

Alcohol in the Bible

By Pastor Doug Baker, D.Min.
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Introduction

Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and mainline Protestant churches teach that the Bible permits the moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages but condemns intoxication.¹ More conservative Protestant churches usually discourage their members from consuming alcoholic beverages. In this way, Christianity as a whole is badly divided on this matter. In this paper, we attempt to determine if the Bible teaches moderation only or total abstinence from alcohol. To do this, we will examine all of the Biblical words which refer to drinks other than water and milk. In the course of this examination, we provide some historical information on the practices of ancient Middle Eastern cultures and the usage meaning of the English word “wine” as well. We will take a closer look at various New Testament passages which are used by defenders of the moderationist viewpoint. We also identify a method from within Scripture itself that tells us whether God approves of alcohol or condemns it.

Difficulties in Interpreting Scripture Accurately Regarding Alcohol

Three factors make it difficult to properly interpret the Scriptures regarding its teaching on alcohol: (1) the modern usage meaning of the English word “wine”; (2) the prevailing belief that ancients did not know how to prevent the juice of the grape from naturally fermenting; and (3) the difficulty of ascertaining the meaning of several words in the Biblical languages.

The English Word “Wine”

Modern English-speaking people use the word “wine” exclusively to refer to the fermented juice of the grape, which, of course, contains alcohol. Because of this, the assumption is made that the word “wine” has always meant this, and that therefore, whenever the Bible speaks about wine, it must be fermented wine. However, this is a mistaken assumption even for the English word “wine.” That word originally referred to the juice of the grape, whether in its fermented or unfermented state, as a check of several eighteenth-century English dictionaries attest.² Of course,

¹ By mainline Protestant churches, we refer to Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists, primarily, except that most Methodist churches use pure grape juice for their communion wine.

² Abel Boyer, *The Royal Dictionary, First French and English*, 1702, p. 579 @ <https://books.google.com/books?id=XURTeB4FB-AC&pg>; Benjamin Martin, *A New English Dictionary*. London: J. Hodges, 1748, p. 700 @ <https://books.google.com/books?id=aqlbAAAAQAAJ>; Nathan Bailey, *New Universal English Dictionary of Words and of Arts and Sciences*. London: W. Johnston, 1760, p. 652 @ <https://books.google.com/books?id=NgdgAAAAcAAJ>.

each word the Bible uses in its original languages must be examined as well, which we do in this paper. Our point here is that the mistaken assumption that the English word “wine” has always meant wine with alcohol content creates a barrier for people to even begin to consider that the Bible might not approve of alcohol, especially by those Christians who are seeking validation for their view that they may drink alcohol moderately.

Preservation of Wine

A second barrier to understanding whether God approves of or condemns alcohol is the widespread belief that the ancient world did not know how to preserve grape juice to prevent it from fermenting. Therefore, the assumption is that at least most of the time, references to wine in the Bible must be to fermented wine. This assumption is also false. Historical evidence demonstrates that the ancients were aware of four different methods to preserve grape juice: (1) Boiling the juice down to a syrup³; (2) Filtering the juice to eliminate the pulp⁴; (3) Storing it in cool water for 6-8 weeks⁵; and (4) Fumigating the container of juice with sulfur dioxide.⁶ While they knew how to preserve the juice from fermenting, and practiced these methods, they had no real scientific explanation for why these methods worked.⁷

Boiling the Juice to Syrup

This method requires that the temperature of the juice be raised to above 210 degrees Fahrenheit.⁸ This stops the fermenting process because temperatures above 150-180 degrees Fahrenheit will stop the growth of the yeast bacteria. Moreover, the water in the juice will boil out, making the natural sugar content in the grapes increase proportionately. Both results stop the fermentation process because (a) it is the yeast bacteria which eats the sugar to create the alcohol, and (b) too much sugar stops the growth of yeasts.⁹ Once boiled, the syrup is stored in a sealed container, from which water can be added and mixed to reconstitute it as unfermented juice.

Filtering Out the Pulp

Albumen exists in the lining of the skin of the grape, and it contains yeast which eats the natural sugar and converts it into alcohol under the right conditions. By filtering out the pulp, there is an

³ Virgil, *Georgics* 1, 295-296.

⁴ Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, 29, 1; Plutarch, *Symposiacs* 8, 7.

⁵ Columella, 12, 29-30, 1.

⁶ Pliny, *Natural History* 14, 25, 129; Horace, *Carminum Liber* 3, 8, 6, 9-12.

⁷ The very idea of bacteria (including yeast bacteria) was not known until the 1670s by a Dutchman named Antoni van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723).

⁸ Stephen Albert, “How to Make the Best Tasting Grape Juice.” Harvest to Table @ <https://harvesttotable.com/how-to-make-the-best-tasting-grape-juice>.

⁹ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible*. Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1989, p. 115.

insufficient amount of yeast bacteria to convert any of the sugar to alcohol.¹⁰ History records that the ancients knew how to do this, and that they did so in order preserve unfermented wine.¹¹

Storing in a Cool Place

A third method of preserving unfermented wine was to seal a container of fresh wine and place it in a cistern or pool of cool water. Although they had no thermometers in antiquity, we now know that fermentation requires a temperature between 40 degrees and 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Storing the wine in cool water kept it below 40 degrees, thus preventing the wine from fermenting into an alcohol content.¹² After 30-40 days, it was assured that no fermentation took place, and as long as it was kept cool, it would remain sweet unfermented wine for about one year.¹³

Sulfur Dioxide Fumigation

This last method mingled some fumes of sulfur dioxide with the wine, and then sealed it up. The fumes take the oxygen out of the container, which prevents the creation of yeast bacteria.¹⁴ Ancient testimony is that this process was sometimes used to preserve the wine in its unfermented state.¹⁵

Language Difficulty in Relying on Lexicons

It would seem reasonable to almost everyone to simply look up a Hebrew or Greek word in a Biblical lexicon in order to know what that word means. And that would be the first step that a Bible student *should* do in order to determine the meaning. However, that is insufficient as the only step to take. The problem with ancient languages—and that includes Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and New Testament Greek¹⁶—is that there are sometimes relatively few occurrences of a word in and outside the Bible in order to understand exactly what a word means. This illustrates another point: Dictionary definitions are only part of the story even in modern languages, because language is constantly evolving, and therefore words take on new meanings according to how they are used in a linguistic culture. There will almost always be some connection with the dictionary meaning, but the usage meaning can vary by the era and even by the writer/speaker himself. So it is often very helpful to know, for example, how the apostle Paul used a specific Greek word, because it might have been different from the way John used it.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

¹¹ Columella, 12, 29, 1.

