

Jesus and Wine

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This ENDTIME ISSUES newsletters comes to you with considerable delay. Rest assured that it was not procrastination on my part. I always look forward to address some of our current issues from a Biblical perspective. The problem has been the much traveling. I have been away from home much of the time during the past month.

From April 18 to 28 I spent ten marvelous days in London, England, speaking at four major rallies. The response was truly gratifying. The first rally was held at the Brixton SDA Church on April 19-2. Brixton, a former Anglican Cathedral, is the largest Adventist church in London with a membership of about 800 members. On the Sabbath the sanctuary that can seat 1000 people, was packed with over 100 persons standing. Pastor Hamilton Williams told me that he had never seen such a large attendance.

The last rally was held on April 26-27 at the Stanborough Park SDA Church, which is the largest "white" church in the British Union with about 500 members. On the Sabbath the sanctuary was packed with about 600 fellow believers and friends, some of whom had travelled over 200 miles to attend the meetings. A group of former-members of the Worldwide Church of God joined us. I just received email messages from them expressing appreciation for the blessings received.

On Thursday evening, April 25, I was privileged to speak at Newbold College to a gathering of about 200 students, faculties, and community members. For me it was a moving experience to visit Newbold again after many years. In fact, I attended Newbold for four years from 1956 to 1960— that is over 40 years ago. This makes me pretty old, though I do not feel that way. Those were formative years during which I caught a vision for the ministry. I went to Newbold to learn the English language so that I could guide tourists through the magnificent monuments of ancient Rome. But while sitting at the feet of a godly old Bible teacher, Pastor G. D. Keough (80 years old), I sensed the calling to become a spiritual guide to the eternal City of God.

During the past 40 years Newbold has grown considerably, both in terms of the physical plant and of students' enrolment. What impressed me most is the spiritual commitments of the students from former communists countries. About 60 of them are attending Newbold. Many of them have suffered for their faith, especially for refusing to attend school on Saturday. A procession of them came to visit me on Friday morning at the Newbold guest house until 1:00 p. m. when the dean drove me to the Stanborough Park SDA Church for my last appointment. They shared with me their concern about the liberalism and laxity they are facing in this new environment. I challenged them to be a contagious positive witness to the school family and community people.

NEW FRENCH EDITION OF *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*

One of the pleasant surprises of the recent visit to London, England, was meeting Elder Johan Van Bignoot, the manager of our French Publishing House, near Paris, France. He flew from Paris to London for two specific reasons. First, he wanted me ask me permission to reprint the French edition of *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*, and second he wanted to listen to my presentations with the intent of organizing a lecture tour in France, Belgium, and Switzerland.

On Sabbath afternoon he explained to the Stanborough Park SDA Church, that the reason he flew from Paris to ask me permission to reprint the French version of my book *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY (DU SABBAT AU DIMANCHE)*, is because the book has generated a considerable interest for the Sabbath. In fact few days ago he received a call from a non-Adventist lady who wanted to buy 200 copies of *DU SABBAT AU DIMANCHE* to share with her friends who are studying the Sabbath.

When Elder Van Bignoot discovered that he could not fill the order because the Catholic French publisher had sold out the book, he decided to meet with me to arrange for an immediate reprint. After listening to my presentations, he was eager to invite me to present my SABBATH SEMINAR in France, Belgium, and Switzerland this coming October. I look forward to share my ministry with our believers in these countries.

THE STORY BEHIND THE FRENCH EDITION OF *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*

The story behind the French edition of *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY (DU SABBAT AU DIMANCHE)*, is fascinating. It almost sounds almost too nice to be true. I thought you would love to hear it.

A Belgian Benedictine monk, Ferdinand Poswick, Director of the Center for Biblical Information at the Abbey of Maredsous in Belgium, ordered a copy of my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, when it first came out from the pontifical Gregorian University Press in 1977. Being impressed by documents and arguments which indicate the continuity, validity, and value of the Sabbath for the Christian life today, Poswick decided to contact me during his trip to America in 1982. He never anticipated meeting me in Dallas at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

At the Dallas meeting, Poswick shared his great desire to translate and publish the book into French if I would give him permission. He felt that the book could contribute to the recovery of the biblical values of the Sabbath for today. I was delighted to grant him permission, forfeiting royalties in view of the cost of translation.

Poswick supervised the translation done by another Benedictine monk, Dominique Sebire, who worked for almost two years on this project, producing a superb French translation. The French title of the book is *DU SABBAT AU DIMANCHE*. Poswick and Sebire did all of this as a labor of love, without receiving a cent of compensation from anyone. They were inspired by the desire to help Christians rediscover the blessings of the biblical Sabbath for today. They verbalize this desire in the Foreword which I do my best here to translate from French into English.

