

What are the facts about fermented drinks in the Bible?

It is often supposed that in Bible times, grape juice inevitably fermented if kept for any length of time, and that therefore whenever the Bible mentions “wine,” it is referring to the alcoholic beverage commonly called “wine” today. However, ancient civilizations had several ways of preventing fruit and fruit juices from fermentation, and thus were able to have non-alcoholic wine (grape juice) throughout the year.

Preventing fermentation

- 1) One method involved boiling the juice and reducing it to a syrup that could later be diluted with water.
- 2) Another was to boil the juice with minimum evaporation and then immediately seal it with beeswax in airtight jars.
- 3) Drying the fruit in the sun and then reconstituting it with water, adding sulfur to the fruit juice, or filtering the juice to extract the gluten were also methods that would prevent the juice from fermenting.

These means of preservation were known to the ancients, who also practiced boiling fermented juice to eliminate the alcohol.

Unfermented wine in ancient literature

Referring to reconstituting grape syrup to make grape juice, Aristotle, who was born around 384 b.c., wrote “The wine of Arcadia was so thick that it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was contained and to dissolve the scrapings in water” (quoted in Nott’s Lectures on Biblical Temperance, p. 80). The poet Horace, born in 65 b.c., wrote, “There is no wine sweeter to drink than that of Lesbos; it was like nectar . . . and would not produce intoxication.”

“The Mishna [a collection of oral Jewish traditions] states that the Jews were in the habit of drinking boiled wine” (Kitto’s Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature, vol. 2, p. 447). Naturally, this wine would be entirely free of alcohol as a result of the boiling, if not also from the manner of preservation.

Additional information

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Albert Barnes wrote, “The wine of Judea was the pure juice of the grape, without any mixture of alcohol. It was the common drink of the people and did not produce intoxication.” And Adam Clarke, commenting on Genesis 40:11, wrote, “From this we find that wine anciently was the mere expressed juice of the grape without fermentation. The saky, or cupbearer, took the bunch [of grapes], pressed the juice into the cup, and instantly delivered it into the hands of his master. This was anciently the yayin [wine] of the Hebrews, the oinos [wine] of the Greeks, and the mustum [wine] of the ancient Latins.” Clarke’s comments agree with the Scripture that declares “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, ‘Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it’ ” (Isaiah 65:8, NKJV).

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1871 book: Jesus' wine at Cana was non-alcoholic

<http://www.bpnews.net/3163/1871-book-jesus-wine-at-cana-was-nonalcoholic>

by Daniel W. Guido, posted Wednesday, February 19, 1997 (22 years ago)

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--First published in 1871, the book, "Bible Wines," remains a valuable resource supporting a centuries-old contention that Christ turned barrels of water into non-alcoholic wine at the wedding in Cana.

"Bible Wines," by William Patton, is distributed by the Temperance League of Kentucky. Copies can be ordered from the organization at (502) 635-0002.

Patton's book is a godsend to those who believe Christ would not have turned water into fermented wine, said Claude Witt, executive director of the Temperance League of Kentucky who also is a Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission member and president of the American Council on Alcohol Problems, based in St. Louis.

"There are so many biblical verses that clearly emphasize God's restriction against drinking fermented wine," Witt said.

"For example, in Numbers, chapter 6, verses 1 through 4, God instructs Moses to take the vow of the Nazirite and separate himself from wine or strong drink, to consume nothing from the grape vine, not drink grape juice, and eat not even the seed or the skins.

"While that was the call to be a priest, a leader of the people, today, with Christ, all of us are priests or ministers. All of us are called to separate ourselves from the world, and especially from one of the world's greatest temptations -- alcohol," Witt said.

Still, those who drink moderately or occasionally say the Bible does not specifically rule out drinking, only getting drunk -- at least for those who are not called to the degree of service as was Moses.

"There is an argument that can be made along those lines," Witt said. "It is not one that I follow, but the Bible does in many instances sternly warn us not to get drunk. But I believe it is also clearly warning us not to drink at all."

In the Lord's Prayer, Christians pray for protection against temptation. Witt questioned why any believers would think God would lead them into such a powerful temptation by allowing them to drink, even in moderation.

"All alcoholics start as moderate drinkers. All those who get drunk start with a first drink," he said.

In "Bible Wines," Patton presented an extended argument that Christ created non-alcoholic wine at the wedding feast in Cana.

The Bible's account of Christ turning water into wine, considered his first miracle, is in [John 2:1-11](#). Patton contended:

"The distinguishing fact is that Christ turned the water into wine. The Greek word is oinos; and it is claimed that therefore the wine was alcoholic and intoxicating. But as oinos is a generic word, and, as such, includes all kinds of wine and all stages of the juice of the grape, and sometimes the cluster and even the vine, it is begging the whole question to assert it was intoxicating.

"As the narrative is silent on this point, the character of the wine can only be determined by the attendant circumstances -- by the occasion, the material used, the person making the wine and the moral influence of the miracle.

"The occasion was a wedding convocation. The material was water -- the same element which the clouds pour down, which the vine draws up from the earth by its roots, and in its passage to the clusters changes into juice. The operator was Jesus Christ, the same who, in the beginning, fixed that law by which the vine takes up water and converts it into pure, unfermented juice.

"The wine provided by the family was used up, and the mother of Jesus informed him of that fact. He directed that the six water pots be filled with water. This being done, He commanded it be drawn and handed to the master of the feast. He pronounced it wine -- good wine.

"The moral influence of the miracle will be determined by the character of the wine. It is pertinent to ask: Is it not derogatory to the character of Christ and the teachings of the Bible to suppose that he exerted his miraculous power to produce (what some say is 126 gallons, others 60 gallons) of intoxicating wine?

"Wine which inspiration has denounced as 'a mocker,' 'as biting as a serpent,' and 'stinging like an adder,' as 'the poison of dragons,' 'the cruel venom of asps,' and which the Holy Spirit has selected as the emblem of the wrath of Almighty God?

"Is it probable that his son gave that to the guests after they had used the wine provided by the host, and which, it is claimed, was intoxicating?

"... Can it be seriously entertained that Christ should, by his miraculous power, make alcohol? Can it be believed that he, by making alcohol, sanctions the making of it and the giving of it to his creatures, when he, better than all others, knew that it, in the past, had been the cause of the temporal and eternal ruin of myriads, and which, in all the ages to come, would plunge myriads upon myriads into the depths of eternal damnation?"