¹² Samuele Bacchiocchi, p. 124.

¹³ Columella, 12, 29-30, 1; Marcos Cato, *On Agriculture* 120, 1.

¹⁴ Samuele Bacchiocchi, p. 126.

¹⁵ Pliny, 14, 25, 129; Horace, 3, 6, 8-12.

¹⁶ Biblical Hebrew and New Testament (koine) Greek represent languages which have changed enormously since Bible times. Furthermore, classical Greek and koine (common) Greek used in the New Testament are not identical either.

When there are relatively few occurrences of a given word, it is more difficult to determine its meaning in any given context of Scripture. In those circumstances, scholars have to interpret the meaning of a word from its immediate context in a given Scripture. Then they extrapolate that into the definitions and nuances of meaning when they write a Bible lexicon. That is the reason that simply looking a word up in a lexicon may not always tell you the most accurate story. It will surely provide you with a general idea, but the Bible student really ought to look at the immediate context for himself, along with the lexicon meaning, in order to be reasonably certain that he has derived the correct interpretation in any given passage of Scripture.

This counsel regarding what a person should do to arrive at the correct meaning is no better illustrated than with the various words used in the original Bible languages for “wine” and “strong drink.” A total of 9 different words are used for these beverages, 7 Hebrew words and 2 Greek words. The next several sections examine each of those 9 words.

Tirosh

This Hebrew word occurs 38 times in the Old Testament, where the lexicons widely agree that it refers to “new wine” or “fresh wine”, that is to say, unfermented wine. A study of the 38 different textual contexts reveals that it most often occurs in connection with grain and/or oil as being freshly harvested and sometimes as grapes themselves, in addition to the pure juice of the grape.¹⁷

Most Hebrew lexicons interpret its meaning in Hosea 4:11, which reads, **“Harlotry, wine [yayin], and new wine [tirosh] enslave the heart”**, as the one exception where it denotes fermented wine.¹⁸ The adjective for “new” modifies “tirosh” in this text, so that the most common view is that this refers to newly fermented wine. But could it be new or fresh wine, that which is unfermented? At first glance, the context seems to suggest newly fermented wine because these things are said to **“enslave the heart.”** If this interpretation is correct, then “yayin” and “tirosh” would be parallel terms. However, what is often overlooked is that there are *three* things in a series that are said to “enslave the heart.” Thus, “yayin” and “tirosh” are not parallel concepts (not synonymous) in this passage. And what connects these three things together is not intoxication, but spiritual apostasy. Not only is Israel’s spiritual apostasy one of the key themes of the entire book of Hosea, but it is also in the immediate context of this verse, both before and after it. The verse is actually building upon a point Hosea made earlier in his book. In Hosea 2:12-13, Israel is said to have given credit for vines and fig trees to false gods, for which Israel would be punished. But when the Lord restores Israel, **“The earth shall answer with grain, With new wine [tirosh], and with oil...”** (v. 22). In other words, God’s true blessings became a curse when His people no longer gave Him credit for giving them those blessings. Plainly, “tirosh” in 2:22 is unfermented wine because “vines” (v. 12) do not produce fermented wine and neither does the “earth” (v. 22). Thus, the fact

¹⁷ R. Laird Harris, et. al., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980, p. 969.

¹⁸ Ibid.

that he uses the same term, “new wine [new tirosh]” in 4:11, along with the point of the theme being spiritual apostasy, is compelling evidence to conclude that “tirosh” in Hosea 4:11 refers, like it always does, to the grapes themselves or to unfermented wine, and that it is not an exception to that rule.

Yayin

“Yayin” is the most common Hebrew word for “wine” in the Old Testament, occurring 140 times. It is a generic word for “wine”, but the context in the Old Testament almost always shows it is a reference to fermented or intoxicating wine.¹⁹ However, there are at least three verses where the context indicates an unfermented wine. Note these below:

¹⁰The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. ¹¹Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. (Genesis 49:10-11)

Here the word “wine” (“yayin”) is linked with two occurrences of a word for “vine.” A grape vine produces pure grape juice, not a fermented wine. Also, “the blood of grapes” is more likely a reference to the juice that comes directly from the vine.

¹⁴He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth, ¹⁵And wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine, And bread which strengthens man’s heart. (Psalm 104:14-15)

References to “grass”, “vegetation”, “Oil”, and “bread” all indicate natural food for animals or people. Thus, it is more likely that “wine” (“yayin”) here is also natural, which means it is unfermented.

I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. (Song of Solomon 5:1)

“Myrrh”, “spice”, “honeycomb”, “honey”, and “milk” are all natural entities, implying that the “wine” (“yayin”) is natural as well, that is, unfermented.

These exceptions suggest that “yayin” is a word that can refer to either fermented or unfermented, although the large majority of its occurrences in the Old Testament are to fermented wine.

¹⁹ R. Laird Harris et. al, Vol. 1, pp. 375-376.

