

***DID JESUS MAKE OR DRINK ALCOHOLIC WINE?*¹ – JOHN 2**

(working paper, incomplete at this time)

Introductory Thoughts:

To state—or even imply—that Jesus Christ the Lord of glory, who is God, made &/or drank alcohol is an extremely serious accusation to make. I would contend that it impugns His very character, since it attributes to Him the making of something which the Word of God repeatedly warns man to avoid and condemns as a mocker, a destroyer of mankind and the source of untold misery and woe! (Prov. 20:1)

In addition, in the Old Testament God forbade kings and priests who were serving to drink alcohol. In light of the fact that the New Testament declares *all* believers to be *priests* and “*kings*,” or part of a “*kingdom*”² can believers justify partaking of it? Furthermore, how can one maintain that Christ who is the “living Word, violated the written Word by making alcoholic wine—a lot of it—for the guests at the wedding at Cana?

In light of the fact that the various words translated “*wine*” in the Old & New Testaments (e.g. *yayin*, *tiros*, *acicyc*, *oinos*, etc.) on various occasions unquestionably mean the *unfermented* juice of the grape (i.e. grape juice), and in view of the fact that there is no indication in the text of John 2 whether the “*wine*” created was alcoholic or non-alcoholic, it would seem that the most sensible position would be to assume that it was *not* alcoholic. After all, why would Christ violate His own word and supply approximately 100 gallons of alcoholic drink to people who were already “buzzed” and on their way to becoming drunk?³ Such a position makes no sense. Worse yet, it makes our Lord Jesus Christ who was God incarnate, the source of temptation to all of the individuals in attendance at Cana that day. On the contrary, James 1:12-14 clearly states that God tempts no one!⁴

Many well-respected pastors, theologians & Bible scholars both past and present agree that Jesus did *not* make or drink alcoholic wine and I’d like to include a few of their comments here. I pray that you will find them helpful and enlightening.

Dr. Peter Masters, Pastor of The Metropolitan Tabernacle (Spurgeon’s church) in London, England:

“The writers of books [and teachers, preachers] which advocate the consumption of alcohol in moderation by Christians **should be extremely careful before asserting (as they invariably do) that Jesus drank wine**⁵...He may very well have drunk the fresh fruit of the vine, or the boiled and diluted variety of fermented wine (also called wine) **in which the intoxicating properties had been destroyed. But we have no right to say dogmatically that our perfect, law-abiding and great High Priest drank intoxicating wine Himself.**

“The Lord did indeed say that He came *eating and drinking* (Luke 7:34); [But] He was contrasting Himself with John the Baptist, whose life of extreme austerity evidently excluded the usual foods and vine-drinks of the people... **the Lord’s words do not actually indicate that He drank wine in an intoxicating form, however weak.**

“The Pharisees and lawyers certainly said, ‘*Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners,*’ **but that does not prove that the Lord drank alcohol either. The jibe of the Pharisees was as false on the matter of alcohol as it was on the matter of gluttony [!]... Let us take great care and show all due**

¹ Compiled by Mike Edwards, April, 2013, St. Vincent, West Indies. Words in parentheses () appear as such in the original sources. That contained in brackets [], as well as all bolding & underlining have been added by me-mwe.

² *Priests*—I Pet. 2:5, 9 & Rev. 20:6; *Kings*—Rev. 1:6; 5:10; [KJV; a *kingdom*-NKJV & NASV]

³ A statement I personally heard a preacher make several months ago!

⁴ “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*” –James 1:12-15

⁵Dr. Peter Masters mentions as a typical example G.I. Williamson who “in his book *Wine in the Bible and the Church*, “says repeatedly, ‘*Christ did make and use wine.*’[sic]” (Peter Masters, “*Should Christians Drink?*” [The Wakeman Trust: London, England, 1992, 2001], p. 63)

reverence before we make confident remarks about the Lord Jesus drinking wine. Let us never forget that He fulfilled all righteousness in procuring our salvation.⁶

Dr. Henry R. Pike [veteran missionary, pastor and author]:

“For almost two thousand years, controversy has raged over the ‘kind’ of wine Jesus created...Among certain Reformed Christians, some Messianic Jewish, and other Gentile believers, the use of intoxicating beverages, especially wine, is spoken of in proud, if not boastful language... **God did not make intoxicating beverage the emblem of those spiritual blessings that ensure peace and promote hope in the hearts of believers. To hold that the sinless Messiah from heaven approved such a state of things and point to the wedding at Cana as proof, is devilish thinking...**

[in] Judges 9:13 ...Scripture states, ‘*wine... cheereth God and man.*’ **Who would dare intimate that this means the Almighty was in a low state of ‘acceptable’ intoxication from the use of wine? A statement of this nature would be blasphemy! Albert Barnes wrote in 1832, ‘*The common wine of Judea was the pure juice of the grape, without any mixture of alcohol, and was harmless.*’ (*Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, page 195). Barnes further points out how the ancients frequently spoke of ‘good wine’ as that which was free from intoxication...**

“Josephus, who lived over two thousand years ago, stated in Antiquities, Book 2:5. 2, line 64 that the liquid from freshly squeezed grapes was called ‘wine.’ Thus, [the word] ‘wine’ also speaks of non-intoxicating drink. It is incorrect that ‘wine’ in ancient history and the Bible always means an alcoholic beverage... Wine across the entire bible is a generic term meaning a variety of things from liquids to syrups, and even jellies. In the Old Testament, there are some eleven different Hebrew words translated by our one English word wine (see *Young’s Analytical Concordance*, page 1058 for details)...