Note: The Plain Word does not support the idea of "eternal damnation".

Patton also quoted another theologian, identified as Professor Donovan, who observed, "All who know of the wines then used well understand the unfermented juice of the grape. The present wines of Jerusalem and Lebanon ... were commonly boiled and sweet, without intoxicating qualities, such as we get in liquors called wines.

"The boiling prevents fermentation," Donovan stated. "Those were esteemed the best wines, which were the least strong."

End of exerpt.

Did Jesus Make Alcoholic Wine?

By Ron Boatwright

The miracle of Jesus turning the water into wine is found in John 2:1-11. Some people try to justify the drinking of alcohol by saying that Jesus made alcoholic wine. But was the wine Jesus created alcoholic? When they ran out of wine at the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus had them fill six water pots to the brim, each of which held about 20 gallons. This would make a total of about 120 gallons. When it was taken to the master of the wedding feast to taste, he was surprised and said, "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" (John 2:10). The good wine in those days was grape juice that had not yet fermented.

The Greek word "OINOS" which is translated wine in the Bible can be either fermented or unfermented wine. We see in Isaiah 65:8, "Thus says the Lord, 'As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says do not destroy it'". What is the alcoholic content in the new wine in a cluster of grapes? Zero. There is no alcohol in a cluster of grapes. Also God says in Isaiah 16:10, "No treaders will tread out wine in the presses; I have made their shouting cease." Again we know the alcoholic content of the new wine that is being treaded out in the grape presses is zero. This wine is only fresh grape juice.

Jesus says in Matthew 9:17, "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." New wine, which is unfermented wine as we have seen in Isaiah 16:10, 65:8, is not placed into old wine skins because the old wine skins probably have been contaminated with fermentation bacteria which will ferment the new wine. If new wine is placed into old wineskins, then the new wine will become fermented and the fermentation gasses will break the wineskins and the wine will pour out. But Jesus says that you put new wine (fresh grape juice) into new wineskins (which have not been contaminated with fermentation bacteria) "and both are preserved".

Jesus did not create an alcoholic wine. God's word forbade giving alcoholic wine to someone else. Habakkuk 2:15 says, "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to the bottle, even to make him drunk, that you may look on his nakedness." Jesus would have disobeyed God's word as found in Habakkuk and sinned if he had made an alcoholic wine, which was drunk by others. But Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Jesus never sinned or He could not have died for us. If He sinned He would have had to die for His own sin.

We have seen in the above scriptures that the wine Jesus made was not fermented. It was fresh grape juice, which is also referred to as wine (OINOS). To say that Jesus made 120 gallons of fermented wine is blasphemy. God's word says "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).

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Jesus and Wine

Did Jesus turn water into “alcoholic” wine at a party?

Did Jesus drink alcoholic wine? It is assumed by a great many that He did. Let’s examine this for a moment. Do you know how much wine Jesus made during His first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana? He made 6 firkins, or about 150 gallons. Now, of course, the New International Version (NIV), which never changes anything of significance (yea, right), says by implication that Jesus did this “after the GUESTS had too much to drink”. You do understand that Jesus was a GUEST don't you??? So, let me understand this correctly, Jesus was at a party where the guests were drinking to excess, Jesus was one of the guests, and He supplied a few extra kegs to liven things up a bit after they had already drank to excess. Is that your Jesus?

Jesus Sinned?

The King James Bible (KJB) rendering which states they had "well drunken" (had plenty to drink) is the correct one. The New American Standard Version and other literal modern versions agree with the KJB here, leaving the NIV alone in its radically liberal paraphrase. Even if you take the rendering in the KJB, which I do, you have to conclude the guests had drank their fill of wine. If this wine was alcoholic then it is likely that they would not be ready for another 150 gallons of alcoholic wine. Think about it. How many glass of wine would this be? If you figure 4 ounces to a glass, 128 ounces to a gallon, you get 32 glasses of wine per gallon and a grand total of 4,800 glasses of wine. Now I do not know how many people were at this feast, but surely 500 would be a large number for such an event at this time. If this wine was alcoholic then Jesus did cause all who were there to drink to excess. This is clearly a sin in the Old Testament. Not only would His excessive drinking have been a sin, but causing others to do so is also a sin. Every Jew present at this wedding, and they were undoubtedly all Jews, would have known Him to be a sinner because of this verse, and many others:

Habakkuk 2:15

Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also,.....

Now my liberal (apostate) friends are quick to assert that Jesus drank alcoholic wine, as a tea totaler of course, but are often shocked by the implication this has in John 2. Some have suggested that Jesus didn't drink any, and that the guests did not have to drink all that he made. These are interesting thoughts, but I think it is clear from context that the guests had drank their fill and were now given a great deal more to drink. I think it is also abundantly clear from context this was not alcoholic wine.

Biblical Word Wine and Its Usage

The word "wine" is mentioned 231 times in the King James Bible. In the Old Testament there are 3 Hebrew words that are all translated as “wine”.

- YAYIN: Intoxicating, fermented wine (Genesis 9:21).
- TIROSH: Fresh grape juice (Proverbs 3:10).
- SHAKAR: Intoxicating, intensely alcoholic, strong drink (often referred to other intoxicants than wine) (Numbers 28:7).

The New Testament, translated from Greek, uses the word “wine” for both fermented and unfermented drink. There are 2 Greek words for wine the New Testament.

- OINOS: Wine (generic) - Matthew 9:17
-- unfermented, Ephesians 5:18
-- fermented.
- GLEUKOS: Sweet wine, fresh juice (Acts 2:13).

The context reveals the type of wine as in Proverbs 20:1, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise”. If grape juice is substituted for the word wine, the verse doesn't make sense.

The Bible is full of prohibitions about using alcoholic wine. It was forbidden for priests and for those who took the Nazarite vow. It was forbidden for kings and princes (Proverbs 31:4-6) and pronounced woe upon anyone who provided his neighbor alcoholic wine and made him drunk (Habakkuk 2:15). It would be inconsistent for the Bible to speak against alcoholic wine and then have Jesus ignore it.

