

moderately. Does that make sense? The moderation view of “not much wine” makes Paul’s teaching nonsensical.

The “stumble principle” (Romans 14:21) also comes into play. “It is right (*kalon*, morally excellent, befitting) not ... to drink wine (*oinos*), or do anything that makes your brother stumble.” Here Paul is talking about food and drink that had been consecrated to idols. He discussed the same problem in 1 Corinthians 8:13. The principle Paul stated, however, is applicable to deacons whose ministry caused them to visit in the homes of members of the church. They must not eat or drink anything that might cause a brother to stumble into sin. Scripture calls for a moderate use of all good things (food; God-made grape juice) and total abstinence from all injurious things (man-made alcoholic wine).

Reprinted with permission by Charles Dailey

## Wine in the Bible

James E. Smith

Printed 2/10/2018

The “pastors” of a large Christian Church recently conducted a program on the local Christian television channel. The topic for discussion was whether or not Christians are permitted biblically to consume alcoholic beverages in moderation. The four “pastors” all saw nothing wrong with drinking in moderation. They assured the audience that Jesus drank alcoholic

Dr James E. Smith holds a B.A. and B.Th from *Cincinnati Christian Bible Seminary* and a Ph.D. From *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion* in New York. He is the author of more than 25 books about the Bible. Reprinted by permission from *The Christian Herald* of August, September and October, 2014.

wine, and made it for others to drink; and that God commanded Israel to bring alcoholic wine and other strong drinks to celebrate festivals.

The argument seemed to be 1) drunkenness is prohibited; 2) wine is commended; 3) therefore consuming wine without getting drunk is not sinful. The head “pastor” told how he had sworn off booze when he committed his life to Christ; but now that God had thrown down that stronghold, he and his wife saw nothing wrong with celebrating special occasions in their home with a glass of alcoholic wine. The tone of his comment almost seemed to suggest that he had reached a new spiritual plateau now that he was getting re-acquainted with alcoholic wine. Of course, he reassured his audience that we would never see him in a bar. But why not? Can’t one drink in moderation in a bar? The discussion was full of misinformation and faulty exegesis based entirely on English translations. It sent me to the library to re-read a book that impacted me years ago, *Wine in the Bible* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, a Seventh-Day Adventist scholar.

Written in 1989 this small volume has done definitive work on the nature of wine in the Bible. In this study I will recycle some of his research, for it is obvious that a new generation of young “pastors” needs to be educated. Bacchiocchi provides ample documentation for all the points that I bring up in this article.

### False Assumptions

Moderationists assume that grape juice in Bible days automatically turned to wine in short order after production due to the warm climate of the region. Not true. Wine production is a controlled

process that depends on the exact proportions of 1) sugar, 2) gluten or yeast, 3) water and 4) temperature (between 50 and 75 degrees). Grape juice simply left on its own degenerates into an acidic liquid that would not appeal to anyone as a beverage.

Another assumption of moderationists: in the biblical world they had no means of preserving grape juice unfermented. Not true. There were at least four different methods of keeping grape juice fresh. The ancients even had methods of preserving whole grapes for up to a year so that they could squeeze fresh juice anytime they pleased between harvests. And grape juice was a beverage highly desirable in the ancient world. Of course there were people who developed a taste for alcoholic wine, just as there are people today who have developed a taste for coffee, tea or even diet Coke.

### Biblical Terminology

In the first half of the Twentieth Century the term wine was used to refer to any beverage made from grapes, whether alcoholic or non-alcoholic. In more recent dictionaries the definition of wine has been restricted to fermented grape juice. We must distinguish between what a word means today and what a word originally meant. The use of wine in English translations of the Bible does not settle the issue. The Hebrew *yayin* and the Greek *oinos* are the words most frequently translated “wine.” They too have the same ambiguity as the English term. A scholarly study of the Hebrew *yayin* indicated that about half the 141 references were to alcoholic wine, and half to non-alcoholic wine. Only a study of context gives any clue about which type of wine is being referenced.

It is frequently asserted that the Greek *oinos* is used only of alcoholic beverages, and that is indeed what some Greek dictionaries assert. Yet passages from ancient sources can be produced in which *oinos* clearly refers to non-alcoholic grape juice. So *oinos* by itself does not decide the issue without supporting evidence.

