

"A Little Wine"

"... be no longer a drinker of water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23).

Some consider this passage to have been improperly placed here because it has no apparent connection with what he has just written or is about to say. That objection does not follow. Students of Paul's writing know that frequently something the apostle wrote is interrupted by instructions on another theme, and that the apostle will then return to the previous subject. His dissertation on love is injected in the midst of his instructions regarding spiritual gifts; to which subject he returned in due time (1 Cor. 13). Other instances might be given. It is also true that Paul frequently gives short, terse statements, unconnected to each other, but profitable to the reader; for which see Romans 12:17-21 for a remarkable example of this. And while it may be true that verses 24 and 25 connect back to verses 21 and 22 (especially in the view that verses 21 and 22 are Paul's charges as to "ordaining elders") that does not within itself mean that verse 23 did not originally follow verse 22.

"No longer a drinker of water." Some suggest that the water at Ephesus was "bad" and Timothy was not to drink it because of his weak stomach. Others deem the statement to be one of those "no-but" passages in which one thing is negated in order to emphasize a second part. Given the fact that people of the first century did dilute their wine by adding water (or vice versa) that likely is the thought here: not drink just a "tablespoon" of pure wine; rather what wine was drunk was greatly diluted by water. This is likely the proper understanding of the apostle's words. From Paul's command that Timothy take *"a little wine"* it is apparent that Timothy previously abstained from the drinking of wine altogether *err* this epistle reached his hands. Paul wrote of drinking in various texts. Ephesians were not to be drunken with wine (Eph. 5:18). Elders were not to be given to wine (1 Tim. 3:3); deacons were not to be *"given to much wine"* (1 Tim. 3:8); aged women were not to be enslaved to *"much wine"* (Titus 2:3). His condemnation of drunkenness was frequent and certain (1 Cor. 6:1f; Gal. 5:19-21). Peter wrote, *"For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desires of the Gentiles and to have walked in winebibbings, revelings and carousings ..."* (1 Pet. 4:3). Each of three words, *"winebibbings, revelings, carousing,"* picture drinking in every aspect: the social drink; one who is "tipsy" and he who has had so much that he is loud, boisterous, and quarrelsome from its use.

Some argue for "a beer now and then" on the basis that deacons were not to be *"given to much wine"* while the instructions to elders were that they were

not to be *"given to wine."* According to this view, elders were to be teetotalers, and deacons could have a little. We think this argument is without merit. How is it possible a deacon could gain to himself *"a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus"* by being *"given to a little wine"* when he is, by his works, preparing himself, as he matures, to be selected as an elder, whose qualifications require that he *"not be given to wine"*? The basis for the selection of an elder is not on that which he becomes after he is ordained; but on the basis of what he is before he is chosen!

"Take a little wine ... for thine often infirmities." We conclude from this that Timothy was of frail health and Paul was fully aware of that. His command to him was that what little wine he took was for a distinct reason; for his stomach's sake and infirmities. Any wine taken today would have to be for the same purpose -- for medicinal purposes, but given the many different forms of medicine available, we are certain that medicine for our stomach's sake can be administered without the need of the *"little wine"* Paul wrote Timothy about.

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