

Furthermore, Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:1-4 that in the last days, wickedness will abound and become worse.

*“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”*

The last days before Christ returns will be dangerous because there will be great wickedness and sin proliferating in the earth. The state of this world will only get from bad to worse, until that final day when Christ shall come.

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## TEETOTALISM

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The B-P position on alcoholic beverages is that of abstinence and not moderation. While the Orthodox Presbyterian Church believed that it was all right for them to drink in moderation, the B-P Church believed that one is to abstain fully from all alcoholic beverages. Does the Bible teach moderation or total abstinence? To understand this, we want to first look at the words in the Bible that are used to describe wine. Following that, we want to consider what the Bible says about alcoholic wine. Finally, we want to answer some of the objections against the teetotal position.

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## DEFINITION OF WINE

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There are different words used in the Bible to describe ‘wine’. Wine was a staple in the nation of Israel. Israel being an agricultural nation, one of the products that Israel manufactured was grapes. They would process these grapes by pressing them and producing grape juice. They would then store the juice of the grapes into large vats. Over the process of time, the grape juice would ferment, and when that happens, the juice becomes increasingly alcoholic. If left to ferment, the alcoholic grape juice would eventually become vinegar. When we see the Bible using the word ‘wine’, it can refer to any part of this process from grape juice to alcoholic wine to vinegar, depending on the word used and the context in which it is found.

There are four words in Hebrew used to describe wine in the Old Testament.<sup>32</sup>

**Yayin** (יַיִן): This is a general term for wine (141 times). It can be used to describe (1) grapes or anything from the vine (Numbers 6:4), (2) freshly pressed unfermented grape juice from the vine (Isaiah 16:10), or (3) intoxicating drink (Proverbs 20:1).

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<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Khoo et al., “Bible-Presbyterianism - History & Theology,” unpublished lecture notes of the Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore, 2019, 129-130.

**Tirosh** (תִּירוֹשׁ): Often translated as “wine” or “new wine” (38 times). This is used to describe the fresh produce of wine from the field, often used in conjunction with other produce like grain and oil (Numbers 18:12).

**Shekar** (שֶׁכָּר): Often translated as “strong drink” (42 times). It is used to describe wine from other kinds of fruit rather than grapes (e.g. barley or grain).

**Mimsak** (מִמְסַךְ): Often translated as “mixed wine”. This refers to cocktails or wine that is mixed with spices.

There are three words in the Greek to describe wine in the New Testament.<sup>33</sup>

**Oinos** (οἶνος): General term for wine, close equivalent to *yayin*.

**Sikera** (σίκερα): Refers to sweet intoxicating drink made from something other than grapes (Friberg). It is similar to the Hebrew word *shekar*.

**Gleukos** (γλευκος): This word refers to sweet wine that has just begun the process of fermentation (Louw-Nida).

## WARNING AGAINST WINE

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In the book of Proverbs, the Bible is clear with regard to the dangers and effects that alcoholic wine has on a person. There are two passages that we would like to consider.

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### PROVERBS 23:29-35

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Proverbs 23:29-35 reads,

*“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”*

Firstly, the Bible describes the destructive nature of drinking and how one ought to flee from drinking.<sup>34</sup> Though the word for wine here is ‘*yayin*’, which can refer to both non-alcoholic and alcoholic grape juice depending on its context, the context here demands for an alcoholic wine because it is used in conjunction to “mixed wine” (*mimsāk*). Wine is not something that one ought to toy with. The posture of God’s

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 131-132.

Word towards alcoholic wine is that of fleeing. The Bible says that we are not even to look at it, lest we are tempted by it, and we fall into the trap of drinking. That is the extent in which the Bible teaches us to avoid alcoholic beverages. It is not only that we can drink so long as we are not drunk, but a total abstinence of it. Not only are we not supposed to consume them in moderation, but we are also to avoid them completely and not even look at them lest we are tempted to consume it.

Secondly, drinking alcoholic beverages bring about dangers and detriment to our Christian conduct and testimony.<sup>35</sup> It brings about addiction (v.30), whereby a person will tarry long in it. In doing so, he becomes a slave to sin, serving the flesh rather than God. It also brings about contentions and babblings (v.29), whereby a person will not be guarded in the things he says and as a result offends. Drinking also brings about riotous conduct (v.33), of promiscuity and perverseness. Furthermore, drinking causes a person to have a skewed perception of reality (vv.34-35), whereby he is like a man floating about, not in control of his mental and physical faculties, and as a result he says and does things that harm the testimony of Christ.

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### PROVERBS 20:1

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Another verse in Proverbs that speak of the same idea is in Proverbs 20:1,

*“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”*

The word used for wine here is “*yayin*”, while the word for strong drink is “*shekar*”. While either can be used in reference to both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, the context determines the meaning. In this case, it would point to alcoholic beverages that has the power to deceive a person. The nature of alcoholic wine is that it mocks and is deceptive. It makes you think that you are in control of your faculties even when you are not. It is also raging, which means to cause you to be boisterous and turbulent. It causes you to behave in a way that is uncontrolled and unchristian.