To summarize: *yayin* and *oinos* have dual meanings. Clearly passages that speak negatively about the effects of wine are referring to the alcoholic variety. Passages praising or commending wine refer to grape juice.

### Wine in the Old Testament

Did the Hebrew *yayin* (wine) ever refer to alcoholic wine? Yes. Without question, we have examples of intoxication from *yayin* (wine) in the Old Testament. The terrible effects of alcohol are obvious in the stories of Noah (Genesis 9:20-21), Lot (Genesis 19:32-33) and Nabal (1

But isn't it just a drunkard who is condemned in 1 Timothy 3:3? A church leader is not to be a drunkard (*me paroinos*). Moderationists think this implies that one may drink in moderation. Literally the word means that the bishop is not to be near wine, i.e. near a place where wine is consumed. Thus the term goes beyond abstinence (*nephalios*) to avoidance, if at all possible.

But isn't it self-control that the Bible mandates, not abstinence? Another term used five times in the New Testament is *enkrateia*, often rendered “self-control.” Moderationists understand this to mean that they may consume alcoholic wine, as long as they do not go to excess. But the primary meaning of the term is “abstinence,” and the term complements the other terms used above. “Self-control” is not moderation but abstinence from whatever is harmful. We have explicit testimony from one of the earliest Church Fathers that James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, “drank no wine or strong drink.”

Some of the earliest Jewish Christian sects went to the extreme of rejecting both fermented and unfermented “wine” in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. They substituted water. If drinking of alcoholic wine was so common among Christ, the apostles and the earliest Christians, why would these early Christian sects practice total avoidance of grape products?

Are deacons permitted to be moderate drinkers? According to 1 Timothy 3:8 a deacon should not be addicted to much wine (*me oino pollo prosechontas*). Moderationists think this implies that, while a bishop must have no addiction to wine whatever (*me paroinon*), a deacon can be moderately addicted to wine. Such an interpretation rests on the assumption that what is declared wrong in excess is naturally right in moderation. But let's test this assumption:

1 Peter 4:4 says that Christians do not indulge in “the same excess of riot” as pagans. Does that mean that Christians are moderate in their rioting?

Timothy was advised to drink a little wine for medical purposes, and most likely it was grape juice. If Paul advised Timothy to drink only a little wine for medical purposes, then he could hardly have counseled deacons to drink wine moderately for pleasure. If Paul really believed that it was proper for a Christian to drink alcoholic wine moderately, then he would not have given Timothy such restrictive (“little”) and qualified advice (“for the sake of your stomach”). In the light of these facts, the phrase “not addicted to much wine” is most probably a loose form of speech intended to express abstinence from the use of wine. Paul required abstinence for a bishop (1 Timothy 3:2-3), a woman (1 Timothy 3:11) and an aged man (Titus 2:2); but a deacon (1 Timothy 3:8) and aged women (Titus 2:3) may drink

Does being “temperate” mean total abstinence? Yes. The Greek word translated “temperate” is *nephalion*. This word is used three times in the New Testament. In 1 Timothy 3:2, 11 it is used of church leaders and their wives. In Titus 2:2 it is used of older men. The primary meaning of this term is “physical abstinence, especially from wine.” It was used by Josephus to describe priests when they wear their priestly garments (*Antiquities* 3.12.2). The term is used in the Greek Old Testament in Leviticus 10:8 for the prohibition of strong drink to priests when engaging in official duties.

In Titus 1:7-8 an elder/bishop must also be “no drunkard” (*me paroinon*). The phrase literally means “not near or beside wine.” What Paul is saying is that a church leader must not only abstain from drinking alcoholic wine, but also stay away from places where drinking takes place.

Was there drunkenness at the communion table in Corinth? Paul wrote: “One is hungry and another is drunk” (1 Corinthians 11:21). Does this not prove that the Christians consumed alcoholic wine? Even were this so, it would be dangerous to infer from a local perversion at Corinth a general practice in the church. The verb translated is drunk (*methuei*) does not always signify intoxication. The context determines its exact meaning.

In the case of 1 Corinthians 11:21 the verb is antithetical to *peina*, hungry. This requires that the verb be understood here in the sense of “satiated; filled to capacity.” So the overfilled man is compared to the underfilled man. Drunkenness was not the problem at the Corinthian communion table, but rather excessive indulgence in consumption. Paul admonishes that they should satisfy their hunger at home.

