revealed wine to mortals, to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse. For it gives food to them that take it and strength in mind and body. In medicine it is

most beneficial; it can be mixed with liquid and drugs and it brings aid to the wounded. In daily intercourse, to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer; but if you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse.

From an early Christian volume called *The Apostolic Tradition* we learn that the early church followed the custom of using only such mixed wine, whether made from a syrup or from the unmixed liquid.

Wine in Homer's day was twenty parts water and one part wine (*Odyssey* 9.208-9). Pliny referred to wine as eight parts water and one part wine (*Natural History* 14.6.54). According to Aristophanes, it was stronger — three parts water and two parts wine. Other classical of other mixtures: Euenos — three part wine; Hesiod — three to one; four to one; Diocles and Anacreon two to one; and Ion — three to one. The average was about three or four parts of water to one part of wine.

Naturally fermented wine has an alcoholic content of nine to eleven percent. For an alcoholic beverage such as brandy to have a higher content, it must be artificially fortified by distilling already-fermented wine. The unmixed wine of the ancients therefore had a maximum alcohol content of eleven percent. Even mixed half and half (a mixture which Mnesitheus said would bring madness), the wine would have had less than five percent alcohol. Since the strongest wine normally drunk was mixed at least with three parts water to one of wine, its alcohol content would have been in a range no higher than 2.25-2.75 percent—well below the 3.2 percent that today is generally considered necessary to classify a beverage as alcoholic.



It is clear, therefore, that whether the *yayin* or *oinos* mentioned in Scripture refers to the thick syrup itself, to a mixture of water and syrup, or to a mixture of water and pure wine, the wine was either nonalcoholic or only slightly alcoholic. To get drunk with mixed wine (*oinos*) would have required consuming a large quantity—as is suggested in other New Testament passages. “Not given to wine” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7) translates one Greek word (*paroinos*) and literally means “at, or beside, wine,” and carries the idea of sitting beside the wine cup for an extended period of time.

The answer to the first question is clearly no. The wine of Bible times was not the same as the unmixed wine of our own day. Even the more civilized pagans of Bible times would have considered the drinking of modern wines to be barbaric and irresponsible.

IS IT NECESSARY?



The second question that helps us determine whether or not a believer today should drink wine is, “Is drinking wine necessary for me?” In Bible times, as in many parts of the world today, good drinking water either did not exist or was scarce. The safest drink was wine, and wine that had alcoholic content was especially safe because of the antiseptic effect of the alcohol. It actually purified the water. Water could be made safe in several ways. It could be boiled, but this was tedious and costly. Or it could be filtered, but this was not a safe method. Or some wine could be put in the water to kill the germs — one part wine with three or four parts water. This later process provided tasty, purified water, which was called “wine.”

Yet it seems hard to believe that the wine Jesus miraculously made at the wedding feast in Cana or that He served

at the Lord's Supper and on other occasions was fermented. How could He have made or served that which had even the potential for making a person drunk? When He made the wine at Cana, He first instructed the servants to fill the jars with water, as if to testify that the wine He was about to create was obviously mixed. The wedding guests commented on the high quality of the wine (John 2:10), and because they called it *oinos*, it obviously was like the mild drink they were accustomed to making by adding water to boiled-down syrup.

Even though circumstances often required or made advisable the drinking of wine that contained alcohol, the preferred wine even in the Bible times had little or none. Modern believers therefore cannot appeal to the biblical practice to justify their own drinking, because so many alternatives are now readily and cheaply available. Drinking alcoholic beverages today is an extremely rare necessity; most often it is simply a matter of preference.

Nor is drinking necessary in order to prevent embarrassing or offending friends, acquaintances, or business associates. A Christian's witness is sometimes resented and costly, but most people are inclined to respect our abstinence when it is done out of honest conviction and is not flaunted self-righteously or judgmentally. The argument of not wanting to offend others is more likely to be based on concern for our own image and popularity than on genuine concern for their feelings and welfare. Some feel that drinking is sometimes necessary for the sake of establishing a relationship with an unsaved person with a view to bringing him to saving faith. But such a view of evangelism fails miserably in understanding the sovereign work of God and the power of the gospel apart from human devices.



IS IT THE BEST CHOICE?

Because drinking of wine is not specifically and totally forbidden in Scripture and because it is not a necessity for believers in most parts of the world today, the drinking of it is a matter of choice. The next question is therefore, Is it the best choice?

Throughout the history of God's people He has given higher standards for those in positions of greater responsibility.