Oinos

“Oinos” is the Greek word that is overwhelmingly used in the New Testament for “wine”, occurring about 33 times there. Greek lexicons usually identify it as fermented wine, although the etymology of the word gives no clue of its precise nature.²⁰ The problem is that in most of its occurrences in the New Testament, the context is not sufficiently clear to make the identification of the nature of the wine. However, on at least two occasions the context does clearly lead to the interpretation of “oinos” as unfermented wine, or pure grape juice. Therefore, it appears that it is a generic word that can mean either fermented or unfermented.

New Wine in Old Wineskins

The first of these two occasions is found in Jesus’ statement in Matthew 9:17 about not putting new wine into old wineskins:

Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.

Wineskins in first-century Palestine were goatskins. The *usual* explanation for Jesus’ words is that the reason you do not put new wine into old wineskins is that as the wine ferments, it would eventually break an old wineskin, which has already been weakened by previous fermentations of wine.²¹ This fact has been cited as evidence for “oinos” being fermented.²² However, this explanation completely misses the historical evidence that “It is impossible that the must could ever have been put into skins to undergo the whole process of fermentation, as it is usually stated, the action of the gas given off in the early stages of the process being much too violent for *any skins* to withstand” (emphasis supplied).²³ Even the ancient Job understood that new wineskins could burst: **“Indeed my belly is like wine that has no vent; It is ready to burst like new wineskins”** (Job 32:19). The reason that, in His illustration, Jesus said people do not put new wine into old wineskins is that the old wineskins would contain portions of yeast bacteria stuck to them, which would create the fermentation process that would burst the skins.²⁴ Therefore, the “only ‘new wine’ which could be stored safely in new wineskins was unfermented must, after it had been filtered or boiled.”²⁵ These facts, then, establish that in this particular case, “oinos” is unfermented wine.

²⁰ W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, John R. Kohlenberger III, ed. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, p. 1231.

²¹ Craig Keener, ed., *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, New Testament Notes. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016, p. 1628.

²² W. E. Vine, p. 1231.

²³ T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, ed., *Encyclopedia Biblica*, Vol. 4. “Wine and Strong Drink.” 1903, p. 5315.

²⁴ Frederic Richard Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible Commentary*. London: Andesite Press, 2017 printing, p. 266.

²⁵ Samuele Bacchiocchi, p. 146.

Jesus Turned Water into Wine

The other occasion that tells us that at least sometimes “oinos” refers to unfermented wine is the story of Jesus’ first miracle in John 2, where He changed the water into wine (“oinos”). In addition to the misconception that the juice of the grape could not be prevented from fermenting, one argument for those who say that Jesus’ miracle created intoxicating wine is verse 10, which reads:

And he said to him, ‘Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!’

The argument goes like this: The verb “well drunk” always means that a person is intoxicated. Therefore, when Jesus created more wine, it must have been of the same nature as the first—fermented wine. Although the Greek verb “methuo” (“well drunk”) usually has the meaning of “to be drunk”²⁶, it is sometimes used in the Septuagint with the meaning of “to drink freely”, without regard to intoxication.²⁷ In other words, it sometimes simply denotes satiation rather than intoxication.

How do we know whether “methuo” has the meaning of “to be drunk” or “to drink freely” in the story of Jesus’ first miracle? As is often the case, the answer to this question is in the immediate context. First, if the guests were already drunk, then their taste buds would have been dulled so that no one could tell that Jesus’ wine was of a better quality. Second, if the guests were already drunk, then Jesus would have contributed to an even higher level of intoxication. And all Christians agree that Jesus would never do that. Therefore, the Greek verb “methuo” in John 2:10 has the meaning of “to drink freely”, and the wine Jesus made was unfermented wine, or pure grape juice.

Additional Evidence Regarding “Oinos”

At least one passage in the New Testament shows that “oinos” is sometimes used in reference to fermented wine: **“And do not be drunk with wine [“oinos”], in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit...”** (Ephesians 5:18). Clearly, this refers to wine that intoxicates. Further evidence can be found in the Septuagint, the second-century B.C. translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. In that translation, “oinos” is the normal word used to translate the Hebrew words “yayin” and “tirosh.”²⁸ We saw earlier that “yayin” usually refers to fermented wine, but that “tirosh” always refers to pure grape juice. Therefore, we conclude that the evidence is indeed

²⁶ W. E. Vine, pp. 331, 333.

²⁷ This is clearly the case in passages such as Genesis 43:34 and Song of Solomon 5:1. See also John Parkhurst, *A Greek and English Lexicon to the New Testament*, 7th edition. “Methuo.” London, 1817.

²⁸ Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, trans., *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987 printing.

convincing that the Greek noun “oinos” is a generic word for “wine” which was used for both fermented and unfermented wine.

Shekar

The Hebrew word “shekar” occurs 23 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, where it is usually translated as “strong drink” by the King James’ Version and many modern versions as well. The context usually reflects God’s disapproval of it, with the notable exception of Deuteronomy 14:26.²⁹ Most Hebrew lexicons interpret this word to mean “beer”, or perhaps as sometimes fermented fruit juice other than grape juice.³⁰ The reason for this is that there is no evidence suggesting that the ancient world ever distilled beverages, a process that significantly increases the percentage of alcohol, such as with modern “mixed drinks.”³¹ Natural fermentation ends when about 50 percent of the sugar content has been converted to alcohol, because after that, the alcohol kills the yeast which helped produced the alcohol in the first place. This means that even for fermented wine (fermented grape juice), the alcohol content in Bible times probably ranged between 10 and 12 percent, after which the Hebrews diluted it with water to avoid drunkenness.³²

Read Deuteronomy 14:22-26 to see the greater context of verse 26:

²²You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. ²³And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine [tirosh] and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. ²⁴But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, ²⁵then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. ²⁶And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine [yayin] or similar drink [shekar], for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.