Do New Testament admonitions to sobriety mandate abstinence?

Yes. The word “sober” (*sophron*) and related words, occur 15 times. English translations usually translate “temperate” (1 Timothy 3:2), “sober,” (Titus 2:12), “right mind” (Mark 5:15) and the like. The term refers to mental sobriety, i.e. being rational and intellectually sound. The word is frequently used in Greek writings, Jewish writings, and early Christian writings to refer to abstinence from sensual desires, especially abstinence from wine. In three places Peter used the verb *nepho*, which means, “to be sober, in contrast to being drunk” (1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). Josephus used this verb in reference to priests who were not permitted to drink wine when they were engaged in priestly service (*Antiquities* 3.12.2; *Wars* 5.5.7). So, in their exhortations to sobriety, both Peter and Paul used Greek terms that in their primary meaning refer to abstinence, not just moderation. See also 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 where the verb refers both to mental vigilance and physical abstinence.

Samuel 25:36-37). Isaiah condemns even some of the religious leaders for intoxication (Isaiah 28:7).

Was grape juice considered a blessing? Yes. New wine (*tirosh*) or grape juice was a symbol of divine blessing (Genesis 27:28). *Tirosh* clearly refers to pressed grape juice in many passages. It is this “wine” that is regarded as a blessing, and its removal is regarded as a curse (Hosea 2:9).

Does “gladden the heart” refer to intoxication? No. If it did, then the Bible could be charged with a monstrous contradiction— to condemn drunkenness (as all acknowledge) and at the same time celebrate the fact that wine “gladdens the heart.” It is *tirosh* (grape juice) that gladdens the heart (Psalm 4:7). When *yayin* (wine) is said to gladden the heart (Psalm 104:14-15) it must be referring also to the *tirosh*, much like Coke is used to refer to Diet Coke, Coke One, Cherry Coke, etc. In Bible days grape juice and milk were considered beverages for young and old alike. The ancients loved sweet beverages, sometimes even adding honey to grape juice to make it sweeter still.

Does a “heart merry with wine” refer to intoxication? Yes. When Amnon’s heart was merry with wine he certainly was drunk (2 Samuel 13:28) as was King Ahasuerus (Esther 1:10).

Did the Lord command his people to consume alcoholic wine in worship assemblies? No. It is true that certain tithe offerings were to be eaten in a worship meal before the Lord at the sanctuary. That included “wine” (*tirosh* = grape juice). But what about Deuteronomy 14:26 which authorizes the purchase of “wine” (*yayin*) and “strong drink” (*shekar*) and the subsequent consumption of both in the sanctuary? The term *shekar* appears 23 times in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere except here denotes an intoxicating beverage disapproved by God (e.g., Proverbs 20:1; Isaiah 5:11). Is it really likely that God would commend in Deuteronomy 14:26 what he condemned in 22 other passages? Either the term *shekar* here is used differently, or Scripture contradicts itself. In Deuteronomy 14:23 it is clear that those who come to this harvest festival will be drinking *tirosh*, grape juice. So it makes no sense that those coming from a distance would be permitted to purchase alcoholic wine for the same festival. *Shekar* here may be related to a word found in sister languages which refers to a beverage made from honey or dates. Some dictionaries derive our English words “sugar” and “cider” from the Hebrew *shekar*. Under God’s judgment *shekar*, which is normally sweet, becomes bitter (Isaiah 24:9). Bottom line: there simply is not enough evidence dogmatically to affirm that *shekar* in Deuteronomy 14:26 is an intoxicating drink; but there is contextual evidence to suggest that it is not.

Were the drink offerings of the Mosaic system intoxicating wine? The word used is *yayin* (e.g., Exodus 29:40), so language-wise either type of wine could be intended; but in cereal offerings nothing leavened or fermented could be offered (Leviticus 2:11). Most likely the same rule applied to drink offerings. Numbers 18:12 lists *tirosh* (grape juice) along with oil and grain as the firstfruits that should be given to the Lord. These are harvest products, not man-made products like fermented wine. Verse 27 makes it clear that “the best of the wine” was the fresh produce of the wine press, i.e. grape juice. There were rabbis who prohibited intoxicating beverages as offerings for the temple.