“ [The phrase] ‘*Well drunk*’ is seized upon to prove that that after the guests at a wedding were half intoxicated, the servants rolled out a worse or lesser grade of wine to be consumed. Consequently, due to their partly inebriated mental state, they would not know the difference! **Who could imagine the Lord of Glory would set before hundreds of thirsty Jews about one hundred gallons of fermented wine with the design that they complete their half-drunken conditions into full-blown stupors? It was not the Savior who made this statement** [i.e. ‘*when they have well drunk*’], but the master of ceremonies or ruler-governor of the feast. **He was speaking for himself, not for the Messiah.** However, he confessed that the wine drawn from the waterpots was ‘good wine.’ This was a term of contrast and set against ‘old wine’...

“Demonstrating He was the sovereign creator, Christ bypassed the process of grape growing, which took some five years (Lev. 19:23-25), with the necessary elements of rain and sun, the long, hard season of harvesting and then pressing out the juice. He instantly created fresh, delicious ‘pure blood of the grape’ which, under normal circumstances, could be extracted only at the winepress by crushing the clusters (Gen. 49:11 with Deut. 32:14). It was called ‘good wine’ (or ‘new’), and in this case was void of fermentation (Isa. 65:8 with Prov. 3:9-10). **In some passages ‘new wine’ is associated with intoxicating drink after it was mixed with other wines (Joel 1:5).**⁷

Rev. David Wilkerson, well-known New York City pastor, on whose ministry the film & book titled “*The Cross & the Switchblade*” were based & the founder of “*Teen Challenge*”, a Christian ministry to alcoholics, drug addicts, etc.:

“Drinkers are pleased beyond words to hear evangelists and other bible ‘experts’ suggest that Jesus turned water into fermented wine, and that Jesus, Paul, and Timothy were wine tasters. They like to picture Jesus as that earthy, easygoing Galilean who loved to mix with the crowd on their terms. [They point out that] His generation called Jesus a ‘winebibber,’ one who came eating and drinking. [However] **they also called Him a glutton, a devil, a**

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⁷ Henry R. Pike, “*Selah! Harmony Commentary of the Four Gospels*” (Ambassador International: Greenville, South Carolina & Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2012), pp. 117-119.

destroyer of the law, and a deceiver. He was none of these. Jesus did not come as a drinking buddy to the potbellied crowd of rowdy men. **He did not eat as a glutton, and He did not drink as a winebibber.** Our sinless High Priest ate with publicans and sinners and drank the pure juice of the vine. But never did He sit in the seat of the scornful or touch the cup when its contents were ‘red and biting’ (see Proverbs 23:31, 32).

“Ask many Christian young people today why they drink, and their quick reply is, ‘*Well, if Jesus could make it—and drink it—so can I. If Paul recommended it to Timothy, I’ll take the recommendation too. Jesus was no square!*’[sic]

“Do Christians drink because of ignorance? Has no one challenged them by the Word of God? ...I know a number of good, Spirit-filled Christians who take a glass of wine with their meals. Some are also moderate beer drinkers...No one has ever challenged their drinking. **No one has pointed them to the strong rebuke in the Word of God against drinking and to its potential harm.** They never considered their drinking a stumbling block to young converts. But that is no longer excusable. It is especially inexcusable to those who know better—those who have been convicted by the Word and the Spirit. Tragically, many fine Christian people shut out all the evidence and refuse to abstain. They have convinced themselves that nothing is wrong with moderate drinking, and no one will ever change their minds. So be it! **But one day we must all stand before God’s holy judgment and answer for the truth revealed to us.**”⁸

But didn’t Jews, Greeks, etc., make & drink alcoholic wine? Wilkerson: “Traditionally, Christians and Jews often drank vintage wines, as they still do in Europe. Traditionally, fermented wine was used in the Passover celebration and communion. ***But tradition does not make it right!*** I flatly state that ***there is not one shred of proof that Jesus turned water into fermented wine—or that He served vintage wine at His Passover celebration.*** Nor can I find any real proof that all wine in the Old Testament had alcoholic content. To the contrary, I believe the facts prove otherwise.”

Regarding what happened in John 2: “Jesus did turn water into wine. But there is absolutely no foundation in Scripture to back the assumption that it was alcoholic. And I say it is vitally important to deal with this subject now, because if Jesus made and drank alcoholic wine, let’s all do it, and let the kids go on swinging their merry way toward alcoholism. If it was good enough for Jesus, then it should be allowed to any teenager. **Not all wine is alcoholic any more than all cider is hard.** It is inconceivable to me that our blessed Lord would ever produce an intoxicant or that He used fermented wine at Passover as the symbol of His own shed blood.