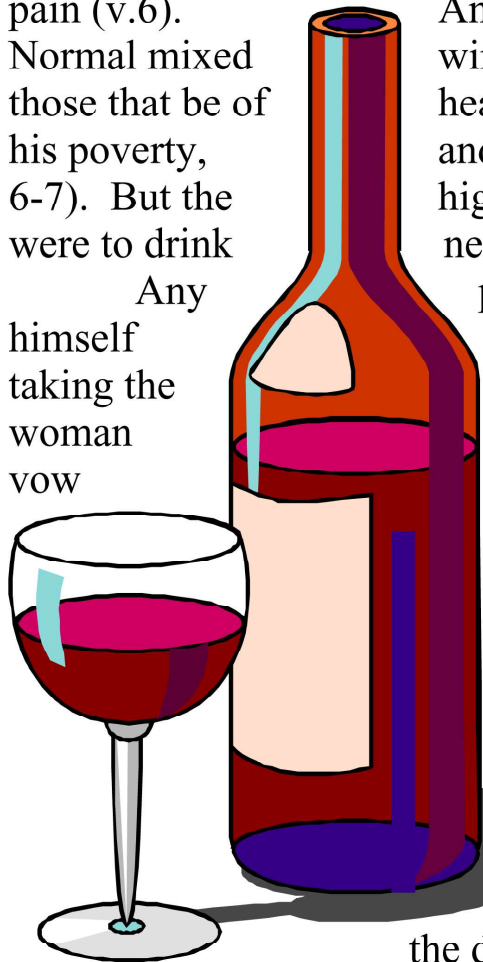
Under the sacrificial system instituted under Moses and described in Leviticus 4-5, the ordinary person was required to give a female goat or a lamb as a sin offering—or two pigeons or two turtledoves (5:7), or even a meal (fine flour) offering (5:11), if he was very poor. But a ruler had to offer a male goat, and the congregation as a whole or the high priest had to offer a bull.

Aaron and all succeeding high priests were also given higher personal standards by which to live. They were commanded, “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” (Leviticus 10:9). Because the high priest was called apart to a higher office, he was also called to a higher commitment to God and to a higher quality of living. Whether their drink restriction pertained to their total living or only to the time while they were actually serving in the Tabernacle or Temple, their ministry for the Lord was to be marked by total abstinence from all alcoholic beverage. Their minds and bodies were to be clear, pure, and fully functional when they ministered in the Lord's name. There was to be no risk of moral or spiritual compromise in sacred ministry.

The same high standard applied to rulers in Israel. “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” (Proverbs 31:4-5). Their judgment was not to be clouded even by the amount of alcohol found in wine (*yayin*), much less by the much higher amount in strong drink (*shekar*). Strong drink was to be given only “unto him that is ready to perish,” as a sedative to ease his pain (v.6).

Normal mixed those that be of his poverty, 6-7). But the were to drink

Any himself taking the woman vow



Any other use of it was not condoned. wine could be given for enjoyment “unto heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget and remember his misery no more” (vv. high priests and the rulers of the people neither *yayin* nor *shekar*.

person in Israel could choose to set apart for God in a special way by Nazarite vow. “When either man or shall separate themselves to vow a of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord: He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of

grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All

the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk” (Numbers 6:2-4). A Nazarite also vowed not to shave his head or to ceremonially contaminate himself by touching a dead body as long as his vow was in effect (vv. 5-7).

The name Nazarite comes from the Hebrew *nazîr*, which means “separated, or consecrated.” Such separation was voluntary and could last from 30 days to a lifetime. But while the person, man or woman, was set apart in that way for special service to the

Lord, his life was to be marked by special purity, including abstention from anything even associated with alcoholic drink. The Nazarite was in a sense, stepping up to the level of a ruler or high priest by his act of special consecration and separation.

Scripture names only three men who were Nazarites for life—Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. All three were set apart as Nazarites before they were born, Samuel by his mother (1 Samuel 1:11) and Samson and John the Baptist by the Lord Himself (Judges 13:3-5; Luke 1:15). The mothers of both Samson and Samuel also abstained from wine and strong drink (Judges 13:4; 1 Sam. 1:15), Samson’s mother by the direct command of the angel.



Though we do not know their identities, many other Nazarites lived in Israel and served the Lord through their specially consecrated lives (see Lamentations 4:7; Amos 2:11). Unfortunately, many of them were forcibly corrupted by their fellow Israelites, who “made the Nazarites drink wine” (Amos 2:12; cf. Lamentations 4:8). The world resents those whose high standards are a rebuke to low living. Instead of trying to attain a higher level for themselves, people who are worldly and fleshly—including worldly and carnal Christians—seek to bring those who live purely down to their own corrupt level.