If “shekar” denotes an intoxicating beverage virtually everywhere else, why does God seem to recommend it in this passage? After all, Proverbs 20:1 condemns this drink itself as a “brawler”, regardless of how much is consumed. The account in Deuteronomy 14 describes the annual harvest festival to which Israel gathered, if they could, to the tabernacle to celebrate God’s goodness to them. Notice the context here. First, God calls on His people to be “a holy people”

²⁹ Robert P. Teachout argues that Numbers 28:7 and Deuteronomy 29:6 may also refer to unfermented wine in “The Use of ‘Wine’ in the Old Testament”, doctoral dissertation. Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979, pp. 238-240.

³⁰ Beer is a fermented *grain* beverage.

³¹ R. Laird Harris, et. al., Vol. 2, pp. 926-927.

³² Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 375-376.

(vv. 2, 21) by not eating anything unclean (vv. 3-21).³³ If the Bible almost universally condemns “shekar” as an intoxicating beverage, it does not make sense that it would recommend an intoxicating beverage here, especially in the context of avoiding unclean things. Second, note that the occasion was a harvest festival, which means consuming produce and animals which were newly available. This would hardly give any beverage time to ferment. Third, the main commandment here regarding a beverage was to consume “new wine” (“new tirosh”), which we have already seen was unfermented wine—which makes perfect sense since this was a tithe straight from the harvest. These facts imply that the nature of “shekar” in Deuteronomy 14 is different from its usual nature elsewhere in Scripture.

There is other interesting evidence to support our tentative conclusion that “shekar” in Deuteronomy 14 is not an intoxicating beverage. Numerous authorities in ancient Semitic languages testify that “shekar” was most often a sweet drink made from palm-dates.³⁴ This is further substantiated by its use in Isaiah 24:9: “...**Strong drink** [shekar] **is bitter to those who drink it.**” The English word “Strong” has been added by the translators and is not intrinsic to the word “shekar.” The contrast suggested here is between this drink’s sweetness and the bitterness that the wicked experiencing God’s judgment taste instead. Therefore, “shekar” should have been translated as “sweet drink” rather than “strong drink.” Even authorities in the English language note that the word “sugar” is derived from “shekar” or its related words in other Semitic languages.³⁵ As one scholar noted, “It is hard to imagine that the word ‘sugar’ could have derived from a term originally associated with an alcoholic beverage having practically no sugar content nor sweet taste.”³⁶ That a sweet beverage can be fermented is undeniable, but its fermented state is highly unlikely to have been the origin of a word (“sugar”) that emphasizes sweetness rather than intoxication.

In Numbers 28:7, “shekar” appears as the specific name of the drink offering to be poured into vessels in the Holy Place of the tabernacle as part of the daily burnt offering in Israel (cf. vv. 1-8). Because we have established that “shekar” can refer to either a fermented or unfermented sweet beverage, the fact that this drink offering was poured into holy vessels in the Holy Place would seem to exclude an interpretation that it was an intoxicating beverage.

The Biblical evidence, combined with the linguistic data, support the conclusion that “shekar” is primarily a sweet drink, which is usually fermented, but which is sometimes unfermented.

³³ This is the second listing of unclean animals which God declared forbidden for people to eat, the first list occurring in Leviticus 11.

³⁴ “Strong Drink.” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, 1939, pp. 879-880; John Kitto, ed., “Wine”. *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 2, 1845, p. 953; T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, eds., “Wine and Strong Drink”, *Encyclopedia Biblica*, Vol. 4, 1903, p. 5310.

³⁵ See a list of several authorities for this in Charles Wesley Ewing, *The Bible and Its Wines*. Denver, CO: National Prohibition Foundation, 1985, pp. 25-34.

³⁶ Samuele Bacchiocchi, p. 232.

Gleukos

“Gleukos” is a Greek word which indicates “sweet wine.”³⁷ If the word looks familiar, it is because the English word “glucose” is derived from it, glucose being the natural sugar in the blood which powers the body’s cells. Numerous Greek lexicons agree that “gleukos” refers only to unfermented wine, or pure grape juice.³⁸ Some, however, insist that sometimes this “sweet wine” has undergone some degree of fermentation, but still retains sufficient natural sugar to be a “sweet wine.”³⁹ The word is used only once in the Septuagint, where it translates the Hebrew “yayin” in Job 32:19: **“Indeed my belly is like wine [yayin; gleukos] that has no vent; It is ready to burst like new wineskins.”** Of course, we have discovered that “yayin” can refer either to fermented or unfermented wine. In any case, even “gleukos” can ferment if the temperature and other conditions are favorable for that process to occur.

“Gleukos” occurs only once in the New Testament, in Acts 2:13. On the Day of Pentecost, when the early Christians had received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and were preaching in foreign languages that they had not learned, critics accused them of being drunk: **“Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine [gleukos].’”** The fact that the critics were “mocking” suggests that they knew Christians did not drink fermented wine, so they mocked them for somehow getting drunk on grape juice. Peter’s reply in verses 14-15 that they were not drunk because **“it is only the third hour of the day”** was the kind of response you would expect from someone who is being mocked. Therefore, his reply does not mean that any of them drank fermented wine later in the day like most people who drank it, but simply that he mocked the mockers.

The conclusion that “gleukos” means only unfermented wine is reinforced by a well-known nineteenth-century scholar who supported the view that alcohol in moderation was sanctioned by the Bible. But even he understood that “gleukos” only meant unfermented wine by pointing out that “oinos gleukos” was the term referring to grape juice which had partially fermented but still retained its sweetness.⁴⁰ Therefore, “What this means is that when gleukos occurs by itself, as in Acts 2:13, it refers specifically to unfermented grape juice.”⁴¹

Asis

“Asis” is a Hebrew word meaning “sweet wine” and is used 5 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is the noun form of a verb which means “to press, crush, press by treading, tread down”, which

³⁷ W. E. Vine, pp. 1231-1232.

³⁸ One example is the classic Greek lexicon of Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987 printing, p. 118.

³⁹ W. E. Vine, p. 1232.