Relevant Questions to the Discussion

Didn't they use fermentation to preserve wine? How much alcohol content does naturally fermented wine have? Did they ever water it down? Is granulated sugar important to fermentation and alcoholic content? Was fermentation the only way to preserve grape juice?

Fermentation, Preservation and Alcoholic Content

One must have a clear understanding of fermentation to see the unlikelihood of the above contention. First, naturally (no additives) fermented wine has a low alcoholic content. Until the advent of widely available granulated sugar, strongly alcoholic wine was rare. To make wine strongly alcoholic like what we have today (10%-15%) you must add a lot of sugar and yeast. These are the two key components to fermentation, and they are not present in large enough quantities naturally to create the strong wine we have today. Alcoholic wine during biblical times, which was much weaker than the wine of today, was often watered down for drinking. They basically only had water and wine. Like Pepsi or Coke today, wine was consumed by adults and children alike as a tasty substitute for water. Watering down wine was something they did and they drank it this way regularly. Also, boiling it down to a syrup was frequently done for preservation. This boiling killed the yeast that would cause fermentation. The syrup could easily be reconstituted later for drinking purposes. A third form of preservation was by straining out the yeast to prevent fermentation.

The Myth of Natural Fermentation

Nature NEVER forms spiritous liquors. The fruit (grape) may rot and turn sour but it takes ART to convert juice to alcohol. The indispensable conditions for vinous fermentation are exact proportions of sugar, yeast or gluten and water with air temperature between 50 and 75 degrees. Chemical science forbids vinous fermentation when heat exceeds 75 degrees and assures the acetous (vinegar). Since the Middle East is well above that even at night most of the year, something had to be done to preserve the juice (wine) for the year, or else it would all turn to vinegar! To assume it was all turned to alcoholic wine is a ridiculous assertion and flies in the face of historical fact. Josephus, famous Jewish historian declares that he has seen provisions at the Jewish fortress Massada including grapes and fruits, kept fresh to last for 100 years!!!! Pliny the Roman historian confirms this. Don't let anyone tell you that grapes have to be kept by making alcoholic wine so they can last the year!!

So we see that the portrayal that grape juice was only preserved by fermentation is utterly false. Unfermented wine was the most common wine in biblical times. It was not what we know as wine today which is always alcoholic. You cannot defend wine drinking today on the basis of biblical times because the two are totally different.

Argument from the Passover

Some will still say that Jesus Christ indeed drank alcoholic wine and we know this by the passover (which was the last supper - *Mark 14:14-17*). There is a difference of seven months grapes between the harvest and passover. They will say “they didn't have refrigerators, so to keep the grapes from souring, they were fermented”. As we have shown above, the seven month time span would not have been a problem due to the multitude of frequently used preservation methods, all of which easier than fermentation, available to the people at that time.

Furthermore, in Matthew 26 it was "the fruit of the vine" (verse 29) they drank. This is also in Mark 14, Luke 22, and 1Corinthians 11. The “fruit of the vine” would be grapes, and when the grapes are crushed they do not make alcoholic wine. You do know that God calls it wine while the juice is still in the grape don't you?

Isaiah 65:8

Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster....

Argument from the Good Samaritan

Another contention about Jesus drinking alcoholic wine stems from the story of the Good Samaritan. The Greek word for wine used here is oinos. The claim is that it is alcoholic here because the Good Samaritan used it as an antiseptic. This is the same Greek word used in John 2, so it is contended that Jesus did turn the water into alcoholic wine.

If you know anything at all about Greek you know that oinos can refer to fermented or unfermented grape juice. The word oinos is used at least 33 times in the LXX to translate tirosh the Hebrew word for grape juice. The word “wine” not only in Greek, but in Old English, in Latin, and in Hebrew is a generic term including all kinds of wine, unfermented and fermented.

In the 1828 Webster's dictionary wine is defined as unfermented and fermented juice. Only by context can one know whether the wine in question is fermented or not. Thus, the fact the wine made by Christ at Cana is called oinos offers no grounds for concluding that it was fermented wine.

It is interesting that the new versions, which claim to have up-to-date language, still translate all these original language words as wine since the definition of the English word "wine" has changed in the last 100 years. Where the KJB is accurate in its translation given the definition of the word in 1611, the new versions misrepresent the true meaning of these Hebrew and Greek words when they translate what is by definition juice in the Old Testament (tirosh) and clearly presented as such in context in the New Testament.

It is a false private interpretation of these passages in the NIV that the guests, including Jesus, were drunken and then Jesus made more to further the intoxication. The fact is that the context tells us otherwise. By the simple fact that the governor of the feast noted that He had saved the good wine until last. If they had been intoxicated the governor would not have been able to tell it was the best because his senses would be dulled. The argument from the Greek word oinos is completely invalid.

Argument from the Pharisee's Accusation

Another contention about Jesus drinking alcoholic wine comes from what our Lord said about the Pharisees. The Lord was demonstrating how it was impossible to please these arrogant theological intellectuals. No matter what you did they could find it to be wrong somehow. Jesus gives the illustration like this:

Matthew 11:18

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. 19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

The argument from this passage goes like this: "Jesus must have drank alcoholic wine or they would not have made the accusation". That is an interesting comment, one that I considered very closely. However, if this argumentation is correct it must be applicable to the former comment about John the Baptist. For them to accuse him he must have been possessed by a devil (maybe just a little one and only infrequently). The obvious implication of this analogy is that neither is true. John was not possessed of a devil, and Jesus did not drink alcoholic wine and therefore could not have been a winebibber. It also bears mention that the Pharisees also accused him of breaking the sabbath by healing the sick, and of blaspheming God by making Himself equal with God. Neither of these accusations were true since helping the sick on the sabbath does not fall under the category of work (Mark 3:3-5), and He was equal and co-eternal with the Father (John 1:1-18).

What Does the Bible Say About Drinking?

Proverbs 23:29

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? 30 They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. 31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. 32 At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. 33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. 34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. 35 They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

I know, I know, you guys that drink alcohol never drink too much do you? Sure you don't. I was around people who drank this stuff a lot before I was saved and I know from experience that someone who drinks almost always does it to get a buzz from it. Do your eyes behold strange women when you drink? Do you utter perverse things, like curse words, or dirty jokes when you drink? I am convinced that most of the fornication going on out there is at least partially attributable to alcohol consumption. Even the most worldly people consider it a sin product. Keep justifying it in your mind, but remember this verse:

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Is Wine Destructive?

