

Can We Drink Socially? #2

In the last article, we examined the definition of wine in the Bible and how the ancients preserved grape juice. We now want to turn our attention to the claim that Jesus made wine, therefore, we can drink socially, and the condemnation of social drinking in the New Testament.

Jesus And Wine

The belief that the wine Christ provided in Cana was alcoholic rests on five major assumptions: First, it is assumed that the word *oinos* indicates only "fermented-quality grape drink." Second, it is assumed that since the word *oinos* is used in reference both to the wine which ran out and the wine that Christ made, both wines must have been alcoholic. Third, it is assumed that the Jews did not know how to prevent the fermentation of grape juice; and since, the season of the wedding was just before the Passover (John 2:13), that is, six months after the grape harvest, the wine used at Cana had ample time to ferment. Fourth, it is assumed that the description given by the master of the banquet to the wine provided by Christ as "*the good wine*" means a high-quality alcoholic wine. Fifth, it is assumed that the expression "*well drunk*" (John 2:10), used by the master of the banquet, indicates that the guests were intoxicated because they had been drinking fermented wine. Consequently, the wine Jesus made must also have been fermented.

It was customary to bring out the freshest wine at the beginning of the feast. As the wine ran low, the older wine was brought out. In John 2:10, the master of the feast made the comment that Jesus had saved the good wine until now (near the end of the festivities). This "*good wine*" was the fresh, sweet must or unfermented wine. New wine is not intoxicating until some time after the process of fermentation has set in. Fermentation is a process of decay. There is not a hint that our Lord produced alcohol, which is a product of decay and death. He produced a living wine uncontaminated by fermentation.

It is against the principle of scriptural and moral analogy to suppose that Christ would exert His supernatural power to bring into existence an intoxicating wine which scripture condemns as "*a mocker*" and "*a brawler*" (Proverbs 20:1) and which the Holy Spirit has chosen as the symbol of divine wrath. Scriptural and moral consistency require that "*the good wine*" produced by Christ was fresh, unfermented grape juice. In fact, the adjective used to describe the wine made by Christ is *kalos*, which means "that which is morally excellent or befitting." The term is suggestive of the characterization of unintoxicating wine as moral (*ethikos*) wine.

Social Drinking In The New Testament

People who seek to justify social drinking because the Bible does not specifically condemn it are mistaken. Notice two examples: First, the word for "*banquetings*" in 1 Peter 4:3 is the Greek word *potos* which was the ancient practice of social drinking. R. C. Trench states that this word means "the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, not of necessity excessive (Genesis 19:3; 2 Samuel 3:20; Esther 6:14), but giving opportunity for excess (1 Samuel 25:36)." Peter made a specific reference to drunkenness and drinking parties, condemning them both! Second, the irony of the mockers' charge that on the day of Pentecost the apostles were drunk on *gleukos*, that is, on the grape juice which apparently was their common beverage (Acts 2:13), provides an indirect proof of their abstinence from fermented grape juice. There would have been no point in the mockers' attributing the cause of the disciples' strange actions to unfermented grape juice if it was not common knowledge that the apostles abstained from intoxicating wine. The intended jibe was that the disciples were such dimwits they got drunk on grape juice!

In the New Testament, purity has always been a major aspect of a Christian's life (1 Timothy 4:12; 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:22; Romans 12:1). Do you believe a loose attitude concerning social drinking would meet God's requirements for purity? Furthermore, consider two statements in Jesus' sermon on the mount. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus not only condemned murder but He went beyond the overt crime of killing and stated that anyone who has a malicious and wicked attitude is a murderer. Also, in Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus not only condemned adultery but He went to the heart of the problem and stated that someone commits adultery even if they look upon a woman and lust. Considering the way Jesus taught on these two subjects, how do you think He would feel about social drinking?

In Philippians 2:5, Paul said, "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*" Specifically, Paul was writing about humility but the principle can apply to all phases of being a Christian. We should be diligent to have the same attitude Jesus did toward all subjects. The holidays are coming up and it is a common time for social drinking to take place. A very appropriate question is, "Could you see Jesus engaging in social or occasional drinking?" If we are going to have the attitude of Christ, then we have to ask ourselves these questions!

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