⁴⁰ Horace Bumstead, “The Biblical Sanction of Wine,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 38. January 1881, p. 62.

⁴¹ Samuel Bacchiocchi, p. 180.

implies that it was fresh sweet wine in an unfermented state.⁴² However, in two of those five Old Testament occurrences, the context suggests that it was fermented there:

I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh, And they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine [asis] (Isaiah 49:26).

Awake, you drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you drinkers of wine [yayin], Because of the new wine [asis], For it has been cut off from your mouth.

As noted earlier, even unfermented wine can ferment, given the right conditions. It appears that in these two verses, the “asis” had partially fermented, yet retained enough of its natural sugar content to still be sweet.

Mimsak

The Hebrew word “mimsak” means “drink-offering”, “mixed wine”, “spiced wine”, or “libation” and was usually wine mixed with honey or spices.⁴³ It occurs twice in the Hebrew Old Testament, once each in Proverbs 23:30 and Isaiah 65:11. The context of both passages either prove (Proverbs) or suggests (Isaiah) that the drink there was a fermented beverage:

Those who linger long at the wine [yayin]; Those who go in search of mixed wine [mimsak] (Proverbs 23:30).

But you are those who forsake the LORD, Who forget My holy mountain, Who prepare a table for Gad, And who furnish a drink offering [mimsak] for Meni (Isaiah 65:11).⁴⁴

In the Proverbs passage, a few verses on either side of verse 30 show unmistakably that “mimsak” is fermented wine there even if verse 30 is not compelling to every reader. However, the Hebrew Old Testament has another word altogether to describe the large majority of its drink offerings, “nesek”, whose origin does not suggest whether it was fermented or unfermented. The Hebrew words “yayin” and “shekar” are occasionally used in reference to a Hebrew drink offering. But as already noted, “yayin” and “shekar” can refer to either fermented or unfermented wine. And given the fact that the drink offering was poured into holy vessels in the Holy Place would seem to exclude an interpretation that it was an intoxicating beverage.⁴⁵

Hemer/Hamar

Although slightly different, “hemer” and “hamar” are essentially the same Hebrew word according

⁴² R. Laird Harris, et. al., Vol. 2, p. 1660.

⁴³ R. Laird Harris, et. al., Vol. 1, p. 516.

⁴⁴ Gad and Meni were pagan gods, or idols, in ancient Palestine.

⁴⁵ Review pages 8-9 of this paper to see the context for our statement here.

to most lexicons.⁴⁶ It occurs 8 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is the noun form of a verb which means “to ferment, boil, or foam”, which is the reason that most scholars assume it must be fermented wine.⁴⁷ However, when grape juice is freshly squeezed from the grapes into containers, the juice foams on the top. There is also good evidence suggesting that it may therefore be unfermented as well as fermented wine. For example, in Deuteronomy 32:14, “hemer” is translated as “pure” in the King James’ Version, so that it reads, **“thou didst drink the pure [hemer] blood of the grape.”**⁴⁸ Several other agricultural products or animals mentioned in verses 13-14 in connection with the **“pure blood of the grape”** strongly suggest that here “hemer” is also a natural product, which would make it unfermented wine.

The textual evidence in Isaiah 27:2 is divided over whether “hemer” *or* a word for “delight” is in the original text.⁴⁹ But even if “hemer” is the correct reading, it would be part of the expression **“a vineyard of red wine [hemer].”**⁵⁰ And vineyards do not produce fermented wine, but only pure grape juice; people have to create the conditions for it to ferment.

The very close cognate is “hamar”, which occurs 6 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. In Ezra 6:9 and 7:22 it is used to describe the wine the priests used in the sanctuary. We have already dealt with the best evidence for the fact that such wine was probably unfermented. On the other hand, in Daniel 5,⁵¹ “hamar” describes the Babylonian king’s wine which Daniel and his three friends refused to drink. Given the previous testimony elicited in this paper, it may safely be inferred that this “hamar” was fermented.

Sobe/Saba

These two cognates are essentially one Hebrew word that means “fermented drink.”⁵² It is variously translated in the Hebrew Scriptures as “wine” (Isaiah 1:22), “drink” (Hosea 4:18), “drunken” (Nahum 1:10), and “drunkard(s)” (Deuteronomy 21:20; Proverbs 23:21; Nahum 1:10).⁵³ The origin of the word and its usual context in Scripture make it clear that “sobe, saba” refers to a fermented drink, probably fermented wine.

⁴⁶ R. Laird Harris, et. al., Vol. 1, p. 298 and Vol. 2, p. 1020.

⁴⁷ R. Laird Harris, et. al., Vol. 1, p. 298.

⁴⁸ Most modern translations use the word “wine” for “hemer” in this verse.

⁴⁹ *New English Translation (NET) Bible, Full Notes Edition*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019, p. 1295.

⁵⁰ Here “hemer” translates “red wine” and not merely “wine” by itself. “Hemer” is related to the Greek word “hemo”, which means “blood.” From the Greek word we obtain words related to “blood”, such as “hemoglobin” and “hemorrhage.” This explains the translation in Isaiah 27:2 of “red wine” because red wine looks very similar to blood.

⁵¹ See verses 1-2, 4, and 23.

⁵² R. Laird Harris, et. al., Vol. 2, p. 615.

⁵³ Most modern English translations use “drunkards” or “heavy drinkers” in place of “Sabeans” in Ezekiel 23:42.

Additional New Testament Usages of “Oinos”

In the course of our investigation, we previously examined the use of the Greek word “oinos” in Matthew 9:17’s statement by Jesus that people do not put new wine into old wineskins,⁵⁴ John 2’s story of Jesus turning water into wine, and Ephesians 5:18’s use of this word as reference to fermented wine. In this section, we examine the nature of the “wine” used in the original Christian Holy Communion service, as well as three New Testament occurrences from which some scholars argue that early believers consumed fermented wine.