“Did Jesus of Nazareth abolish the Sabbath? Paul, who was often accused by his own Jewish brethren of many transgressions—was he ever accused of Sabbathbreaking? Why then did Christians stop observing the Sabbath beginning from the fourth century? Was it perhaps to distinguish themselves from the Jews and to facilitate their integration in the rhythms and customs of the Constantinian empire?

“Doesn't Sabbathkeeping remain a very visible sign of the break that occurred between carnal Israel and those who claim to be spiritual Israel? At any rate, should we not prefer the sincere and truthful celebration of the Sabbath unto God to the pharisaism of a paganized Sunday? [Isn't this a daring statement to make by Benedictine monks?]

“Some Christians, the Seventh-day Adventists, often considered as marginal people among the main line denominations, do observe the Sabbath. One of their theologians wished to verify the historical sources dealing with the change from the observance of the Sabbath to the observance of Sunday. . .[biographical information about me follows]. For the reflection of Christians we present this research that the author has adapted for the American edition of his dissertation.

“May this thorough study stimulate biblical, patristic, and liturgical research, challenging everyone to return to the sources, improve the methodology of research, and reexamine afresh a truth [that is, the Sabbath truth] which the author presents with the conviction of someone who has found in the celebration of the Sabbath a spiritual enrichment which gives a special quality to his faith in the Resurrection and Return of Christ.”

Words fail to express my heartfelt appreciation to these dedicated Benedictine monks, not only for giving unstintingly their time and skills to this project, but also for daring to challenge Christians to “reexamine afresh” the values of the Sabbath which can bring spiritual enrichment to our Christian life today. It is hard for me to believe that they succeeded in having the French edition of my dissertation *Du Sabbat au Dimanche* published and distributed through Catholic bookstores. One of the result is the interest for the Sabbath reported by Elder Johan Van Bignoot, as indicated by the order for 200 copies from a non-Adventist lady. May the new edition that will soon be out in few weeks help many other to rediscover the blessings of the Sabbath.

NEW VIDEO RECORDING OF SABBATH SEMINAR

Many of the people who attended my seminars in London, asked me if they could obtain a video recording of my Sabbath lectures in the PAL system used by the European TV system. I reassured them that I would do my best to find a company that could make the conversion from the American to the European TV system.

Luckily I found a company close to Andrews University which has the equipment to convert American Videos in all the various systems used in different parts of the world. This means that now I will be able to offer my latest video recording of the SABBATH SEMINAR in any system used in different parts of the world.

The new video recording was done on March 15-17, 2002, by the TEXAS MEDIA CENTER at the First Fort Worth SDA church in Texas. We spent a lot of time and efforts preparing for this new recording. What makes this new recording special is the 100 plus PowerPoint slides used in each presentation. A total of about 600 slides are used for the complete seminar. I have spent countless hours preparing my PowerPoint slides which can fittingly illustrate the concepts presented. I am pleased that the new recording features all these visual aids. Within a month the new recording will also be available in DVD disks. A company in Boston is working on this project at this moment. I will inform you about the DVD version as soon as it is available.

The new video recording contains a total of 8 one-hour programs. They include my testimony on how the Lord opened the door for me to research the Sabbath/Sunday question at a Vatican University in Rome, the significant discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on the role of the Papacy in changing the Sabbath to Sunday, two meditations on the meaning and experience of the Sabbath for today, an update report on the latest Sabbath/Sunday developments, and a sacred concert on THE SABBATH IN SONGS produced with the help of two fine tenors in a television studio in South Bend, Indiana.

Many small congregations in America and overseas who are unable to invite me because of the travel costs, will now be able to enjoy the same messages which I deliver every weekend in different parts of the world. You will find these video presentations an ideal tool for sharing the message of the Sabbath with your church members and friends. Churches that have a video-projectors can view all the lectures on a large screen.

To make it possible for our believers in America and in English-speaking countries overseas to benefit from this special SABBATH SEMINAR, I have decided to offer this latest video recording at the following substantially reduced prices:

1. American Version: The price for the complete SABBATH SEMINAR, consisting of 8 one-hours lectures recorded in FOUR VIDEO CASSETTES (120 minutes each) for the American system, is only \$50.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00.
2. Overseas Version: The price for the complete SABBATH SEMINAR, consisting of 8 one-hours lectures recorded in FOUR VIDEO CASSETTES (120 minutes each) for any overseas system (PAL, SECAM, and NTSC) is only \$60.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00.

The overseas version costs \$10.00 more than the American version, because I have to pay \$30.00 more for the conversion. I am offering the overseas version at the basic cost price to facilitate its circulation.