As I have demonstrated, nowhere in scripture do we find Jesus drinking alcoholic wine. Alcohol is destructive and addictive. It is a depressant drug that actually attacks the brain cells and destroys them. Twenty percent of all patients admitted into mental hospitals have a problem with alcohol. Alcohol has caused numerous health and social problems. In addition to this a majority of traffic fatalities and accidents can be directly attributive to alcohol. Drunkenness destroys lives and relationships. It is not just a disease. It is a sin.

Notice the damage alcohol did in the lives of these Bible characters:

- Noah - It brought shame (*Genesis 9:21*).
- Lot - His daughters committed incest (*Genesis 19:30-36*).
- Nabal - God killed him (1Samuel *25:36-37*).
- Elah - Was murdered by Zimri (*1Kings 16:9-10*).
- Belshazzar - The Assyrians took his kingdom (Daniel 5)
- The Corinthians - During the Lord's Super God kills some (1Corinthians 11).

Where Do You Get Your Joy?

Some people seek their happiness, comfort and peace in a bottle. The Lord will always be the Christian's source of joy. Jesus said in *John 15:11*, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full". *1John 1:4* reminds us, "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full".

God has given us His Word to provide comfort and to maintain joy in our lives. The Christian's happiness does not come in a bottle. It comes in a book -- the Bible! Consider that others are watching our example. What example are we setting? *1Thessalonians 5:22* warns us, "Abstain from all appearance of evil".

Will Hoyt

WINE IN THE BIBLE: A BIBLICAL STUDY ON THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Chapter 5

JESUS AND WINE

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Andrews University

Many well-meaning Christians find the fundamental justification for their moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages in the teachings and example of Jesus. For example, in his book *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages*, Kenneth L. Gentry appeals first of all to Christ's example to defend a moderate partaking of alcoholic beverages: "First, we must again be reminded that the Lord and his apostles partook of [fermented] wine despite the fact that sinful men indulged in it to their own hurt and degradation."¹

It is alleged that Christ not only partook of fermented wine but also produced it in abundant quantity at the wedding of Cana and gave it to His disciples at the Last Supper. Norman L. Geisler, for example, explicitly states in his article "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking" that "it is false to say that Jesus made unfermented wine. As a matter of fact, He made wine that tasted so good the people at the wedding feast in Cana said it was better than the wine they had just drunk. Surely they would not have said this if it had tasted flat to them. In fact in John 2:9-10 it is called 'wine' (oinos) and 'good wine' (kalon oinon). These are the same words used for fermented wine elsewhere in the New Testament."²

The popular belief that "Jesus was not a teetotaler," but a moderate drinker of fermented wine who even "miraculously 'manufactured' a high-quality (alcoholic) wine at Cana"³ and instituted the Last Supper with alcoholic wine,⁴ has no doubt influenced the drinking habits of millions of Christians around the world more than anything else that the Bible says about drinking. The reason is simple. The example and teachings of Christ are normative for Christian belief and practice. If Christ made, commended and used fermented wine, then there can hardly be anything intrinsically wrong with a moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages! Simply stated, "If wine was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me!"

Objective and Procedure. In view of the fundamental importance and far-reaching consequences of Christ's example and teachings on drinking, we will closely examine in this chapter what the Gospels tell us about Jesus and wine. Our primary objective is to ascertain whether indeed Christ by His teachings and example sanctioned the use of fermented wine.

The chapter is divided into the following five wine-related stories or sayings:

- (1) The Wedding at Cana: John 2:1-11.
- (2) New Wine in New Wineskins: Luke 5:37-38; Mark 2:22.
- (3) Is Old Wine is Better? Luke 5:39.
- (4) Was Jesus a Glutton and a Drunkard? Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34.
- (5) The Communion Wine: Matthew 26:26-29;
Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23.

PART I: THE WEDDING AT CANA

Importance of the Miracle. Moderationists view Christ's miraculous transformation of water into wine at the wedding of Cana as primary evidence of Jesus' sanctioning the use of alcoholic beverages. They argue that if Jesus produced between 120 and 160 gallons of high-quality alcoholic wine for the wedding party and guests at Cana, it is evident that He approved of its use in moderation.

The belief that the wine Christ provided in Cana was alcoholic rests on five major assumptions. First, it is assumed that the word oinos "wine" indicates only "fermented-quality grape drink, i.e. wine."⁵ Second, it is assumed that since the word oinos "wine" 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, as argued by William Hendriksen, the season of the wedding was just before Spring Passover (cf. John 2:13), that is, six months after the grape harvest, the wine used at

Cana had ample time to ferment.⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸ In view of the importance these assumptions play in determining the nature of the wine provided by Christ, we shall examine each of them briefly in the order given.

The Meaning of Oinos. The popular assumption that both in secular and Biblical Greek the word oinos meant fermented grape juice exclusively was examined at great length in Chapter 2. We submitted numerous examples from both pagan and Christian authors who used the Greek word oinos referring both to fermented and unfermented grape juice. We also noticed that *oinos is used at least 33 times in the Septuagint to translate tirosh, the Hebrew word for grape juice.*

A better acquaintance with the use of the word "wine," not only in the Greek language, but also in old English, Latin and Hebrew, would have saved scholars from falling into the mistaken conclusion that oinos means only fermented wine. The truth of the matter is, as we have shown, that *oinos is a generic term, including all kinds of wine, unfermented and fermented*, like yayin in Hebrew and vinum in Latin. Thus the fact that the wine made by Christ at Cana is called oinos, offers no ground for concluding that it was fermented wine. Its nature must be determined by internal evidence and moral likelihood. The record of the evangelist, as we shall see, affords information for determining this question.