## OBJECTIONS AGAINST TEETOTALISM

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The Bible being clear about its position towards alcoholic beverages, nevertheless, there may be some who use Scripture to support their moderate position. In this section, we want to interact with some of these objections and understand them biblically.

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### JESUS TURNED WATER INTO WINE

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Some argue that it is all right for Christians to drink because Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. This miracle is recorded for us in John 2:1-11. These argue that since Jesus created wine, He condoned the drinking of wine. Is this true?

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

First, the word for ‘wine’ in this passage is the word ‘*oinos*’, which is a general term for wine and can refer to both alcoholic and non-alcoholic wine. To understand what kind of wine it refers to, we have to look into the context.<sup>36</sup> The crux of this passage is in verse 10 where the Bible says,

*“And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.”*

From the immediate context, we see that the wine which Jesus made was said to be “good”. This is in contrast to the wine which is “worse”. To the Jew, the wine that is good is the wine in which the fermentation process has not yet begun. The more it ferments, the worse it becomes, for it loses its sweetness and becomes increasingly sour. Therefore, the wine that Jesus created cannot be alcoholic in nature. It was good, as if it was freshly pressed.

Furthermore, from the larger context of Scripture, we know that the Bible speaks strongly against alcoholic wine, whereby one is not even to look at it. To say that the Lord Jesus Christ created alcoholic wine would make God inconsistent and attributing sin to the Son of God.

Moreover, the common wine in biblical times is not like the wine drunk today that has been manufactured to produce a high alcoholic content. The alcohol content of the wine in biblical times was much lower (2-3%).

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### DRINK BUT NOT DRUNK

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Another passage of Scripture that is often used to support drinking is Ephesians 5:18, *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;”* These argue that the Bible speaks against drinking only insofar as a person is drunk with excess of wine. In other words, as long as a person is not drunk, it is all right to drink.

There are a few problems to this interpretation of Ephesians 5:18. First, the word “excess” comes from the Greek word “*asotia*”, which points to a life that is wasteful, profligate, riotous, and full of debauchery. In other words, the verse can be understood, “And be not drunk with wine, in which there is riotous and wasteful living”. The word “excess” does not point to an excess of alcohol, but an excessive living.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, when understood in the context of this verse, it cannot make sense for this verse to be advocating a moderate drinking. The contrast to being drunk with wine is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The picture here is that of control and result. Wine controls a person which results in his riotous living. But for the Christian, he must be fully controlled by the Holy Spirit which will result in righteous living. He is not to allow alcohol to control him in any way, whether little or much.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 130-131.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 133-134.

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## PAUL PROMOTED MODERATE DRINKING

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Another argument that some use to justify moderate drinking is 1 Timothy 5:23, “*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.*” These argue that since Paul told Timothy to take a little wine, it is all right for the Christian to drink in moderation and even for health purposes.

To understand this passage rightly, we have to understand the context of this verse.<sup>38</sup> Timothy had stomach issues which was exacerbated by the water which he drank. In those days, water was carried from place to place via aqueducts. These are open pipes that were open to the elements, which resulted in the water being contaminated. The common practice in those days was to mix a little wine with the water to purify it. However, Timothy being wary of wine and mindful to keep the qualifications of the elder (1 Timothy 3:8) abstained even from purifying the water he drank. Paul saw it fit to ask Timothy to treat the water with wine for the sake of his health. The alcoholic content in this water would have been extremely diluted which cannot result in drunkenness or impairment, much like the trace amounts of alcohol found in other common food items. This cannot be used to support the moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages engineered to have a high alcoholic content, designed to cause drunkenness.

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## FOREIGN MISSIONS SUPPORT

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The Orthodox Presbyterian Church believed that we only ought to support missions that are part of our denomination. However, the B-P Church was convinced that they can support foreign missions of any denomination so long as they hold on to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, which is necessary for salvation.

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## PUPROSE OF MISSIONS

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To understand whether we can support foreign missions of other denominations, we must first understand the purpose of missions. The purpose of missions is given to us by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20,

*“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*

Here, the Lord Jesus Christ taught us that the primary purpose of evangelism is the salvation of the lost. We are simply to go into all the nations and share the gospel to all. Therefore, as long as a church teaches the true gospel that is able to save a person from hell, we can readily support their work in doing the work of evangelism.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 134.

## PRIORITY OF MISSIONS

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Nevertheless, the Bible also speak of how a church is to send missionaries of their own to do the work of evangelism. Acts 13:1-3 gives us the example,

*“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”*

The church in Antioch sent her own missionaries to the work. These were the ones whom they supported primarily. These were chosen by the Holy Spirit through the leaders of the church, and when they were chosen, they were sent by the church, meaning that the church was the one whom they were to be accountable to, and that they were supported by the church.

The priority of support would be first to those whom the church has sent forth. The church has the responsibility to care for those whom they have sent forth. When that is done, then missions support can be given to those of other churches.