In Jeremiah’s day the entire clan of the Rechabites had taken a vow not to drink wine, and had remained faithful to that vow. Because of their faithfulness, the Lord had Jeremiah set them up as a standard of righteous living, in contrast to the corrupt unfaithfulness of Judah, on whom He was about to bring judgment (Jeremiah 35:1-19).

The most outstanding Nazarite was John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater” (Matthew 11:11). Before John was born, the angel said of him, “For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong

drink: and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15).

Yet Jesus went on to say in regard to John the Baptist that "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). In Jesus Christ, every believer is on the spiritual level of a high priest, a ruler, and a Nazarite. Christ loves us and has "washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Revelation 1:5-6). Christians are a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9; cf. v.5). Every Christian is specially set apart for God, and every Christian is to be separated from everything that is unclean (2 Corinthians 6:17). "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved," Paul continued, "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).



God did not lower His standards for New Testament saints, who are greater, Jesus said, even than John the Baptist. In both the Old and New Testaments drinking wine or strong drink disqualified a person from the leadership of God's people. Christian leaders, like those of the Old Testament, are held to specially high standards. Overseers, or bishops, who are the same as elders and pastors, must not be "addicted to wine," which as mentioned above, translates one word (*paroinos*) and literally means "at, or by, wine." A leader in the church is not even to be beside wine. "Must" (1 Timothy 3:2) is from the Greek particle *dei*, and carries the meaning of logical necessity rather than moral ought. Paul is therefore saying that leaders in the church of Jesus Christ not only ought but "must be...not given to wine" (vv. 2-3).

James said, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1), and Jesus said, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). If Old Testament high priests, Nazarites, kings, judges, and other rulers of the people were to be



clear-minded at all times, the Lord surely does not have lower standards for leaders in the church, which is the present incarnate Body of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

That Paul advised Timothy to “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:23) indicates that, consistent with his leadership abstinence, Timothy previously had drunk no wine at all and that Paul’s

recommendations to start drinking “a little wine” was purely for medicinal purposes. Every believer is to present his body “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Romans 12:1), in total consecration to Him.

IS IT HABIT FORMING?

A fourth area of concern for believers should be the matter of addiction. Many things become habitual, and many of the habits we form are beneficial. On the other hand, many other habits are harmful and are difficult to break.

Paul’s principle that though all things for him were lawful, he would “not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12) clearly applies to the danger of alcohol addiction. Alcohol easily produces overpowering dependency. In addition to the alcohol’s direct clouding of the brain and disruption of bodily functions, the dependency itself distracts the attention and interferes with the judgment of the one who is addicted.

A Christian not only must avoid sin but must avoid the potential for sin. We should not allow ourselves to get under the influence or control of anyone or anything that leads us away from the things of God even to a small extent. The safest and wisest choice for a Christian is to avoid even the potential for wrong influence.

Even when something is not habit-forming for us, it may be for someone who is looking at and following our example.

Because alcohol is universally acknowledged to be highly addictive, a Christian's drinking unnecessarily creates the potential for the alcohol addiction of someone else.

IS IT POTENTIALLY DESTRUCTIVE?

A fifth concern should be for alcohol's potential destructiveness. The pagan writer Mnesitheus, already quoted, spoke of wine mixed with half water as causing madness and of unmixed wine's bringing bodily collapse. The mental, physical, and social destructiveness of alcohol is too evident to need much documentation.

Over 40 percent of all violent deaths are alcohol related, and at least 50 percent of all traffic fatalities involve drinking drivers. It is estimated that at least one-fourth of all hospitalized psychiatric patients have a problem with alcohol. Heavy consumption of alcohol causes cirrhosis of the liver and countless other physical disorders. Alcohol-related problems cost billions of dollars each year in lost income to employers and employees, in settlements by insurance companies and in higher premiums for other their customers, and in many less direct ways.



Dissipation, to which drunkenness inevitably leads, is from *asotia*, which literally means “that which is unable to be saved.” It was used of a person who was hopelessly and incurably sick and also was used of loose, profligate living, as in that of the prodigal son (Luke 15:13). Dissipation is therefore a form of self-destruction.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Old Testament gives many vivid accounts of the close association of heavy drinking with immorality, rebellion, incest, disobedience to parents, and corrupt living of every sort. Violence is a natural

companion of strong drink (Proverbs 4:17), and “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging” (Proverbs 20:1).

The prophet Joel cried, “Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine: for it is cut off from your mouth” (Joel 1:5). Later in his message he said, “And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink” (Joel 3:3).