Did the Old Testament ever specifically condemn the use of intoxicating wine? Yes. Proverbs 23:29-35. To avoid the shame and suffering caused by alcoholic drinks, Solomon advises that we refrain from even looking at wine literally “when it makes itself red” (Proverbs 23:31). This refers to grape juice in the fermentation process as the rest of the line clearly indicates. Solomon goes on to spell out the consequence when someone does not heed his exhortation. His solution to the abuse of immoderate drinking is to counsel total abstinence, not moderation.

Other proverbs also speak of the nature of alcoholic beverages and counsel against their use: Proverbs 4:17; 20:1; 23:20; 31:4-5. We should note in these verses that it is the alcoholic wine itself that is condemned, not just the abuse thereof.

Did the prophets take a stand against the use of alcoholic wine? Yes. Habakkuk 2:5 says that wine is treacherous. Thus, Habakkuk concurs with Solomon’s verdict that wine is a mocker.

Does the Bible recognize the negative consequences of drinking alcoholic wine? Yes. 1) Wine distorts one’s perception of reality (Isaiah 28:7; Proverbs 23:33); 2) Drinking dulls thinking abilities (Leviticus 10:9-11; Ezekiel 44:23); 3) Drinking corrupts morals (Genesis 9:21; 19:32; Habakkuk 2:15; Isaiah 5:11-12); 4) Drinking causes sickness. In fact it is a sickening poison (Proverbs 23:32; Hosea 7:5); and 5) Drinking disqualifies one for civil service.

What about Proverbs 31:6-7? “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.” Are we then to assist people to drown their troubles in alcohol? In the context there is a strong admonition to rulers to abstain from wine and strong drink because these impair their judicial duties. In the light of the prohibition of rulers drinking wine in verse 5, it is not likely that verse 6 would recommend the moderate use of wine to relieve life’s stress and tension.

Doesn’t 1 Timothy 5:23 condone the use of alcoholic wine? “Use a little wine for the sake of your stomach.” Clearly, Timothy was a teetotaler.

Out of loving concern for his health Paul advised him for his own well-being to drink a little wine. This is advice for Timothy; it was never intended to be a rule for the whole church. The wine was not for pleasure but was regarded as medicine. The verse literally reads: “No longer drink water alone, but use with a little wine for the stomach.” The little wine was to be mixed in with the water. The practice of mixing one part of wine to two, three, five or more parts of water was common in the ancient world. Note that Paul said “take” not “drink.” This is the same verb used by a doctor in prescribing a medication. Similarly the adjective “little” implies a very moderate use of wine. That being said, it is not even certain that the wine (*oinos*) here is alcoholic wine. We do have testimonies from the ancient world about using grape juice for medical purposes.

Did not Paul condemn only getting drunk with wine? In Ephesians 5:18 Paul urged: “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.” Moderationists see here a clear biblical sanction of moderate drinking, for Paul did not exhort total abstinence from wine. The contrast here is not between moderation and excess, but between fullness of wine and fullness of the Spirit. The filling by one excludes the filling by the other. One cannot be partly filled with the one, if he is totally filled with the other. The same contrast between being filled with the Spirit and being filled with intoxicating wine is made in Luke 1:15; Acts 2:4, 15. A number of ancient, as well as modern, translations understand Ephesians 5:18 as a condemnation—not of drunkenness but of wine itself, i.e. “wine which is debauchery” (*asotia*). The word means “unsafe, lost beyond recovery.” This certainly is a legitimate translation, unless one already has decided that there is nothing wrong with drinking alcoholic wine in moderation. If Paul had meant to say that there is no redeeming quality in alcoholic wine, it is hard to see how he could have otherwise arranged the Greek words in this verse. So it was not just the abuse of alcoholic wine that Paul condemns, but the use.

Was any person ever made a better Christian by the use of intoxicating drink? Does alcoholic wine help one pray more fervently, or preach more accurately, or counsel more cogently? But more importantly, does Paul sanction the moderate use of alcoholic wine, providing one does not get drunk? Well, if I told my students, “Don’t get high on drugs” is that saying, “It’s okay to use drugs as long as you don’t get high?” Surely not!

stimulants and not for alcohol-free juices. 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 religion promoted by the Pharisees.

