

A Discourse on Alcohol in the Restoration Movement

Introduction

Intense debate and discourse regarding alcohol consumption has roots in the Restoration Movement Churches from its beginning.¹ It is an issue that has sparked division on many levels; many consider alcohol consumption to be a test of fellowship. However, little has taken place to advance discussion or further understanding on the topic in since debate began.

Alcohol consumption impairs both mentally and physically; many will construct a scriptural polemic based on its adverse psychological and physiological effects. Others will attempt the same on modern legal, political, economic, and socio-cultural terms. Its effects are described, its properties analyzed, and its detriment is quantified in many ways. Discussion carried out in this manner often becomes circular: what is alcohol—a drink...what do we call a consumer of alcohol—a drinker...what do we call it when someone becomes overly intoxicated—drunk...what do we call someone who is addicted to alcohol—a drunk...what is the biblical sin regarding alcohol—drunkenness! At this point, arguments often appeal to personal histories involving the use, or abuse, of alcohol. When personal histories are introduced, debate often evokes strong emotions and a sensitivity that can prevent objectivity in further discussion.

When framed in the context of linguistics, both sides are able to argue for their position effectively—regardless of how recipients of the New Testament letters understood them. Linguistics fail to offer conclusive evidence on the matter because the New Testament Greek lacks the same precision as Old Testament Hebrew in its terminology for wine.² However, in the

¹ Throughout this research, the terms wine and alcohol in reference to biblical times are used interchangeably.

² George Faull, *Drinking and the Bible*, (Peru, IN: Summit Theological Seminary Publishing, 2020 print on demand), 6-7. The Old Testament words: *yayin*, *shekar*, *mameuk*, *chamur*, and *cobe* all refer to fermentation, fermented drink, or wine with alcoholic content. Likewise, *tiyrowsh*, *yeqeb*, *enab*, *ashiyshah*, and *aciyc* all refer to

exercise of polemics and other debate techniques, one aspect of the debate has been neglected—a missing theological perspective.

Alexander Campbell offers a productive path forward in *Christianity Restored*. By applying the restoration principle of, “calling bible things by bible names,” it becomes apparent that wine in biblical times carried certain cultural understandings that are largely absent in current discussion. The discussion should not only define alcohol in biblical times—what it was and was not—but should do the same for alcohol in modern times as well. This is a path of inquiry that appears to be absent in the discussion on alcohol today. To move forward with productivity the question that needs to be addressed is, “based on what wine is known to have been in biblical times, how would the bible define alcohol as it is intended for service and consumption today?”

In this frame of reference, the question of alcohol shifts from, “is it permissible to consume?” to “if wines/alcohols intended for service in biblical and modern times are not the same thing, how do they differ and what should they be called?” According to the hermeneutical principles set forth by Campbell, it is reasonable to suggest that the consumption of modern alcohol amounts to the practice of sorcery.

The Alexander Campbell Method

Alexander Campbell states that words are most often defined in first order by whatever thought(s) are evoked mentally at the time they are presented. The literal sense is, “the sense which is so connected with them [the hearer/user of the word], that it is first order and is spontaneously present to the mind, as soon as the sound of the word is heard.”³ However, in

unfermented wine. *Oinos* and *gleukos* are New Testament words for wine which linguistics offer no further definition.

³ Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored*, (1835; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Faith and Facts Press, ?), 26. [brackets not in original].

dealing with historical works this method alone is not sufficient. As word meanings shift over time and across cultures, words must be allowed to retain the meaning as when they were first penned or spoken to fully understand what was meant by the speaker or writer.

By historical interpretation, we are to understand that we give to the words of the sacred author, the sense which they bore in the age when he lived, and which is agreeable to the degree of knowledge which he possessed, as well as conformable to the religion professed by him, and to the sacred and civil rights or customs, that obtained in the age when he flourished.⁴

Wine in the bible and modern alcohol are best interpreted literally and culturally in both time periods. When viewed in this manner, a clear distinction between the time periods arises regarding alcohol its use. One issue that arises with the consumption of modern alcohol is a general lack of temperament in consumption and its production with the intent of containing higher concentrations of alcohol in its production and at the point of service in comparison to biblical times. This societal shift toward greater overall permissiveness regarding alcohol usage—a form of drug usage—is the beginning of practicing sorcery.