Communion “Wine”

Except for most Methodist churches, the mainline Protestant churches⁵⁵, the Roman Catholic, and the Eastern Orthodox churches use alcoholic wine in their communion services, whereas most evangelical and fundamentalist churches use pure grape juice (unfermented wine) instead. This latter grouping of churches include most Baptists, Churches of Christ, Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, Nazarenes, and Seventh-day Adventists.⁵⁶ Another way to remember this is to note that liturgical churches—those which emphasize rituals in their services—use alcoholic wine, and *most* other churches do not.⁵⁷

Some believers find it news to learn that no Greek words for “wine” appear in any of the New Testament passages that discuss the Holy Communion service. That service is only directly discussed in four passages in the New Testament. In three of them, the only identification of the beverage used in that service besides the words for “cup” and “blood” was “fruit of the vine.”⁵⁸ Although people often refer to fermented wine today as “fruit of the vine”, a second, more careful look at that term indicates that it actually refers to what the vine produces. Technically, the grape vine does not produce fermented wine because the fermentation process occurs after the grapes have been harvested and pressed into juice. And while “fruit of the wine” was equivalent to “oinos”, remember that “oinos” can be either fermented or unfermented wine. Moreover, Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, in the very century the New Testament was written, used the expression “the fruit of the vine” to describe freshly pressed grape juice.⁵⁹ This fact alone means that it cannot be denied that communion wine may have been unfermented.

⁵⁴ Jesus’ statement was also quoted in Mark 2:22 and Luke 5:38.

⁵⁵ Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and most Reformed churches (including Presbyterians).

⁵⁶ Peter Green, former lecturer, Morling College, @ <https://www.quora.com/What-churches-in-the-United-States-use-grape-juice-as-communion-and-which-use-wine-and-why>, n.d.

⁵⁷ Note that this is a general rule-of-thumb, but individual congregations even within the same denomination may differ from most other congregations in their denomination.

⁵⁸ Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; and Luke 22:18.

⁵⁹ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2, 5, 2, trans. William Whiston. *The Complete Works of Josephus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1991 printing, p. 48.

There is additional evidence which shows that communion wine must be unfermented, or pure grape juice. Almost all of the churches in the Western world celebrate communion with unleavened bread. This is based on the fact that unleavened bread was required in the observance of the Hebrew Passover (Exodus 12:8), which the Holy Communion service replaces. In using the language of Passover, the apostle Paul commands Christians to spiritually and continually celebrate Passover (I Corinthians 5:6-7), not **“with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”** (v. 8). This suggests that for Christians at least, leaven must have represented wickedness. And because the bread represents the body of Christ, and Jesus was not corrupted with evil, the communion bread must be unleavened. If the bread must be unleavened, then the wine should also be unfermented because fermentation is a leavening process. In other words, the communion wine should be pure grape juice.⁶⁰

In I Corinthians 11:17-34, the apostle Paul gave instructions concerning the communion service to the church in Corinth. The members there were coming together for food and fellowship, but the wealthy members were acting as gluttons while the poorer members were going hungry. The church there had turned the entire idea of the communion service upside down; it was designed to represent communion with God and communion, or harmony, with each other. Verse 21 describes that **“one is hungry and another is drunk [“methuo”].”** Many argue that because no member could have gotten drunk on pure grape juice, the wine must have been fermented—thus supporting the moderationist view that moderate drinking by Christians is acceptable.⁶¹

Note that in our discussion of the use of “oinos” in John 2:10, we noted that the verb “methuo” (“drunk”) *can* refer to satiation, the feeling of being full, even though it usually denotes intoxication. In I Corinthians 11:21, the contrast is between “hungry” and “drunk”, which makes the meaning here of “satiation.” Therefore, no one was literally getting drunk there, and this is not a legitimate excuse for the moderate drinking of alcohol by Christians. But for the sake of argument, even if some believers were getting drunk at Corinth, this local church was full of mischief and sinful vices. Thus, the fact that members *might* have been using fermented alcohol for their meal (or for their communion wine) does not require the conclusion that Paul endorsed anything they did there. Anyone can read his instructions and see how livid he was at them.

Matthew 11:19/Luke 7:34

In these texts, Jesus is criticizing those who accused John the Baptist and Himself for their eating and drinking habits, John because he lived an austere life and **“came neither eating nor drinking”** (Matthew 11:18) and Jesus for being a **“glutton and a winebibber”** (Matthew 11:19). The compound Greek word for “winebibber” consists in part of the root for “oinos.” In this context, it

⁶⁰ It is not legitimate to state that since Jews use fermented wine for Passover, Christians may use fermented wine for communion, because people’s inconsistency cannot substitute for sound Biblical reasoning.

⁶¹ Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1986, p. 56.

clearly means that Jesus' critics assumed He drank fermented wine because He was **“a friend of tax collectors and sinners”** (v.19). Guilt by association is no actual evidence that Jesus drank the same thing that the “tax collectors and sinners” drank. It is hardly sound judgment to accept the word of Jesus' critics as evidence that Jesus consumed alcoholic wine.

I Timothy 3:8

As we discuss the different Greek words here, it will help to see more of the context. Concerning wine, the apostle admonished bishops to be “temperate” (v. 2) and “not given to wine...” (v. 3). Then verses 8-11 begin his instructions concerning deacons and their wives:

⁸Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. ¹¹Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

The same Greek word translated as “temperate” in verses 2 and 11 is the adjective form of a verb which means “to be free from the influence of intoxicants.”⁶² Moreover, the phrase in verse 3 “not given to wine” literally means in Greek “not near wine”,⁶³ meaning that a bishop should not even be around people who are drinking what here is obviously fermented wine. Therefore, by two pieces of evidence, a Christian bishop should stay far away from fermented wine. Then note that Paul's transition to deacons in verse 11 begins with the word for “Likewise.” This means that what applies to bishops also applies to deacons, which further signifies that the addition of the word “much” in the phrase “not given to much wine” is not actually different from Paul's instructions to bishops. Furthermore, note that the wives of deacons are also to be “temperate”, that is, abstain from fermented wine. So is Paul really saying that a deacon may drink moderately, but that his wife must completely abstain? Remember also that what is wrong in excess is not necessarily right in moderation. For example, when Peter says that believers no longer run to “excess of riot” (I Peter 4:4, KJV), he does not mean that they may riot moderately.