Is Oinos Always Alcoholic? The second assumption, that both the wine that ran out and the wine Jesus made were alcoholic, depends largely upon the first assumption, namely, that the word oinos means exclusively alcoholic wine. As stated by Kenneth L. Gentry, "The word oinos is used in reference to both wines in question. It has been shown that this word indicates fermented-quality grape drink, i.e. wine."⁹

This assumption is discredited by two facts. First, as mentioned earlier, the word oinos is a generic term referring either to fermented or to unfermented wine. Thus the fact that the same word oinos is used for both wines in question does not necessitate that both wines be alcoholic. In his booklet *Christ, the Apostles and Wine*, Ernest Gordon responds in a similar vein to the same assumption, saying: "To the objection that the word oinos, wine, is used both for the intoxicating wine of the feast and the wine Christ made, and hence that both must have been intoxicating, one can quote Abbott, *Dictionary of Religious Knowledge*, 'It is tolerably clear that the word wine does not necessarily imply fermented liquor. It signifies only a production of the vine.' The eminent Hellenist, Sir Richard Jebb, former Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge, declared oinos "a general term which might include all kinds of beverages."¹⁰

Second, the wine provided by Christ is differentiated from the other by being characterized as ton kalon, "the good" wine. This suggests that the two wines were not identical. The nature of the difference between the two wines will be discussed below.

Preservation of Grape Juice. The third assumption, that it would have been impossible to supply unfermented grape juice for a Spring time wedding about six months after vintage, rests on the assumption that the technology for preserving grape juice unfermented was unknown at the time.

The latter assumption is clearly discredited by **numerous testimonies from the Roman world of New Testament times describing various methods for preserving grape juice.** We have seen in Chapter 4 that the preservation of grape juice was in some ways a simpler process than the preservation of fermented wine. Thus, the possibility existed at the wedding of Cana to supply unfermented grape juice near the Passover season, since such a beverage could be kept unfermented throughout the year.

"High-Quality Alcoholic Wine." The fourth assumption is that the wine Jesus provided was pronounced "the good wine" (John 2:10) by the master of the banquet, because it was high in alcoholic content. Such an

assumption is based on twentieth-century tastes. Albert Barnes, a well-known New Testament scholar and commentator, warns in his comment on John 2:10 not to "be deceived by the phrase 'good wine.'" The reason, he explains, is that "We use the phrase to denote that it is good in proportion to its strength, and its power to intoxicate. But no such sense is to be attached to the word here."¹¹

We noted in Chapter 4 that **in the Roman world of New Testament times, the best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration. Pliny, for example, says that "wines are most beneficial (utilissimum) when all their potency has been removed by the strainer."**¹² Similarly, Plutarch points out that wine is "much more pleasant to drink" when it "neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind or passions"¹³ because its strength has been removed through frequent filtering.

Referring to some of the same ancient authors, Barnes says: "**Pliny, Plutarch and Horace describe wine as good, or mention that as the best wine which was harmless or innocent—poculis 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. That would be the best wine certainly. 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."¹⁴

The wine Christ made was of high quality, not because of its alcohol content, but because, as Henry Morris explains, it was "new wine, freshly created! It was not old, decayed wine, as it would have to be if it were intoxicating. There was no time for the fermentation process to break down the structure of its energy-giving sugars into disintegrative alcohols. It thus was a fitting representation of His glory and was appropriate to serve as the very first of His great miracles (John 2:11)."¹⁵

Rabbinical Witness. The rabbinical witness on the nature of wine is not unanimous. Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz points out in his introduction to his collection of rabbinical statements on wine and strong drink that "it is true that some Talmudic doctors have sanctioned, aye, even recommended the moderate use of wine. But it is equally true that many Talmudic Rabbins have in vigorous words condemned the drinking of wine and strong drinks. Some Rabbins have even ascribed the downfall of Israel to wine."¹⁶ An example of disapproval is the statement, often repeated with minor variations by different rabbis, which says: "When wine enters into the system of a person, out goes sense, wherever there is wine there is no understanding."¹⁷

This awareness of the harmful effect of alcoholic wine explains why some rabbis recommended the use of boiled wine. Speaking of the latter, the Mishna says: "Rabbi Yehuda permits it [boiled wine as heave-offering], because it improves it [its quality]."¹⁸ "Such a wine," notes Kitto's *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, "was esteemed [among the Jews] the richest and best wine."¹⁹ Elsewhere the Talmud indicates that drinking was forbidden to the accompaniment of musical instruments in festive occasions such as wedding (Sotah 48a; also Mishna Sotah 9,11). The latter is confirmed by later testimonies of rabbis quoted later in this chapter in the discussion of the Passover wine. In the light of these testimonies and considerations we would conclude that the wine provided by Christ was described as "the good wine" because it was not intoxicating.

Moral Implications. Another reason leading us to reject the assumption that "the good wine" produced by Christ was high in alcoholic content is the negative reflection such an assumption casts upon the wisdom of the Son of God. If, in addition to the considerable quantity of alleged alcoholic wine already consumed, Christ miraculously produced between 120 and 160 gallons of intoxicating wine for the use of men, women and children gathered together at the wedding feast, **then He must be held morally responsible for prolonging and increasing their intoxication. His miracle would only serve to sanction the excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages. If this conclusion is true, it destroys the sinlessness of Christ's nature and teachings.**

Joseph P. Free rightly observes that the large amount of wine miraculously produced by Christ toward the end of a wedding feast proves either: "1. Excessive [alcoholic] drinking was allowable, or 2. The oinos in this case was grape juice. In the light of the whole Old Testament condemnation of wine, it certainly would appear that the beverage was grape juice."²⁰

It is against the principle of Scriptural and moral analogy to suppose that Christ, the Creator of good things (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25; Col 1:16), would exert His supernatural energy to bring into existence an intoxicating wine which **Scripture condemns as "a mocker" and "a brawler" (Prov 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. The very adjective used to describe the wine supports this conclusion. "It must be observed," notes Leon C. Field, "that the adjective used to describe the wine made by Christ is not agathos, good, simply, but kalos, that which is morally excellent or befitting. The term is suggestive of Theophrastus' characterization of unintoxicating wine as moral (ethikos) wine."²¹

Referring to the nature of the wine produced by Christ, Ellen White says: "The wine which Christ provided for the feast, and that which He gave to the disciples as a symbol of His own blood, was the pure juice of the grape. To this the prophet Isaiah refers when he speaks of the **new wine 'in the cluster,' and says, 'Destroy it not: for a blessing is in it' . . . Is. 65:8.** The unfermented wine which He provided for the wedding guests was a wholesome and refreshing drink. Its effect was to bring the taste into harmony with a healthful appetite."²² **"Well Drunk."** The final assumption to be examined relates to the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) used by the banquet master. The full statement reads: "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10, KJV). The assumption is that since the Greek word methusthosin "well drunk" indicates drunkenness and since drunkenness is caused, according to the statement of the banquet master, by the "good wine" customarily served first, then "the good wine" provided by Christ must also have been intoxicating, because it is compared with the good wine usually served at the beginning of a feast.