The PAL system is used in Europe, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and numerous other countries. When ordering, please indicate in which country the videos will be used. I do have a chart which tells me the system I need to mail you.

The easiest way to order the new video recording is with your credit card. You can order by phone calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

THE AUSTRALIAN LECTURE TOUR?

In a previous lecture tour I announced the possibility of returning to Australia for a three weeks lecture tour this coming November 2002. So far I have received 8 invitations From New Zealand, Tasmania, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth. The problem is that none of the conferences have yet processed the service request. The South Pacific Division has stipulated that any invitation has to be processed through the regular channels. This means that if I do not receive an official request within the next few weeks, I will have to cancel the trip to Australia at this time.

I thought to post this information in order to encourage the various pastors who have invited me to contact their respective conferences and find out what is happening. If my Australian lecture tour has be postponed, this is not a problem. In fact, it is a welcomed relief, because I am already scheduled for speaking engagements in Singapore and Malaysia in September, and in France/Belgium/Switzerland in October. This last lecture tour was organized by Elder Johan Van Bignoot during my recent visit to London. These overseas invitations are in additions to the regular weekend seminars conducted in the USA.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of May 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometimes during 2002. I still have a few openings for the latter part of 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style is now presented with PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

MAY 18: SABBATH CONFERENCE AT ANDREWS UNIVERSITY

Location: Garber Auditorium in Chan Shun Hall at Andrews University, in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

For information feel free to call me at (616) 471-2919.

The conference is sponsored by the organization called PROCLAIMING THE SABBATH MORE FULLY. I will be delivering two PowerPoint lectures on Sabbath May 18th. The first is at 9:00 a. m. and is entitled "The Sabbath and the Savior." In this meditation I suggest seven ways the Sabbath enables us to experience the awareness of Christ's peace, presence and rest in our lives.

The second lecture will be given at 4:30 p.m. and is entitled "The Sabbath Under Crossfire." This popular lecture offers an update report on the latest Sabbath/Sunday developments. With the help of 150 PowerPoint slides I will discuss both the recent attacks against the Sabbath and its rediscovery by numerous scholars and church leaders.

MAY 24-25: REDLANDS SDA CHURCH, CALIFORNIA

Location: 520 Brookside Avenue, Redlands, California 92373

For information call Pastor Glenn Munson at (909) 793-6337.

The Redlands SDA church is located only few miles from Loma Linda and is inviting our local churches to attend this special rally.

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Thank you for sharing these Bible studies with your friends. Just let them know that they can receive this newsletter directly simply by emailing us their request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 14,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies

ENDTIME ISSUES 83: JESUS AND WINE
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In the ENDTIME ISSUES No. 81 we began a series of Bible studies designed to clarify the Biblical teachings regarding the use of alcoholic beverages. I feel that this is a timely and urgent issue that needs to be addressed because the use of alcoholic beverages costs the American society over \$117 billion a year and claims at least 100,000 American lives per year, 25 times as many as all illegal drugs combined. The problem is equally serious in most countries.

The real human cost of alcohol transcends statistical figures of dollars, disabilities and death. No one can count the real cost of alcohol to our society in terms of retarded children, violence in the home, child and spouse abuse, divorce, rape, robberies, murders, sickness and death.

In our own Seventh-day Adventist church, long known as a champion of temperance and abstinence, alcohol consumption is steadily rising. I have been made forcibly aware of this trend by such things as: frequent pleas for help from pastors and members facing drinking problems in their own congregations; published surveys in our church paper, *Adventist Review*, indicating that 58 percent of Adventist youth are experimenting with alcohol and 17 percent of Adventist College students are habitual drinkers; lectures given on our college campuses on alcohol recovery by visiting non-SDA experts; classes on substance abuse taught on our campuses; counseling centers set up on our campuses specifically to help students with drinking problems; the establishment by our General Conference of two organizations to meet the challenge of the steadily rising drinking of alcohol within the church: (1) a Study Commission on Chemical Dependency and the Church, and (2) the Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency. It is evident that the drinking problem is assuming alarming proportions in our own Adventist church.

A major factor which has contributed to the significant increase in the consumption of alcoholic beverages on the part of Christians in general and Adventists in particular, is the prevailing assumption that the Bible teaches moderation, not total abstinence. Billy Graham himself stated in an interview: "I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism . . . Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That wasn't grape juice as some of them try to claim." (*Miami Herald* (December 26, 1976), section A, p. 18).