Biblical Wine and its Constitution Defined⁵

All the wine [of Bible times] was light wine, i.e., not fortified with extra alcohol. Concentrated alcohol was only known in the Middle Ages when the Arabs invented distillation (“alcohol” is an Arabic word) so what is now called liquor or strong drink (i.e., whiskey, gin, etc.) and the twenty per cent fortified wines were unknown in Bible times. Beer was brewed by various methods, but its alcoholic content was light. The strength of natural wines is limited by two factors. The percentage of alcohol will be half of the percentage of the sugar in the juice. And if the alcoholic content is much above 10 or 11 percent, the yeast cells are killed and fermentation ceases. Probably ancient wines were 7-10 per cent To avoid the sin of drunkenness, mingling of wine with water was practiced. This

⁴ Campbell, *Christianity Restored*, pg. 26.

⁵ Though the Old Testament has many words referring to wine in both the alcoholic and non-alcoholic sense, for the purpose of this discussion it will be assumed that all New Testament references to wine are alcoholic.

dilution was specified by the Rabbis in NT times for the wine customary at Passover.⁶

Wine in biblical times was diluted or “cut” by mingling it with water before service (the point of intended consumption). This was the custom of the time—this was the common practice. If cutting wine was the social custom of the time, it is reasonable to suggest that New Testament texts that discuss wine consumption are in reference to wine that has already been cut and is ready for consumption. Everett Ferguson lists several ancient sources that refer to wine mixtures and their fitness for the specific occasion being referenced in each; in all, the wine mixtures typically ranged from two to four parts water per one part of wine.⁷ These mixtures would dilute an uncut wine containing about 10% alcohol by volume (here after ABV) down to 2%-3.33% ABV.⁸

Galatians 5:21 defines drunkenness as a sin; many commentators express drunkenness as gateway to other sins because of lowered inhibitions and sense of good judgement.⁹ If wine in the New Testament refers to wine intended for service at no more than 3.3% ABV, the suggestion arises that drunkenness was not the intended goal of wine consumption. At banquets in the ancient world, presider was charged with the oversight of table wine service and to assure its fitness for the occasion coupled with other activities at the banquet.¹⁰ Likewise, in the ancient world it was the host who had ultimate responsibility for keeping guests safe.¹¹ Put into modern

⁶ Laird Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, (Chicago: Moody Publishing, 1980), 376. All [brackets] throughout this thesis are added unless stated otherwise.

⁷ Everett Ferguson, “Wine as a Table Drink in the Ancient World,” *Restoration Quarterly* 13 no 3 (1970): 142. Ferguson states that there are records of wine being cut as much as 20 parts water to one part wine.

⁸ As a point of reference, most mass-produced beer is generally in the neighborhood of 5% ABV. Wines and liquors are much higher in their ABV content.

⁹ See commentaries by Gareth Reese, Don Earl Boatman, Kenneth Boles, and F.F. Bruce.

¹⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 96.

¹¹ Fred H. Wight, *Manners & Customs of Bible Lands*, (Chicago: Moody Publishing, 1953), 78. P.T. Massey in “In Vino Veritas and Its Possible Application to 1 Corinthians 11:21: The Revelatory Role of Wine in a House Church Setting in Light of Graeco-Roman Culture,” states that social roles were in place to prevent men and

terms: the ownership, management, and the patron(s) would all have to be in league with one another for drunkenness to take place. Therefore, accidental drunkenness seems highly unlikely but still possible. Drunkenness, even if unintentional, cannot be considered holy by God. It seems plausible to suggest that accidental drunkenness might be the idea Paul has in mind when he includes drunkenness—understood as table wine properly cut and served—in his acts of sin passage in Galatians 5:19-21.

Cultural Underpinnings of Alcohol

Wine in ancient times has been cited as having medicinal properties. In Proverbs 31, kings are said to avoid wine but give it to the perishing and poverty stricken in order that they may forget their problems.¹² The Good Samaritan used it as medical treatment for the injured man. The Apostle Paul admonishes Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach health issue in 1 Timothy 5:23.¹³ This is the “exception to the rule” that is often given regarding the abstinence from alcohol in modern society—when it is prescribed in measure by one who is properly qualified to make such a determination regarding the health of another.

Wine as a medical treatment falls under the jurisdiction of the Greek word *pharmakeia* from which the modern term pharmacy is derived. However, the term is also scripturally translated as sorcery. Richard Longenecker makes room for the distinctions of good *pharmakeia* as good medical practice and bad *pharmakeia* as the practice of sorcery.¹⁴ Care must be taken to distinguish between the two. In modern times, the Food and Drug Administration works to

women, especially married women, from intermingling inappropriately. However, with drunkenness there is a higher likelihood that social convention and propriety will fall by the wayside.