Some view this meaning of the Greek verb methusko "to intoxicate" as an incontestable proof of the alcoholic nature of the wine produced by Christ. For example, in a scholarly review of John Ellis' book, *The Wine Question in the Light of the New Dispensation*, the reviewers say: "There is another incontestable proof [of the alcoholic nature of the wine produced by Christ] contained in the passage itself; the word methusko in Greek signifies 'to make drunk, to intoxicate'; in the passive 'to be drunk'; now this term is never used for designating the effects from any other than intoxicating drinks."²³

This reasoning misinterprets and misapplies the comment of the master of the banquet, and overlooks the broader usage of the verb. **The comment in question was not made in reference to that particular party, but to the general practice among those who hold feasts:** "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine . . ." (John 2:10, RSV). This remark, as many commentators recognize, forms parts of the stock in trade of a hired banquet master, rather than an actual description of the state of intoxication at a particular party.²⁴

Another important consideration is the fact that the **Greek verb methusko can mean "to drink freely" without any implication of intoxication.** In his article on this verb in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Herbert Preisker observes that "methuo and methuskomai are mostly used literally in the NT for 'to be drunk' and 'to get drunk.' Methuskomai is used with no ethical or religious judgment in John 2:10 in connection with the rule that the poorer wine is served only when the guests have drunk well."²⁵ The Parkhurst Greek lexicon cites the Septuagint usage of the methuo word group in Old Testament passages as illustrative of the meaning "to drink freely": "Methuo . . . denotes in general to drink wine or strong drink more freely than usual, and that whether to drunkenness or not. Pass[ively] to drink freely and to cheerfulness, though not to drunkenness . . . John 2:10. And in this sense the verb is plainly used by the LXX (i.e. Septuagint), Gen

43:34; Cant 5:1; and also, I think, in Gen 9:21."26 The latter meaning is respected by the Revised Standard Version which renders it more accurately "when men have drunk freely."

The verb *methusko* in John 2:10 is used in the sense of satiation. It refers simply to the large quantity of wine generally consumed at a feast, without any reference to intoxicating effects. **Those who wish to insist that the wine used at the feast was alcoholic and that Jesus also provided alcoholic wine, though of a better quality, are driven to the conclusion that Jesus provided a large additional quantity of intoxicating wine so that the wedding party could continue its reckless indulgence. Such a conclusion destroys the moral integrity of Christ's character.**

The Object of the Miracle. The stated object of the miracle was for Christ to manifest His glory so that His disciples might believe in Him. This objective was accomplished: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11). Christ's presence at a marriage feast was intended to show divine approval of the marriage institution and of the innocent enjoyments of social life. Yet all of these considerations were subservient to the manifestation of Christ's glory in fulfillment of His Messianic mission. The glory of God is revealed especially in His act of creation (Ps 19:1-2). Likewise, Christ's "eternal power and deity" (Rom 1:20) were manifested at the beginning of His miracles through an act of creation: "He . . . made the water wine" (John 4:46).

The wine of the miracle must have been identical to the wine found in the grape-clusters, because this is the only wine that God produces. "There is not a hint," writes R. A. Torrey, "that the wine He [Christ] made was intoxicating. It was fresh-made wine. New-made wine is never intoxicating. It 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."27

"I am satisfied," states William Pettingill, "that there was little resemblance in it [wine made by Christ] to the thing described in the Scripture of God as biting like a serpent and stinging like an adder (Prov 23:29-32). Doubtless rather it was like the heavenly fruit of the vine that He will drink new with His own in His Father's kingdom (Matt 26:29). No wonder the governor of the wedding feast at Cana pronounced it the best wine kept until the last. Never before had he tasted such wine, and never did he taste it again."28

Christ's miracles were always directed to benevolent ends. He "came not to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:56). If it were true that Christ miraculously manufactured an intoxicating wine, then that miracle would be a notable exception among His miracles. It would be a malevolent manifestation of His power. He would have manifested shame rather than glory.

Christ was aware of the powerful influence His example would have on contemporary and future generations. If, with all this knowledge He created an intoxicating wine, He would have revealed diabolic rather than divine power and glory. His disciples could hardly have believed in Him, if they had seen Him do a miracle to encourage drunkenness

. Leon C. Field aptly observes that Christ "was not Mohammed, holding out to men the allurements of sensual paradise, but a 'man of sorrow,' whose stern requirement of all who came after him was, that they should deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him (Matt 16:24). And it was by the personal embodiment and the practical encouragement of self-denial and abstinence, and not by the example or sanction of luxury and self-indulgence, that he won his followers and achieved his victories."29

PART II: NEW WINE IN NEW WINESKINS

Importance of the Saying. Christ's allusions to wine in Matthew 9:17 and Luke 5:39 are seen by moderationists as an indication of His approval of the moderate use of alcoholic wine. While the miracle of the wine at the wedding of Cana allegedly proves that Jesus made alcoholic wine, the two sayings to be examined now supposedly show that Jesus commended the moderate use of alcoholic wine. The first saying occurs in the

three parallel passages (Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38). The second is found only in Luke 5:39 as an additional statement not found in the narratives of either Matthew or Mark. Since Luke incorporates both sayings, we shall confine ourselves to the passage as found in Luke, which says: "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'the old is good'" (Luke 5:37-39).

"New Wine": Fermented or Unfermented? The phrase "new wine" (oinos neos) occurs in the New Testament only in this passage and those parallel to it. The question here is the nature of the "new wine." Is it fermented or unfermented? A common view is that it denotes wine recently pressed, but already in a state of active fermentation. Such wine, it is said, could only be safely placed in new wineskins, because they alone were elastic enough to withstand the pressure of the gas-producing fermentation.