The example and teachings of Christ are normative for Christian beliefs and practices. If, as many well-meaning Christians believe, Christ *made* fermented wine at the wedding of Cana, *commended* it in the parables of the new wine skins and the old wine, admitted to have *used* it in the description of His lifestyle ("eating and drinking") and *commanded* it to be used until the end of time at the institution of the Lord's Supper, then there can hardly be anything intrinsically wrong with a moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages. Simply stated, "If wine was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me!"

In view of the fundamental importance and far-reaching consequences of the teachings of Christ and the apostles on drinking, in this ENDTIME ISSUES we shall briefly examine some of the wine-related stories or sayings of Jesus. A fuller treatment of these passages is found in chapter 5 of my book *Wine in the Bible*, which I would be glad to mail to any interested readers. The book has been favorably reviewed by scholars of all persuasions. The content of the book is summarized also in two audio cassettes (one hour each). To receive a copy of the book and /or cassettes, feel free to call us at (616) 471-2915 or email us your request.

THE WEDDING OF CANA

Many well-meaning Christians believe that the “good wine” Jesus *made* at Cana (John 2:10) was “good” because of its high alcoholic content. This belief rests on three major assumptions. First, it is assumed that the Jews did not know how to prevent the fermentation of grape juice; and since the season of the wedding was just before Spring Passover (cf. John 2:13), that is, six months after the grape harvest, the wine used at Cana had ample time to ferment.

Second, it is assumed that the description given by the master of the banquet to the wine provided by Christ as “the good wine” means a high-quality alcoholic wine. Third, it is assumed that the expression “well drunk” (John 2:10) used by the master of the banquet indicates that the guests were intoxicated because they had been drinking fermented wine. Consequently, the wine Jesus made must also have been fermented. In view of the importance these assumptions play in determining the nature of the wine provided by Christ, we shall briefly examine each of them.

The first assumption is discredited by numerous testimonies from the Roman world of New Testament times describing various methods for preserving grape juice. We have seen in the ENDTIME ISSUES No. 81 that the preservation of grape juice unfermented was in some ways a simpler process than the preservation of fermented wine. Thus, the possibility existed of supplying unfermented grape juice at the wedding of Cana near the Passover season, since such a beverage could be kept unfermented throughout the year.

“The Good Wine.” The second assumption that the wine Jesus provided was pronounced “the good wine” (John 2:10) by the master of the banquet because it was high in alcoholic content, is based on the taste of twentieth-century drinkers who define the goodness of wine largely in proportion to its alcoholic strength. But this was not necessarily true in the Roman world of New Testament times where the *best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration.*

Pliny, for example, says that “wines are most beneficial (*utilissimum*) when all their potency has been removed by the strainer.”¹ Similarly, Plutarch points out that wine is “much more pleasant to drink” when it “neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind or passions”² because its strength has been removed through frequent filtering.

The Talmud indicates that drinking to the accompaniment of musical instruments on festive occasions such as a wedding was forbidden.³ The latter is confirmed by later testimonies of rabbis. For example, Rabbi S. M. Isaac, an eminent nineteenth-century rabbi and editor of *The Jewish Messenger*, says: “The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, *including the marriage feast*, ever use any kind of fermented drinks. In their oblations and libations, both private and public, they employ the fruit of the vine—that is, fresh grapes—unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction. Fermentation is to them always a symbol of corruption.”⁴ Though Rabbi Isaac’s statement is not quite accurate, since Jewish sources are not unanimous on the kind of wine to be used at sacred festivals, it still does indicate that some Jews used unfermented wine at wedding feasts.

“Well Drunk.” The third assumption that the expression “well drunk” (John 2:10) indicates that the wedding guest were intoxicated and thus “the good wine” provided by Christ must also have been intoxicating, misinterprets and misapplies the comment of the master of the banquet, and overlooks the broader usage of the verb. The comment in question was not made in reference to that particular wedding party, but to the general practice among those who hold feasts: “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine . . .” (John 2:10, RSV). This remark forms part of the stock in trade of a hired banquet master, rather than an actual description of the state of intoxication at a particular party.

Another important consideration is the fact that the Greek verb *methusko*, translated by some “well drunk,” can also mean “to drink freely,” as rendered by the RSV, without

any implication of intoxication. In his article on this verb in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Herbert Preisker observes that “*Methuskomai* is used with no ethical or religious judgment in John 2:10 in connection with the rule that the poorer wine is served only when the guests have drunk well.”⁵

Moral Implications. The verb *methusko* in John 2:10 is used in the sense of satiation. It refers simply to the large quantity of wine generally consumed at a feast, without any reference to intoxicating effects. Those who wish to insist that the wine used at the feast was alcoholic and that Jesus also provided alcoholic wine, though of a better quality, are driven to the conclusion that Jesus provided a large additional quantity of intoxicating wine so that the wedding party could continue its reckless indulgence. Such a conclusion destroys the moral integrity of Christ’s character.