¹² James Strong and W.E. Vine, *The New Strong's Concordance & Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, 2 volumes in 1 ed., (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1999), 414. Loose paraphrase of Proverbs 31:4-7.

¹³ Though Paul encourages “a little wine” for its medicinal value for Timothy, it took a Holy Spirit-inspired Apostle saying it for Timothy to give consideration to taking any wine.

¹⁴ Richard Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1990), 255.

ensure that pharmaceuticals are vigorously tested before approved for public use. Additionally, those who are legally permitted to prescribe *pharmakeia* as a means of medical treatment for others must have the proper credentials.

The position of drunkenness—not drinking alcohol itself—as a sin is the position often stated in modern context. However, in looking at wine considered culturally acceptable for service in the ancient world, attitudes toward unacceptable practices must also be observed. The Romans considered drinking undiluted wine to be a barbaric practice.¹⁵ Likewise, the Greeks also considered drinking unmixed wine a barbaric (Scythian) practice.¹⁶ Even wine cut 1-1 in equal parts was viewed as suspect:

The gods had revealed wine to mortals, to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse. For it gives food to them that take it and strength in mind and body. In medicine, it is most beneficial; it can be mixed with liquid drugs and it brings aid to the wounded. In daily intercourse, to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer; but if you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse.¹⁷

Would Jews or Christians in ancient times find it acceptable to have greater laxity in their stance toward drinking improperly cut wine and still claim their actions as acceptable before God? It is counterintuitive to suggest that anyone who desires acceptability before God, whether ancient or modern, would adopt a similar position of moral and ethical laxity than the rest of the unbelieving world and still be regarded as the royal priesthood or a holy nation when other

¹⁵ Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 343. The Apostle Paul also specifically warns the Christians at Rome to not fall into the practice of drunkenness (Rom. 13:13).

¹⁶ Everett Ferguson, *Wine as a Table Drink*, 145.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 143. In this reference, ancient source Deipnosophists x.426c,d. records Mnesitheus, as quoted by Athenaeus.

nations arrive at the same stance against strong drink while having no regard for acting in holiness toward God.

Modern Alcohol(s) and their Constitution

Linguistically, the word for wine as an alcoholic beverage has remained unchanged. However, its essence—its cultural underpinnings and how its make-up is understood (e.g., how it was intended to be served)—has changed dramatically. The notion of consuming uncut wines and fortified liquors as they are produced and served today, as well as any modern means of “cutting” them, would be abhorrent to those of biblical times. In a list of 100 beers, a lesser *pharmakeia* than wine, three beers fall within the guidelines of twice cut wine—two of which are legally allowed to be called non-alcoholic because they contain .5% ABV or less.¹⁸ With twice cut wine appearing as the starting point of an acceptable mix in the ancient world, what does it say about the modern view of alcohol consumption when there is so little of it produced that might align with customary practice in the ancient world? Many of the most popular drinks that are cut before service (aka “cocktails”) still retain over 11% ABV at their intended point of service.¹⁹

When Paul listed drunkenness in his acts of the flesh, it seems plausible to suggest that he may have been referring to accidental drunkenness through the course of properly cut and served wine. In Scripture, sin is sin accidental or otherwise. However, if the link between accidental overconsumption of properly cut table wine can be established as the meaning of drunkenness,

¹⁸ “Beer Alcohol Content, Calories, Carbs, and Ratings,” Straight to the Pint, accessed 3/22/2021, <https://straighttothepint.com/beer-alcohol-content-calories-carbs/>

¹⁹ “Rethinking Drinking: Cocktail Calculator,” National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, accessed 3/30/2021, <https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/tools/calculators/cocktail-calculator.aspx>. This site offers a way to calculate your own mixed/cut drink concoctions as well as many of the more prominent already pre-programmed into the site. Every cocktail pre-programmed in, as intended for service, is over 11% ABV. Therefore, these specific and highly popular drinks are all above the threshold of uncut wine ABV in the ancient world.

the question that arises is, “what are the implications for the alcohol that is distributed for consumption today?” To this end, an exploration of *pharmakeia* must be applied to modern alcohol and its intended service.