This view is expressed, for example, by Jimmy L. Albright in his dissertation on "Wine in the Biblical World." He writes: "The biblical mention of bursting wineskins (Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37) shows that gas-producing fermentation took place in the wines produced in Israel, a chemical action that began within a few hours after the pressing of the grapes. The juice usually had begun to ferment as it stood in the lower pressing vats but was soon poured into jars or into skins. . . . Freshly made wine was put into new wineskins; old skins would burst under the pressure."³⁰

In a similar vein R. C. Lenski comments: "When it is fresh, the skin stretches to a degree, but when it is old it becomes stiff and bursts quickly under pressure. People therefore never put new wine, which still ferments and causes pressure, into old, dried-out skins."³¹

This popular interpretation is very imaginative but not factual. Anyone familiar with the pressure caused by the gas-producing fermentation knows that no bottle, whether of skin or glass, can withstand such pressure. Job knew this when he said: "Behold, my heart is like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins, it is ready to burst" (Job 32:19). The Encyclopedia Biblica acknowledges this fact, saying: "It is impossible that the must could ever have been put into skins to undergo the whole process of fermentation, as 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. Where a large quantity of grapes had to be trodden, it was necessary to relieve the wine vat by transferring the must immediately to earthenware jars, of which the Jews possessed a large variety."³²

Unfermented Grape Juice. "The difficulty connected with this parabolic word," as Alexander B. Bruce rightly points out, "is not critical or exegetical, but scientific. The question has been raised: could even new, tough skins stand the process of fermentation?" The answer is obviously negative. Thus, Bruce himself suggests that "Jesus was not thinking at all of fermented, intoxicating wine, but of 'must,' a non-intoxicating beverage, which could be kept safely in new leather bottles, but not in old skins which had previously contained ordinary wine, because particles of albuminoid matter adhering to the skin would set up fermentation and develop gas with an enormous pressure."³³

Some argue that the "new wine" spoken of must have been "a new wine which had not fully fermented, but which had come so near the completion of that process that it could with safety be put into new skins, whose elasticity would be sufficient to resist the 'after-fermentation' which would ensue."³⁴ The weakness of this hypothesis is twofold. First, wine which was near the completion of the process of fermentation could have safely been stored in old wineskins as well, because the neck opening would have provided an adequate release for the remaining fermenting gas. Second, the fermentation process, when permitted, was carried on not in wineskins, but in large jars, known as habith in Hebrew and dolium to the Romans.³⁵

The only "new wine" which could be stored safely in new wineskins was unfermented must, after it had been filtered or boiled. The skin would be prepared like the amphora, by smearing it with honey or pitch, and after the must was poured in, it would be tightly closed and sealed. The reason that a new skin was required for new

wine is that an old skin would almost inevitably have, as Lees and Burns explain, "some of the decayed albuminous matter adhering to their sides."³⁶

This would cause the new wine to ferment. On the other hand, if new wineskins were used to store unfermented new wine, no fermentation-causing agents would be present in the skins themselves. Thus, the wine would be preserved from fermentation and the wineskins from rupture.

A Pagan Testimony. It is significant to note in this regard that Columella, the renowned Roman agriculturist who was a contemporary of the apostles, emphasizes the need to use a new amphora to preserve fresh must unfermented: "That must may remain always sweet as though it were fresh, do as follows. Before the grape-skins are put under the press, take from the vat some of the freshest possible must and put it in a new wine-jar [amphoram novam], then daub it over and cover it carefully with pitch, that thus no water may be able to get in. Then sink the whole flagon in a pool of cold, fresh water so that no part of it is above the surface. Then after forty days take it out of the water. The must will then keep sweet for as much as a year."³⁷

A similar method was used with new wineskins, which were prepared, like the amphora, by being smeared with honey and pitch, and after being filled with must, were sealed and buried in the earth. Any of the processes described in the previous chapter, such as filtration, boiling, exclusion of air, sulphur fumigation, and reduction of the temperature below 40° F. (4° Celsius), would have been counted on to ensure the preservation of the new wine unfermented in new wineskins. Any two or all of these methods could be combined to ensure the prevention of fermentation.

The Meaning of the Saying. This interpretation is further confirmed by the symbolic meaning of Christ's saying. The imagery of new wine in new wineskins is an object lesson in regeneration. As fittingly explained by Ernest Gordon, "The old wineskins, with their alcoholic lees, represented the Pharisees' corrupt nature. The new wine of the Gospel could not be put into them. They would ferment it. 'I came not to call the self-righteous but repentant sinners.' The latter by their conversion become new vessels, able to retain the new wine without spoiling it (Mark 2:15-17, 22). So, by comparing intoxicating wine with degenerate Pharisaism, Christ clearly intimated what his opinion of intoxicating wine was."³⁸

"It is well to notice," Ernest Gordon continues, "how in this casual illustration, he [Christ] identifies wine altogether with unfermented wine. Fermented wine is given no recognition. It could be put into any kind of wineskin, however sorry and corrupt. But new wine is like new cloth which is too good to be used in patching rags. It is a thing clean and wholesome, demanding a clean container. The natural way in which this illustration is used suggests at least a general, matter-of-fact understanding among his Jewish hearers that the real fruit of the vine, the good wine, was unfermented."³⁹

PART III: IS OLD WINE IS BETTER?

Importance of the Saying. In Luke Christ's saying about new wine in fresh wineskins is followed by a similar and yet different statement: "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good'" (Luke 5:39). Though this statement is not found in the other Gospels, it forms an integral part of the narrative. Moderationists attach fundamental importance to this statement because it contains, in their view, Christ's outspoken commendation of alcoholic wine. Kenneth L. Gentry, for example, speaks of "the well-nigh universal prevalence of men to prefer old (fermented) wine over new (pre- or unfermented) wine. The Lord himself makes reference to this assessment among men in Luke 5:39: 'And no one, after drinking old wine, wishes for new; for he says, The old is good enough.'"⁴⁰

Everett Tilson sees Luke 5:39 as one of the most challenging texts against those who favor abstinence. He writes: "This attempt to defend Jesus' preference for the 'new' [unfermented] to the 'old' [fermented] wine falls victim to the passage in Luke 5:39, long one of the most difficult passages for biblical literalists who favor abstinence. Without a word of criticism, as if expressing a truism with which he himself agrees, Luke records Jesus as saying: 'And no one after drinking old wine desires new.' Why? 'The old is good,' he answers (5:39)—though far more likely to be both fermented and intoxicating!"⁴¹ Meaning of "New Wine." The first question to

address in our study of this passage is whether the "new wine" here has the same meaning as in the two preceding verses. Some think it does not. They see the "new wine" of verse 38 as being wine not fully fermented and that of verse 39 as fully fermented wine but without the mellowness which comes with age. Lees and Burns, the authors of *The Temperance Bible-Commentary*, favor the view that the "new wine" of verse 38 is "identical in nature, and representative of the same Christian blessings, with the 'old wine' of verse 39—being the new preserved and improved by age."⁴²

The meaning of "new wine" in this passage cannot be determined by its general usage in Scripture because in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the phrase *oinos neos*—"new wine" is used to translate both fermented wine as in Job 32:19 and unfermented grape juice as in Isaiah 49:26. In the latter it translates the Hebrew *asis* which designates unfermented grape juice.