Moral consistency demands that Christ could not have miraculously produced between 120 and 180 gallons of intoxicating wine for the use of men, women and children gathered at the Cana’s wedding feast, without becoming morally responsible for their intoxication. Scriptural and moral consistency requires that “the good wine” produced by Christ was fresh, unfermented grape juice. This is supported by the very adjective used to describe it, namely *kalos*, which denotes that which is morally excellent, instead of *agathos*, which means simply good.⁶

NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS

Christ’s statement that “new wine must be put into fresh wineskins” (Luke 5:38; Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22), is seen by moderationists as an indication that Jesus *commended* the moderate use of alcoholic wine. This view rests on the assumption that the phrase “new wine” denotes wine freshly pressed, but already in a state of active fermentation. Such wine, it is said, could only be placed in new wineskins because old skins would burst under pressure.

Fermenting New Wine? This popular interpretation is very imaginative but not factual. Anyone familiar with the pressure caused by gas-producing fermentation knows that no bottle, whether of skin or glass, can withstand the pressure of fermenting new wine. As Alexander B. Bruce points out, “Jesus was not thinking at all of fermented, intoxicating wine, but of ‘must,’ a non-intoxicating beverage, which could be kept safely in new leather bottles, but not in old skins which had previously contained ordinary wine, because particles of albuminoid matter adhering to the skin would set up fermentation and develop gas with an enormous pressure.”⁷

The only “new wine” which could be stored safely in new wineskins was unfermented must, after it had been filtered or boiled. Columella, the renowned Roman agriculturist who was a contemporary of the apostles, attests that a “*new wine-jar*” was used to preserve fresh must unfermented: “That must may remain always sweet as though it were fresh, do as follows. Before the grape-skins are put under the press, take from the vat some of the freshest possible must and put it in a *new wine-jar* [*amphoram novam*], then daub it over and cover it carefully with pitch, that thus no water may be able to get in.”⁸

Symbolic Meaning. This interpretation is further confirmed by the symbolic meaning of Christ’s saying. The imagery of new wine in new wineskins is an object lesson in regeneration. As aptly explained by Ernest Gordon, “The old wineskins, with their alcoholic lees, represented the Pharisees’ corrupt nature. The new wine of the Gospel could not be put into them. They would ferment it. ‘I came not to call the self-righteous but repentant sinners.’ The latter by their conversion become new vessels, able to retain the new wine without spoiling it (Mark 2:15-17, 22). So, by comparing intoxicating wine with degenerate Pharisaism, Christ clearly intimated what his opinion of intoxicating wine was.”⁹

"It is well to notice," Ernest Gordon continues, "how in this casual illustration, he [Christ] identifies wine altogether with unfermented wine. Fermented wine is given no recognition. It could be put into any kind of wineskin, however sorry and corrupt. But new wine is like new cloth which is too good to be used in patching rags. It is a thing clean and wholesome, demanding a clean container. The natural way in which this illustration is used suggests at least a general, matter-of-fact understanding among his Jewish hearers that the real fruit of the vine, the good wine, was unfermented."¹⁰

IS OLD WINE BETTER?

In Luke Christ's saying about new wine in fresh wineskins is followed by a similar and yet different statement: "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good'" (Luke 5:39). Though this statement is not found in the other Gospels, it forms an integral part of the narrative. Moderationists attach fundamental importance to this statement because it contains, in their view, Christ's outspoken commendation of alcoholic wine. Kenneth L. Gentry, for example, speaks of "the well-nigh universal prevalence of men to prefer old (fermented) wine over new (pre- or unfermented) wine. The Lord himself makes reference to this assessment among men in Luke 5:39: 'And no one, after drinking old wine, wishes for new; for he says, The old is good enough.'"¹¹

Meaning of "New Wine." The phrase "new wine—*oinos neos*" is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), to translate both fermented wine as in Job 32:19 and unfermented grape juice as in Isaiah 49:26. In the latter it translates the Hebrew *asis* which designates unfermented grape juice.

In the passage under consideration it is legitimate to infer that "new wine" has the same meaning in the whole passage, because it is used consecutively without any intimation of change of meaning. The metaphors in both sayings are used without confusion or contradiction. This means that if the "new wine" of verse 38 is, as shown earlier, unfermented grape juice, the same must be true of the "new wine" of verse 39.