Did Jesus drink alcoholic beverages? There is no evidence that he did. It is true that he was accused of being a drunkard (Matthew 11:19); and Jesus said “The Son of Man came eating and drinking” (Luke 7:34). So the example of Christ sanctions the drinking of alcoholic wine in moderation, or does it? In this passage the phrase “eating and drinking” is idiomatic of the difference in the social lifestyles of John and Jesus. John practiced social isolation, while Christ practiced social association. So the emphasis here is not on alcohol vs. non-alcohol, but on social lifestyle. Jesus’ critics accused him of being “a glutton and a drunkard” because of his socialization as compared to John. Both charges were groundless. John, being a Nazirite (Luke 1:15), abstained not only from alcoholic wine, but from any fruit of the vine (Numbers 6:1-4). Jesus was not a Nazirite, so therefore was not under the restrictions of the Nazirite vow to abstain from grape juice. It is not necessary to assume that because Jesus “came drinking” that he drank all kinds of wine, both fermented and unfermented. If that were true of drinking, the same would be true for eating. Yet no one argues that Jesus ate all kinds of foods, both good and bad, clean and unclean. Furthermore, the charge that Jesus was a drunkard came from his critics, who also accused him of gluttony and blasphemy.

These charges were not accurate, so we should not be too swift to embrace the first. Moderationists agree that drunkenness is sinful; Jesus was accused of being a drunkard. If the critics are credible witnesses, then Jesus must have been a sinner! But if we are going to discount the credibility of the critics, then there is no proof in their words that Jesus drank alcoholic wine.

### Wine in the Early Church

Scoffers at Pentecost accused the apostles of being “filled with new wine” (Acts 2:13). But if the mockers really wanted to charge the disciples with drunkenness, they surely would have accused them of being filled with wine (*oinos*). According to the best authorities, new wine (*gleukos*) designates exclusively unfermented grape juice. So the charge is tongue in cheek: “These abstainers have made themselves drunk on grape juice.”

But why didn’t Peter respond by just denying that Christians drank at all? Because they did drink new wine (*gleukos*), and thus, such a denial would make it appear that the Christians were Nazirites, i.e. total abstainers from the product of the vine.

The sense of the passage is, “If you’re going to give strong drink, give it to someone who is perishing.” Thus alcohol is not fit for thinking, responsible people, it is only fit for those dying without hope. The passage envisions someone dying of excruciating agony. Some of the rabbis interpreted Proverbs 31:6 as a recommendation to give intoxicants to deaden the pain of those being executed. In this connection it is interesting to note that Christ rejected spiked wine (an intoxicant) when he was on the cross (Mark 15:23). Proverbs 31:6 sanctions the use of an intoxicant for serious medical purposes, but that is all.

Does Hosea 4:11 sanction the “one wine” theory? The verse reads: “Wine and new wine take away the understanding.” Moderationists draw the inference that new wine (*tirosh*) was thus not grape juice, for it could be just as intoxicating as wine (*yayin*). *Tirosh* occurs 38 times in the Old Testament, 33 of those times along with “grain” and/or “oil.” The three terms refer to the harvest product, not what is manufactured from the harvest product. *Tirosh* may refer to whole grapes (Micah 6:15) or the juice that is “found in the cluster” (Isaiah 65:8). Does the term in Hosea 4:11 also refer to newly fermented wine that has not fully aged? If we granted, for the sake of argument, that the new wine here was intoxicating, it would only prove abstinence, not moderation. But an examination of the context in Hosea 4:11 indicates that new wine does not denote fermented wine.

First, the verb “take away” (*yiqqah*) is never used in the sense of intoxication in the Bible. Second, fornication which is listed first in the verse does not literally produce intoxication. What connects “fornication, wine and new wine” in this passage is not physical intoxication, but spiritual apostasy. New wine (*tirosh*) took away Israel’s allegiance to God, in the sense that new wine was a gift of Yahweh (Hosea 2:8) which Israel had prostituted by using in the worship of Baal. So fornication (idolatry), wine (sensual gratification) and new wine (worldly possessions) draws hearts away from God. Moses predicted the very thing that Hosea said happened (Deuteronomy 32:14-16).

Is it true that Old Testament priests were forbidden to drink intoxicants prior to service at the altar? Yes (Leviticus 10:9). Some think that we, as Christian priests, serve perpetually at our altar (Christ) and therefore should be no less sober in that service than the sons of Aaron were in theirs.

### Jesus and Wine

Moderationists claim that Jesus made fermented wine at Cana, commended alcoholic wine in his parables, and openly admitted to

having consumed alcoholic wine in his teaching. Let us examine the evidence.