I Timothy 5:23

In I Timothy 5:23, Paul encourages Timothy to **“No longer drink only water, but use a little wine [oinos] for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.”** Evidently, Timothy suffered from some type of frequent intestinal problem because this was the reason Paul gave for encouraging him to use “a little wine.” This advice may imply that Timothy had avoided all products of the grape like the Nazarites did (Numbers 6). In any case, it was only “a little wine”, and it was for medicinal purposes. Even if it referred to fermented wine, this text cannot properly

⁶² W. E. Vine, pp. 1126, 1057.

⁶³ Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament*. New York, NY: American Bible Society, 1975, p. 723.

be used to defend moderate social drinking. However, it probably referred to *unfermented* wine, because the testimony of ancient history is that unfermented wine was preferred for stomach ailments.⁶⁴

Commended vs. Condemned

The aggregate result of our analysis of the original Biblical words referring to beverages other than water and milk points us to the conclusion that God does not approve of intoxicating beverages. An additional method of reaching a conclusion on this matter is to examine those passages where Scripture is quite clear in either its commendation or its condemnation of “wine” or “strong drink.” Creating such lists is somewhat subjective because what one person thinks is quite clear, another might not think is so clear. But there should be sufficient evidence from which an accurate conclusion can be drawn.

After reexamining the passages we analyzed for this paper, we have identified 18 which seem clear to us that God approves of that “wine” or “strong drink.” Of these passages, 17 are from the Old Testament and 1 from the New Testament. Notice that of the 17 Old Testament passages, 12 employ *only* the word “*tirosh*”, which we have shown always refers to unfermented wine. The other 5 use the words “*yayin*”, “*shekar*”, or “*asis*”, or a combination of two of them, all of which we have shown can refer to either fermented or unfermented wine or other beverage.⁶⁵ The one New Testament passage uses the word “*oinos*”, which we have shown can be either fermented or unfermented wine.

Commended

Genesis 27:28—*tirosh*
Numbers 18:12-27—*tirosh*
Deuteronomy 7:9-13—*tirosh*
Deuteronomy 11:13-14—*tirosh*
Deuteronomy 12:17-18—*tirosh*
Deuteronomy 14:23-26—*tirosh* and *shekar*
Deuteronomy 33:28—*tirosh*
Judges 9:13—*tirosh*
Psalm 4:7—*tirosh*
Psalm 104:14-15—*yayin*
Song of Solomon 5:1—*yayin*
Isaiah 55:1—*yayin*
Isaiah 65:8—*tirosh*

Jeremiah 31:10-12—*tirosh*
Hosea 2:8—*tirosh*
Joel 2:18-19—*tirosh*
Amos 9:13-14—*yayin* and *asis*
John 2:9-10—*oinos*

⁶⁴ Athenaeus, *Banquet* 2, 24 and Pliny, *Natural History* 23-24.

⁶⁵ One passage uses both “*tirosh*” and “*shekar*” as being beverages approved of by God.

It is very significant that in every case where “wine” or “strong drink” is recommended by God, the context shows that its nature is unfermented and thus *not* intoxicating. The only passage which commends what is obviously a fermented beverage is Proverbs 31:6-7, which reads, **“Give strong drink [shekar] to him who is perishing, And wine [yayin] to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, And remember his misery no more.”** In the absence of manufactured pain medication, the use of alcohol could suffice to deaden the pain sensors and to thus provide some relief to those who were already suffering and dying. Such advice is hardly an endorsement for even moderate social drinking!

Condemned

By contrast, we have identified 12 passages that clearly show God condemns a beverage for *everyone*,⁶⁶ and the context clearly shows it to be an intoxicating beverage. All 12 passages are from the Old Testament, and in each case, the Hebrew word is “yayin”, which again is a word that can mean either fermented or unfermented wine.

Genesis 9:21—yayin
Genesis 19:32—yayin
Leviticus 10:9-11—yayin
Deuteronomy 32:33—yayin
Psalm 60:3—yayin
Proverbs 4:17—yayin
Proverbs 20:1—yayin
Proverbs 23:20, 29-35—yayin
Isaiah 5:11-12—yayin
Isaiah 28:7—yayin
Ezekiel 44:21—yayin
Hosea 7:5—yayin

Conclusion Regarding the “Recommended vs. Condemned” Evidence

It is clear from the very clear passages of Scripture that while God recommends unfermented wine, or pure grape juice, He condemns the very use of alcoholic beverages. The moderationist position that it is only an *abuse* of alcohol that God’s Word condemns cannot be supported from Scripture.

⁶⁶ We did *not* include those passages, such as Leviticus 10:9, Judges 13:4, 7, 14, Proverbs 31:4-5, and Luke 1:15, which forbid what is obviously an intoxicating “wine” (yayin) or “strong drink” (shekar) to specific individuals, priests, or rulers/judges.

Science and Alcohol

Alcohol carries with it so many health risks that it is impossible to defend its use at all, even if a person is only considering medical science. Just some of the negative impact of even moderate alcohol use include the following:⁶⁷

- Hypertriglyceridemia
- High Blood pressure
- Stroke
- Decreased Immune system
- Breast cancer
- Colon cancer
- Osteoporosis
- Obesity
- Gastritis
- Gout
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Cerebral Atrophy
- Decreases judgment and moral reasoning

Despite the predominant thinking today that moderate drinking of red wine is good for the heart, medical science research knows better. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaims that “the less you drink, the better.”⁶⁸ There simply is no real safe level of alcohol consumption.