Meaning of "Old Wine." Before discussing whether or not Christ expressed a judgment on the superior quality of "old wine" over "new wine," it is important to determine whether the "old wine" spoken of is fermented or unfermented. From the viewpoint of quality, age "improves" the flavor not only of fermented wine but also of unfermented grape juice. Though no chemical change occurs, grape juice acquires a finer flavor by being kept, as its fine and subtle particles separate from the albuminous matter and other sedimentations. Thus, the "old wine" esteemed good could refer to grape juice preserved and improved by age.

The context, however, favors the meaning of fermented wine, since Christ uses the metaphor of the "old wine" to represent the old forms of religion and the "new wine" the new form of religious life He taught and inaugurated. In this context, fermented old wine better represents the corrupted forms of the old Pharisaic religion.

Is "Old Wine" Better? In the light of this conclusion, it remains to be determined if Christ by this saying is expressing a value judgment on the superiority of "old [fermented] wine" over "new [unfermented] wine." A careful reading of the text indicates that the one who says "The old is good" is not Christ but anyone who has been drinking "old wine." In other words, Christ is not uttering His own opinion, but the opinion of those who have acquired a taste for the old wine. He says simply that anyone who has acquired a taste for old wine does not care for new. We know this to be the case. Drinking alcoholic beverages begets an appetite for stimulants and not for alcohol-free juices.

Christ's saying does not represent His approval of the superiority of old, fermented wine. Several commentators emphasize this point. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Norval Geldenhuys says: "The point at issue here has nothing to do with the comparative merits of old and new wine, but refers to the predilection for old wine in the case of those who are accustomed to drink it."¹²

R. C. H. Lenski states the same truth most concisely: "It is not Jesus who calls the old wine 'good enough,' but he that drank it. A lot of old wine is decidedly bad because it has not been prepared properly; age is one thing, excellence with age quite another."¹³

The Context of the "Old Wine." The view that old, fermented wine is better than new wine, would be false even if everyone on earth believed it! And in the passage we are considering it is contradicted by the context in which it occurs and by the whole purpose of the illustration. In the immediate context Jesus uses the same word (*palaios*) of old garments, which He obviously did not esteem as better than new ones. The statement about "old wine" seems to contradict the preceding one about "old garment," but the contradiction disappears when one understands the purpose of the illustration.

The purpose of the illustration is not to praise the superiority of old wine but to warn against an over-estimation of the old forms of religiosity promoted by the Pharisees. Such religiosity consisted, as verse 33 indicates, in the fulfillment of such external ascetic practices as frequent fasting and public prayer. To justify the fact that His disciples did not adhere to such external forms of religiosity, Christ used four illustrations: wedding guests do not fast in the presence of the bridegroom (vv. 34-35); new cloth is not used to patch an old garment (v. 36); new wine is not placed in old wineskins (vv. 37-38); new wine is not liked by those accustomed to drink the old (v. 39).

The common purpose of all the four illustrations is to help people accustomed to the old forms of religion, and unacquainted with the new form of religious life taught by Christ, to recognize that the old seems good only so long as one is not accustomed to the new, which in and of itself is better. In this context, the old fermented wine seems good only to those who do not know the better new wine.

WAS JESUS A GLUTTON AND A DRUNKARD?

More than nineteen centuries ago Jesus was accused of being "a glutton and a drunkard" because He came "eating and drinking" (Luke 7:33-34; Matt 11:19). Moderationists find in Jesus' description of His own lifestyle as "eating and drinking" (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34) an unmistakable proof that He openly admitted having *used* alcoholic wine. Moreover, it is argued, Jesus must have drunk alcoholic wine for His critics to accuse Him of being a "drunkard."

Social Lifestyle. This interpretation ignores several important considerations. The phrase "eating and drinking" is used idiomatically to describe the difference between the social lifestyle of Jesus and that of John the Baptist. John came "eating no bread and drinking no wine" (Luke 7:33), that is to say, he lived a lifestyle of full *social isolation*, while Christ came "eating and drinking," that is to say, He lived a lifestyle of free *social association*.

No Mention of "Wine." A significant point often overlooked is that Jesus did not mention "wine" in describing His own lifestyle. While of John the Baptist Jesus said that he came "eating no bread and drinking no *wine*," of Himself He simply said: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking." If Jesus had wanted it to be known that, contrary to John the Baptist He was a wine-drinker, then He could have repeated the word "wine" for the sake of emphasis and clarity.

By refusing to specify what kinds of food or drink He consumed, Christ may well have wished to deprive His critics of any basis for their charge of gluttony and drunkenness. The omission of "bread" and "wine" in the second statement (Matthew omits them in both statements) could well have been intended to expose the senselessness of the charge. In other words, Jesus appears to have said, "My critics accuse me of being a glutton and drunkard, just because I do not take meals alone but eat often in the presence of other people. I eat *socially*. But my critics actually do not know *what* I eat."