Sorcery Analyzed

Academic research on sorcery is scarce; though Christians are to strictly avoid the practice of sorcery, enough should be known about it to recognize it when it is encountered. Walter Martin defines a sorcerer as, “...one who practices the induction of formulas, potions, or incantations, to assist in gaining power over a person or an event.”²⁰ “What is illicit about sorcery (literally, “pharmacy”) is the use of drugs, potions, and other things with the idea that they can influence the unseen powers to produce love or hatred, prosperity or adversity.”²¹ The practice of sorcery contains the following components: a practitioner with intent, a drug, a person to be overcome via the administered drug by the practitioner, and an underlying spiritual aspect.²² The outcome of the sorcery act has two possibilities: being beneficial to the practitioner or injurious to the one overpowered. However, identifying instances and the practice of sorcery becomes even more difficult when entire cultures begin to sanction and regulate it.

Mike Martin states, “They [drugs] charm us...then have a double allure. They promise greater self-control and simultaneously offer excuses for our failures to exercise control when we are under their influence.”²³ Society excusing the abuse of a drug—which it has legalized by its

²⁰ Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Occult*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2008), 598.

²¹ H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell eds., *Pulpit Commentary*, (?), repr., Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 2011) 20:286. The authors go on to say, “It can be said that this class of sins has almost disappeared with the diffusion of Christianity.”

²² F.F. Bruce states in his work on the Apostle Paul that sorcery was a serious offense in Roman Law: it was dealt with by a standing court in which no very sharp distinction was made between the act and the actor in sorcery. Therefore, it seems plausible to make room for the possibility that that the administrator and the person overcome by the drug can be the same person if, for instance, alcohol was consumed with the specific intent of self-intoxication.

²³ Mike Martin, *Everyday Morality: An Introduction to Applied Ethics 4th ed.*, (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth Publishing, 2007), 220. In some cases, preachers were even paid by whiskey.

own set of standards—in exchange for the paradigm described by Martin often results in the acquiring two labels: addiction and disease—the compulsive user is referred to as an addict and alcoholism is classified as a disease. However, if alcohol is cast in the light of being a disease, the following considerations and their implications must be acknowledged as well.

If drinking is a disease...

1. It is the only disease that is contracted by an act of the will.
2. It is the only disease that requires a license to propagate it.
3. It is the only disease that is bottled and sold.
4. It is the only disease that requires outlets to spread it.
5. It is the only disease that produces revenue for the government.
6. It is the only disease that is habit forming.
7. It is the only disease that provokes crime.
8. It is the only disease that is permitted to be spread by advertisement.
9. It is the only disease without a germ or virus case, and for which there is no human corrective medicine.
10. It is the only disease that will condemn you to eternal separation from God in Hell (Galatians 5:21).²⁴

Essentially, the paradigm of Christian behavior concerned with holiness and sinfulness has been lost. Once the Christian Worldview is removed, the paradigm shift toward another worldview will take its place. When there is a construct that removes responsibility and self-control addiction is given a foothold and the alcoholic will eventually be reduced to acting from a behavioral mindset.²⁵

Sorcery plays a role in modern society that appears to go unnoticed. Why? The answer might be attributed to lacking a proper understanding regarding sorcery. Understanding sorcery

²⁴ George Faull, *Drinking and the Bible*, 5.

²⁵ See the works of B.F. Skinner. If an addict is controlled by factors external to himself such as alcohol, behaviorism states that he will do whatever he needs to in order to feed his addiction regardless of any cognitive awareness that what he desires is bad for him.

and its operational role in society reflects various states of spirit manipulation through purposeful psychological and physiological, alteration.

In the enterprise of modern alcohol as sorcery:

1. As a disease, alcohol is protected.
2. Uncontrolled, it is drunkenness.
3. Uncontrollable, it is an addiction.
4. Used as a manipulative on others, it is sinful and criminal.
5. Used as a self-manipulative, it is still sinful.
6. Used without directed prescription of a qualified medical professional, it is drug abuse.
7. Yet socially it is commonplace: ordinary in its acceptability—and defended as a right.

Conclusion

The goal of this discourse is forward movement in the debate on the issue of wine and alcohol for the Christian and modern society. Taking into consideration the overlooked theological aspect provides new grounds for productive discussion. Many are ill-equipped to identify sorcery because society is largely uninformed or misinformed on the topic. Lack of proper understanding, compounded with others who seek to follow the scriptural prohibition of dabbling in the occult through complete avoidance when of any mention of it arises, have left many unable to recognize it when they see it or encounter it.

Had Alexander Campbell specifically considered the topic of wine and alcohol from the perspective set forth in his hermeneutic, it is reasonable to suggest that he might have reached many of the same conclusion(s) set forth in this discourse. Therefore, Christianity and modern society needs to critically re-examine alcohol, its usage, the biblical parameters of sorcery and its implications for modern times.

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