Habakkuk warned, “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the Lord’s right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory” (Habakkuk 2:15-16).

The Christian must ask himself if it is wise for him to have any part of something that has such great potential for destruction and sin.



WILL IT OFFEND OTHER CHRISTIANS?

In speaking of food sacrificed to idols, Paul said, “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.... Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol: and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God... for neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.... And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died” (1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-9, 11).

Our freedom in Christ stops where it begins to harm others, especially fellow believers. We have no right to “destroy with [our] meat [or drink] him for whom Christ died” (Romans 14:15). We cannot be absolutely certain even of our own ability to always drink in moderation, and even less certain that our example will

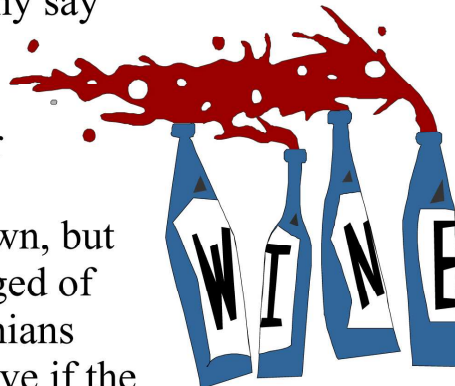
not cause others—including our children—to drink beyond moderation. “For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure: but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak” (Romans 14:20-21). Our own freedom in Christ should not be cherished above the welfare of even one other believer. We are to do those things “which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (v. 19).



WILL IT HARM MY CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY?

To exercise our liberty in a way that might harm a brother in Christ cannot possibly enhance our testimony to unbelievers. Drinking might make us more acceptable in some circles, but our lack of concern for fellow Christians would work against any positive witness we might give. It would also hinder our testimony before many other Christians, who, though they might not be concerned about our influence hindering their own living for the Lord, would nevertheless be concerned about how it might harmfully influence other Christians.

Paul’s standard given to the Corinthians indicates that the best testimony is to refuse a pagan host so as not to offend a brother: “If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go: whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man’s conscience?” (1 Corinthians 10:27-29). The witness is most effective if the



pagan host can see how much you love and care for your Christian brother.

“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord: and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:7-8). Because everything a Christian is and has is the Lord’s, the apostle also said, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 11:31-33).

If we want to reach people who are not saved, as well as give an encouraging example to those who are, we will not exercise our liberty to drink or to do anything else that would cause them to be spiritually offended or misled.

IS IT RIGHT?

In light of all the above questions, the Christian should finally ask, is it right for me to drink at all? We have seen that the answer to the first question is clearly no—the wine drunk in the



Bible times is not the same as contemporary wine. The answers to the second and third questions are also no for the majority of believers today—it is generally unnecessary to drink wine and is seldom the best choice. The answer to the next four questions is yes in at least some degree. Drinking is clearly habit forming and potentially destructive and it is likely to offend other Christians and could harm our testimony before unbelievers.

A man once said to me, “I have a beer with the boys sometimes. Is that wrong?” I replied, “What do *you* think about it?” “Well, I don’t think it’s wrong; but it bothers me.” “Do you like being bothered?” I asked. “No, I don’t,” he said. “You know

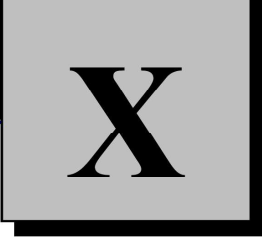
how to stop being bothered, don't you?" I continued, to which he gave the obvious answer, "Yes. Stop drinking."

Paul explicitly said, "He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Even if we believe that something is not sinful in itself, if we cannot do it with a completely free conscience, we sin because we do it against our conscience. Going against our conscience will push us into self-condemnation and self-imposed guilt. Conscience is a God-given alarm to guard against sin, and whenever we go against it we weaken it and make it less sensitive and less reliable, thereby training ourselves to reject it. To continually go against conscience is to cause it to become "seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2) and to become silent. When that happens, we lose a very powerful agent God has given to lead us (1 Timothy 1:5,19).

As we ask ourselves questions about drinking, the final one is the most important: Can I do it before others and before God in total faith and confidence that it is right? It's very doubtful.

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Discipler Report Back



I met with _____ on
_____/_____/_____ and reviewed the contents of this
lesson. My comments regarding the discipleship time
together are:

*(make comments only if they are needed to help the Pastoral
staff assist you in ministering to this person)*

Discipler's Name _____

*Please drop this off at the Hospitality Booth in the
church foyer on the first service after conducting
this session. This will help the Pastoral staff stay
current with the status of our new converts and
new members being disciplined.*

Thank You