Even assuming that His critics actually saw Jesus drinking something, they would have readily accused Him of being a drunkard, even if they saw Him drinking grape juice, or water, for that matter. On the day of Pentecost critics charged the apostles with being drunk on grape-juice (*gleukos*—Acts 2:13). This goes to show that no matter what Jesus drank, His unscrupulous critics would have maligned Him as a drunkard.

Critics' Accusation Unsafe. To infer that Jesus must have drunk wine because His critics accused Him of being a “drunkard” means to accept as truth the word of Christ’s enemies. On two other occasions his critics accused Jesus, saying: “You have a demon” (John 7:20; 8:48). If we believe that Christ must have drunk some alcoholic wine because His critics accused Him of being a drunkard, then we must also believe that He had an evil spirit because His critics accused Him of having a demon. The absurdity of such reasoning shows that using critics’ accusations is not safe grounds for defining Biblical teachings.

Jesus answered the baseless charge of His critics, saying: “Yet wisdom is justified by all her children” (Luke 7:35). Textual evidence is divided between “children” and “works,” but the meaning of this cryptic statement remains the same, namely, that wisdom is to be judged by its results. The wisdom of God is vindicated by the works of goodness to which it gives birth. Thus, to infer on the basis of the aspersions of His critics that Jesus drank wine shows a complete lack of wisdom. The results of His life of self-denial speak for themselves.

THE COMMUNION WINE

Fundamental importance is attached to the “wine” of the Last Supper because Christ not only used it, but even *commanded* it to be used until the end of time as a memorial of His redeeming blood (Matt 26:28-29; Mark 14:24-25). It is widely believed that the wine of the Last Supper was alcoholic for two main reasons: (1) the phrase “fruit of the vine” is a figurative expression which was used as the functional equivalent of fermented wine, and (2) the Jews supposedly used only fermented wine at the Passover. This belief is discredited by several important considerations.

“The Fruit of the Vine.” The language of the Last Supper is significant. In all the synoptic gospels Jesus calls the contents of the cup “the fruit of the vine” (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). The noun “fruit” (*gennema*) denotes that which is produced in a natural state, just as it is gathered. Fermented wine is not the natural “fruit of the vine” but the unnatural fruit of fermentation and decay. The Jewish historian Josephus, who was a contemporary of the apostles, explicitly calls the three clusters of grapes freshly squeezed in a cup by Pharaoh’s cupbearer as “the fruit of the vine.”¹⁴ This establishes unequivocally that the phrase was used to designate the sweet, unfermented juice of the grape.

“All” to Drink the Cup. If the contents of the cup were alcoholic wine, Christ could hardly have said: “*Drink of it, all of you*” (Matt 26:27; cf. Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17), especially in view of the fact that a typical Passover cup of wine contained not just a sip of wine, but about three-quarters of a pint.¹⁵ Christ could hardly have *commanded* “all” of His followers to drink the cup, if its content were alcoholic wine. There are some to whom alcohol in any form is very harmful. Young children who participate at the Lord’s table should certainly not touch wine. There are those to whom the simple taste or smell of alcohol awakens in them a dormant or conquered craving for alcohol. Could Christ, who taught us to pray “Lead us not into temptation,” have made His memorial table a place of irresistible temptation for some and of danger for all? The wine of the Lord’s Supper can never be taken *freely* and *festally* as long as it is alcoholic and intoxicating.

The Law of Fermentation. Further support for the unfermented nature of the Communion wine is provided by the Mosaic law which required the exclusion of all fermented articles during the Passover feast (Ex 12:15; 13:6, 7). Jesus understood the meaning of the letter and spirit of the Mosaic law regarding “unfermented things,” as indicated by His warning against “the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt

16:6). "Leaven" for Christ represented corrupt nature and teachings, as the disciples later understood (Matt 16:12). The consistency and beauty of the blood symbolism cannot be fittingly represented by fermented wine, which stands in the Scripture for human depravity and divine indignation.

We cannot conceive of Christ bending over to bless in grateful prayer a cup containing alcoholic wine which the Scripture warns us not to look at (Prov 23:31). A cup that intoxicates is a cup of cursing and not "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10:16); it is "the cup of demons" and not "the cup of the Lord" (1 Cor 10:21); it is a cup that cannot fittingly symbolize the incorruptible and "precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). This gives us reason to believe that the cup He "blessed" and gave to His disciples did not contain any "fermented thing" prohibited by Scripture.