Albert Barnes, highly respected scholar & Bible commentator comments on the miracle of water into “wine” in John 2. We will pick up his commentary on the passage in John 2, beginning at verse 10:

“**Every man.** i.e. It is customary, or it is generally done. **When men have well drunk.** This word does not of necessity mean that they were *intoxicated*, though it is usually employed in that sense. It may mean when they have drunk sufficient, or to satiety; or have drunk so much as to produce hilarity, and to destroy the keenness of their tastes, so that they could not readily distinguish the good from that which was worse. **But this cannot be adduced in favour of drunkenness,** even if it means to be intoxicated; for, 1) It is not said of those who were present *at that feast*, but of what *generally* occurred. For...(it) appears, at that feast all were perfectly temperate and sober. 2) It is not the saying of Jesus that is here recorded, but of the governor (i.e. the “MC”) of the feast, who is declaring what usually occurred... 3) There is not any expression of opinion in regard to its *propriety*, or in approval of it, even by that governor. 4) It does not appear that our Saviour even *heard* the observation. 5) Still less is there any evidence that he *approved* such a state of things, or that he designed that it should take place here. 6) ...the word translated ‘well drunk’ cannot be shown to mean intoxication; but it may mean when they had drunk as much as they judged proper or as they desired, then the other was presented. It is clear that neither our Saviour, nor the sacred writer, nor the speaker here expresses any *approbation* [i.e. approval, praise] of

⁸ David Wilkerson, “*Sipping Saints—Do Christianity and Drinking Mix?*” (Spire Books/Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, NJ, 1978), p. 16

intemperance, nor is there the least evidence that anything of the kind occurred here. It is not proof that *we* approve of intemperance when we mention, as this man did, what occurs usually among men at feasts.”⁹

“***The good wine.*** This shows that this had all the qualities of real wine [wine meaning anything from fresh-pressed grape juice to preserved grape juice, to a weak alcoholic variety-*mwe*]. We should not be deceived by the phrase ‘*good wine.*’ We often use the phrase to denote that it is good in proportion to its strength [i.e. alcohol content] and its power to intoxicate; but no such sense is to be attached to the word here. **Pliny, Plutarch, and Horace describe wine as good, or mention that as the best wine, which was harmless or innocent**—*poculo vini innocentis*. The most useful wine—*utilissimum vinum*—was that which had little strength; and the most wholesome wine—*saluberrimum vinum*—was that which had not been adulterated by ‘the addition of anything to the *must* or juice.’ **Pliny expressly says that a ‘good wine’ was one that was destitute of spirit** (lib. Iv. C. 13).

It should not be assumed, therefore, that the ‘good wine’ was *stronger* than the other: it is rather to be presumed that it was milder. The wine referred to here was doubtless such as was commonly drunk in Palestine. That was the pure juice of the grape. It was not brandied wine, nor drugged wine, nor wine compounded of various substances, such as we drink in this land. The common wine drunk in Palestine was that which was the simple juice of the grape.

“We use the word ‘*wine*’ now to denote the kind of liquid which passes under that name in this country—always containing a considerable portion of alcohol—not only the alcohol produced by fermentation, but alcohol *added* to keep it or make it stronger. **But we have no right to take that sense of the word and go with it to the interpretation of the Scriptures. We should endeavour to place ourselves in the exact circumstances of those times, ascertain precisely what idea the word would convey to those who used it then, and apply that sense to the word in the interpretation of the Bible;** and there is not the slightest evidence that the word so used would have conveyed any ideas but that of the pure juice of the grape, nor the slightest circumstance mentioned in this account that would not be fully met by such a supposition. No man should adduce *this* instance in favour of drinking wine unless he can prove that the wine made in the ‘water pots’ of Cana was *just like* the wine which he proposes to drink. The Saviour’s example may be always pleaded JUST AS IT WAS; but is a matter of obvious and simple justice that we should find out exactly what the example was before we plead it.(!)...

“There is, moreover, no evidence that any other part of the water was converted into wine than that which was *drawn out* of the water-casks for the use of the guests. On this supposition, certainly, all the circumstances of the case are met, and the miracle would be more striking... All, therefore, that has been said about the Redeemer’s furnishing a large quantity of wine for the newly-married pair, and about his benevolence in doing it, is wholly gratuitous. There is no evidence of it whatever; and it is not necessary to suppose it in order to an explanation of the circumstances of the case.”¹⁰ Tasker agrees likewise.¹¹

⁹ Albert Barnes, “*Notes on the New Testament*” (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan, reprinted from the 1884-1885 edition, reprinted 1998), John II, p. 193, italics in the original.

¹⁰Barnes, *ibid*, pp. 193-194

¹¹ “*It is not necessary to assume that all the water in all the jars was converted into wine. Probably the miracle was enacted after the servants had drawn out some of the water from one of the jars and were conveying it to the steward in charge.*” R. V. G. Tasker, “*The Gospel According to St. John – An Introduction and Commentary*”, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1960, 1972), p. 60.