Even small amounts of alcohol negatively impact the frontal lobe of a person’s brain, which is where the conscience and moral judgment center is.⁶⁹ How can any serious-minded Christian defend even moderate alcohol consumption when he knows that the Holy Spirit seeks to influence him through the frontal lobe of the brain, and that even small amounts of alcohol tends to deaden our moral perceptions? Those Christians who continue to do so after learning the facts ought to ask themselves whether perhaps they are stubbornly choosing to ignore the evidence simply to justify a habit that they emotionally do not want to abandon.

⁶⁷ Neil Nedley, *Proof Positive: How to Reliably Combat Disease and Achieve Optimal Health through Nutrition and Lifestyle*. Ardmore, OK: Neil Nedley, 1998, p. 441.

⁶⁸ H. Emblad, “Moderate Drinking: Serious Warning by WHO Specialists.” *World Health Organization Press Release*, Nov. 1, 1994.

⁶⁹ Neil Nedley, p. 437.

Summary and Conclusion

Our investigation into the question of whether a moderate use of alcoholic beverages is acceptable to God or whether He condemns *any* use has led us to examine all of the key Hebrew and Greek words the Bible uses for “wine” and “strong drink.” We discovered that 9 separate Hebrew and Greek words are used to represent these beverages.⁷⁰ Only the Hebrew word “*tirosh*” is accepted by Bible language scholars as universally meaning unfermented wine.⁷¹

The varied interpretations of what most of these words mean exist because we are dealing with ancient languages, and there is an insufficient number of extant examples from which to establish the precise meaning. Furthermore, it is well-known that all languages evolve over time, and therefore words take on different meanings depending upon how they are used in a culture. Often a word’s relationship to other known words provides a core idea of the word; sometimes it does not. But even when it does, the Bible language scholar must engage in interpreting each context where the word occurs and make the best judgment as to its meaning. In turn, this means that it is not as simple as looking up a modern word in a dictionary and being absolutely certain that the written meaning is, in fact, its real meaning.

We conclude from our study that most of the really difficult passages containing these words *do* have a context which is sufficiently clear to make a reasonably certain judgment as to whether they refer to fermented or unfermented beverages. In general, the Hebrew words “*yayin*” and “*shekar*” refer to fermented beverages, although they do *sometimes* reference unfermented drinks. “*Tirosh*” is the one Hebrew word which always refers to unfermented wine. In the Greek New Testament, “*oinos*” is a generic word which may refer to either fermented or unfermented wine. The remaining 5 words—4 Hebrew and 1 Greek—occur rarely in the Bible, although the context in most cases allows us to determine the nature of the beverage.

Two factors tend to bias most researchers concerning this subject of alcohol in the Bible. The first one is that our modern English word “wine” is now used exclusively to refer to fermented juice of the grape. But we saw in our study that this exclusive use of the word “wine” only began in earnest in the nineteenth century, approximately 200 years ago. The second factor helping to create bias is the *assumption* that the ancient world had *no* knowledge of how to prevent fermentation, and that therefore, grape juice or other fruit drinks could not have been fresh except for a short time after they were squeezed from the fruits, which would be immediately after harvest. However, we saw that historical evidence is quite clear that this assumption is wrong; the ancients knew at least 4 ways to prevent the fermentation process, even though they did not know the scientific reasons

⁷⁰ Technically, one could identify that number as 11 because two sets of Hebrew cognate words are so similar that they can be broken into four words instead—(1) “*hemer*” and “*hamar*”, and (2) “*sobe*” and “*saba*.”

⁷¹ Even “*tirosh*” is widely believed to have one exception where it refers to fermented wine, although our analysis showed that this so-called exception is not really valid.

those methods worked. We might add a third bias, and that is the long history during the Middle Ages in which Christians almost universally believed that moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages was permitted, and that God only disapproved of the abuse of overindulging in such drinks. As all experienced persons know, changing one's thinking which has been long ingrained is a difficult task to accomplish.

Our linguistic study demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt that wherever the context is clear, the Bible commends the use of unfermented wine, or pure grape juice, and condemns the use of fermented beverages. The only exception to that rule is Proverbs 31:6, where it is recommended that alcoholic beverages be given to one who is suffering and dying. And that is hardly an endorsement of moderate social drinking. It is therefore not merely the *abuse* of alcohol that Scripture condemns, but its very nature, which even the ancients well knew tended to break down moral inhibitions, cloud people's judgment, and lead to alcohol addiction and evil behavior. A careful reading of two proverbs written by one whom Jews and Christians consider to be the wisest person who ever lived make it quite clear that it is the *use* of fermented wine, and *not* only its *abuse*, that inspiration warns us against:

Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise. (Proverbs 20:1)

³¹Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; ³²At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. (Proverbs 23:31-32)

In other words, the very nature of an alcoholic beverage is that it “is a mocker” and “a brawler.” Because of this, we should not even consider (“do not look on...”) drinking such wine.

Even without the testimony of Scripture regarding the consumption of alcoholic beverages, medical science which is untainted by research funded by the alcohol industry is so clear that any possible value in consuming alcohol—such as relieving stress by relaxing a person—is far offset by the numerous health risks of even the moderate use of alcohol.

On the spiritual side of the equation, we know that even small amounts of alcohol negatively affect the frontal lobe of the brain, which is the center of our moral judgment and decision-making capabilities. How can a Christian that knows this possibly justify the use of a product which weakens his moral conscience, the very part of the brain which the Holy Spirit uses to influence him for good? Finally, Christians understand that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19) and that we are to be holy people (I Peter 1:15-16). Concerning the ingestion of anything into our bodies which deadens our moral and spiritual capacity, it ought to be a “no-brainer” for the Christian to stay far away from it. **“For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves...”** Amen and amen!