Historical Testimonies. Jewish and Christian historical testimonies support the use of unfermented wine at Passover/Lord's Supper. Louis Ginzberg (1873-1941), a distinguished Talmudic scholar who for almost forty years was chairman of the Department of Talmudic and Rabbinic Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, provides what is perhaps the most exhaustive analysis of the Talmudic references regarding the use of wine in Jewish religious ceremonies. He concludes his investigation by saying: "We have thus proven on the basis of the main passages both of the Babylonian Talmud and that of Jerusalem that unfermented wine may be used *lekatehillah* [optionally] for *Kiddush* [the consecration of a festival by means of a cup of wine] and other religious ceremonies outside the temple."¹⁶

Ginzberg's conclusion is confirmed by *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. Commenting on the time of the Last Supper, it says: "According to the synoptic Gospels, it would appear that on the Thursday evening of the last week of his life Jesus with his disciples entered Jerusalem in order to eat the Passover meal with them in the sacred city; if so, the wafer and the wine of the mass or the communion service then instituted by him as a memorial would be the unleavened bread and *the unfermented wine of the Seder service*."¹⁷

The custom of using unfermented wine at Passover has survived through the centuries not only among some Jews, but also among certain Christian groups and churches. For example, in the apocryphal *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle*, which circulated in the third century, a heavenly voice instructs the local Bishop Plato, saying: "Read the Gospel and bring as an offering the holy bread; and having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when He rose from the dead on the third day."¹⁸ This is a clear testimony of the use of freshly pressed grape juice in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The practice of pressing preserved grapes directly into the communion cup is attested by councils, popes and theologians, including Thomas Aquinas (A. D.1225-1274).¹⁹ The use of unfermented wine is well-documented especially among such Eastern Churches as the Abyssinian Church, the Nestorian Church of Western Asia, the Christians of St. Thomas in India, the Coptic monasteries in Egypt, and the Christians of St. John in Persia, all of which celebrated the Lord's Supper with unfermented wine made either with fresh or dried grapes.²⁰

CONCLUSION

In the light of the foregoing considerations we conclude that “the fruit of the vine” that Jesus commanded to be used as a memorial of His redeeming blood was not fermented, which in the Scripture represents human corruption and divine indignation, but unfermented and pure grape juice, a fitting emblem of Christ’s untainted blood shed for the remission of our sins.

The claim that Christ used and sanctioned the use of alcoholic beverages rest on unfounded assumptions, devoid of textual, contextual and historical support. The evidence we have submitted indicates that Jesus abstained from all intoxicating substances and gave no sanction to His followers to use them. May we follow the example of Jesus by abstaining from any substance that intoxicate our body and impairs our mind.

ENDNOTES

1. Pliny, *Natural History* 23, 24, trans. W. H. S. Jones, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961).
2. Plutarch, *Symposiac* 8, 7.
3. See *Sotah* 48a; also *Mishna Sotah* 9, 11.
4. Cited in William Patton, *Bible Wines. Laws of Fermentation* (Oklahoma City, n. d.), p. 83. Emphasis supplied.
5. Herbert Preisker, “*Methe, Methuo, Methuskomai*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1967), vol. 4, p. 547, emphasis supplied.
6. “It must be observed,” notes Leon C. Field, “that the adjective used to describe the wine made by Christ is not *agathos*, *good*, simply, but *kalos*, *that which is morally excellent or befitting*. The term is suggestive of Theophrastus’ characterization of unintoxicating wine as *moral (ethikos) wine*” (*Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* [New York, 1883], p. 57).
7. Alexander Balman Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels in The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 500.
8. Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 29.
9. Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine. An Exegetical Study* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 20.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
11. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986), p. 54.
12. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 198.
13. R. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio, 1953), p. 320.
14. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2, 5, 2.
15. According to J. B. Lightfoot, each of the four Passover cups contained “not less than the fourth part of a quarter of a hin, besides what water was mingled with it” (*The Temple-Service and the Prospect of the Temple* [London, 1833], p. 151). A hin contained twelve English pints, so that the four cups would amount to three-quarters of a pint each.
16. Louis Ginzberg, “A Response to the Question Whether Unfermented Wine May Be Used in Jewish Ceremonies,” *American Jewish Year Book* 1923, p. 414.
17. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904 edition, s. v. “Jesus,” vol. 5, p. 165.
18. *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 8, pp. 532-533.
19. For references and discussion, see *Wine in the Bible*, pp. 168-169.
20. Information about these churches is provided by G. W. Samson, *The Divine Law as to Wines* (New York, 1880), pp. 205-217. See also Leon C. Field, *Oinos: A Discussion of the Bible Wine Question* (New York, 1883), pp. 91-94; Frederic R. Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* (London, 1894), pp. 280-282.

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