Why did Jesus talk about putting new wine in fresh wineskins in Matthew 9:17? Grape juice was stored in new wineskins in order to preserve both the wine and the wineskins. The usual explanation is that the grape juice, in fermenting and expanding, would burst old wineskins. But this can hardly be what Jesus intended. New wineskins, no matter how strong, could not resist the tremendous pressure of fermentation. Grape juice intended for the fermentation process was placed in a series of four tanks over the first few days, then was poured into large jars, which were then sealed. If the aim was to preserve the grape juice unfermented it might be placed in new wineskins. This avoided some of the albuminous matter adhering to the sides of old wineskins, which could quickly trigger fermentation should air get in. So one would put new wine in new wineskins when the intention was to preserve the juice unfermented.

Did the Greek *oinos* ever refer to alcoholic wine? Yes. Paul tells us not to get drunk with wine (*oinos*) but to be filled with God's Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). As a symbol for God's wrath, the wicked are said to drink the wine (*oinos*) of God's wrath poured unmixed into the cup of his anger (Revelation 14:10). Unmixed means undiluted, i.e. the wine had full potency. Cf. Revelation 16:19; 17:1-2.

Is the Greek *oinos* ever used to refer to non-alcoholic wine? Yes. It is used at least 33 times in the Greek Septuagint translation for grape juice (*tirosh*). One example is Proverbs 3:10. This alone is sufficient to establish that *oinos* can refer to grape juice as well as to alcoholic wine.

Was alcoholic wine used in communion? No. Even in English translation, the term "wine" is never used in connection with the Lord's Supper. It is always "the fruit of the vine." We can document from Josephus that the phrase "fruit of the vine" was used of fresh grape juice (*Antiquities* 2.5.2). Even if "fruit of the vine" is the functional equivalent of *oinos* (wine), we have seen that *oinos* itself covers the entire range of grape beverage products, from grape juice to alcoholic wine. Yet in discussing communion the ambiguous *oinos* is never used. Fruit (*gennema*) points to what is produced in a natural state. Fermented wine is not the natural "fruit of the vine." In fact, the practice of pressing preserved grapes directly into the Lord's Supper cup continued at least 700 years into the Christian age. The practice of adding water to communion juice can be documented for at least 300 years into the Christian age, but not for the reasons generally thought. The purpose was not to weaken alcoholic wine, but to thin the thick juices of the crushed clusters. Boiled down

unfermented grape juice was used in the ancient world as a drink diluted with water. The argument that only alcoholic wine was used in Passover at the time of Christ also has been shown to be untrue. Grape juice was, and is, just as acceptable as alcoholic wine, and some rabbis argued that it was more so. Mosaic Law required the absence of all fermented materials during the Passover feast.

Did Jesus make alcoholic wine at Cana? No. As we have seen, *onios* (wine) does not necessarily refer to alcoholic wine. The assertion that the wine at the wedding feast had to be alcoholic because it was too far removed from the fall grape harvest, shows no awareness of the ability of the people of the time to preserve grape juice unfermented. The assumption that the "wine" Jesus produced was called "the good" (*ton kalon*) because it was fermented is a commentary on the taste of the commentator rather than the text of Scripture. "Good" has nothing to do with the power to intoxicate, but with the sweetness of the beverage. In fact, in the Roman world the best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration. The ancients loved grape juice, the fresher the better.

There are certainly different qualities of unfermented grape juice, depending on the variety of grapes used, and the method used in preserving the juice since harvest. But what about the comment of the banquet master: "Every man at the beginning sets forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but you have kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10)? "Well drunk" (*methusko*) is used here in the sense of saturated, filled to capacity, not necessarily "intoxicated." The point the banquet master was making is that, when men have had their fill of any beverage, they generally find more of the same distasteful. For that reason the best "wine" was usually offered first. So there is nothing in this passage which requires that Christ produced alcoholic wine.

Did Jesus himself favor alcoholic wine? No. Luke 5:39 reads: "No one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good.'" Clearly the "new wine" in the two preceding verses is grape juice. It is a fact that 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" of Luke 5:39 could refer to grape juice preserved and improved by age. But even if "old wine" here does refer to alcoholic wine, Jesus is not expressing his own judgment on its merits. He is stating a truism that those who have acquired a taste for old wine do not care for new. We know that drinking alcoholic beverages begets an appetite for