In the passage under consideration it is legitimate to infer that "new wine" has the same meaning in the whole passage, because it is used consecutively without any intimation of change of meaning. The metaphors in both sayings are used without confusion or contradiction. This means that if the "new wine" of verse 38 is, as shown earlier, unfermented grape juice, the same must be true of the "new wine" of verse 39.

Meaning of "Old Wine." Before discussing whether or not Christ expressed a judgment on the superior quality of "old wine" over "new wine," it is important to determine whether the "old wine" spoken of is fermented or unfermented. From the viewpoint of quality, age "improves" the flavor not only of fermented wine but also of unfermented grape juice. Though no chemical change occurs, grape juice acquires a finer flavor by being kept, as its fine and subtle particles separate from the albuminous matter and other sedimentations. Thus, the "old wine" esteemed good could refer to grape juice preserved and improved by age.

The context, however, favors the meaning of fermented wine, since Christ uses the metaphor of the "old wine" to represent the old forms of religion and the "new wine" the new form of religious life He taught and inaugurated. In this context, fermented old wine better represents the corrupted forms of the old Pharisaic religion.

Is "Old Wine" Better? In the light of this conclusion, it remains to be determined if Christ by this saying is expressing a value judgment on the superiority of "old [fermented] wine" over "new wine." A careful reading of the text indicates that the one who says "The old is good" is not Christ but anyone who has been drinking "old wine." In other words, Christ is not uttering His own opinion, but the opinion of those who have acquired a taste for the old wine. He says simply that anyone who has acquired a taste for old wine does not care for new. We know this to be the case. Drinking alcoholic beverages begets an appetite for stimulants and not for alcohol-free juices.

Christ's saying does not represent His judgment regarding the superiority of old, fermented wine. Several commentators emphasize this point. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Norval Geldenhuys says: "The point at issue here has nothing to do with the comparative merits of old and new wine, but refers to the predilection for old wine in the case of those who are accustomed to drink it."⁴³

The same point is emphasized by Henry Alford in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke. He says: "Observe that there is no objective comparison whatever here between old and new wine; the whole stress is on desirerth and for he saith, and the import of better is subjective: in the view of him who utters it."⁴⁴ R. C. H. Lenski states the same truth most concisely: "It is not Jesus who calls the old wine 'good enough,' but he that drank it. A lot of old wine is decidedly bad because it has not been prepared properly; age is one thing, excellence with age quite another."⁴⁵

In a similar vein, Dr. Jack Van Impe writes: "Does not Jesus say [in Luke 5:39] that old wine is better? Not at all. He simply says that one who has been drinking old wine says it is better. This shows the Lord's understanding of the habit-forming effect of beverage alcohol. His statement stands true today. Try to sell grape juice on skid row and you will probably have no takers. Those who drink old wine (intoxicating wine) prefer it.

They are hooked on it. . . . The secondary message of the parable, then, actually argues for the superiority of new (unfermented) wine, using it as a picture of salvation."⁴⁶

The Context of the "Old Wine." The view that old, fermented wine is better than new wine, would be false even if everyone on earth believed it! And in the passage we are considering is contradicted by the context in which it occurs and by the whole purpose of the illustration. In the immediate context Jesus uses the same word (*palaios*) of old garments, which He obviously did not esteem as better than new ones. The statement about "old wine" seems to contradict the preceding one about "old garment," but the contradiction disappears when one understands the purpose of the illustration.

In his article on "oinos" ("Wine") in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Heinrich Seeseman notes the apparent contradiction and the significance of the context: "Luke 5:39 seems to contradict what goes before, since it favors the retention of the old. In the context of Luke, however, it is regarded as a warning against over-estimation of the old."⁴⁷

The purpose of the illustration is not to praise the superiority of old wine but to warn against an over-estimation of the old forms of religiosity promoted by the Pharisees. Such religiosity consisted, as verse 33 indicates, in the fulfillment of such external ascetic practices as frequent fasting and public prayer. To justify the fact that His disciples did not adhere to such external forms of religiosity, Christ used four illustrations: wedding guests do not fast in the presence of the bridegroom (vv. 34-35); new cloth is not used to patch an old garment (v. 36); new wine is not placed in old wineskins (vv. 37-38); new wine is not liked by those accustomed to drink the old (v. 39).

The common purpose of all the four illustrations is to help people accustomed to the old forms of religion, and unacquainted with the new form of religious life taught by Christ, to recognize that the old seems good only so long as one is not accustomed to the new, which in and of itself is better.

In this context, the old fermented wine seems good only to those who do not know the better new wine. In his book *Alcohol and the Bible*, Stephen Reynolds perceptively points out the broader implications of Christ's illustration about the old wine. He says: "Christ warns against the over-estimation of Pharisaism (old wine), but the figure of speech carries with it more than the thought that the Gospel should be regarded more highly than Pharisaism. It also strongly suggests that to those who are perceptive of truth, new wine (unfermented grape juice) is preferable to old (intoxicating) wine. Only the natural man with corrupted taste thinks otherwise."⁴⁸

PART IV

WAS JESUS A GLUTTON AND A DRUNKARD?

Importance of the Text. More than nineteen centuries ago it was said of Jesus: "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Matt 11:19; cf. Luke 7:34). A particular of this accusation has been repeated until today: Jesus was a drinking man! Lovers of alcoholic beverages love to affirm that Jesus was a drinking man in order to shelter themselves under the cover of His example.

The full text of this passage reads as follows: Jesus said: "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a glutton man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" (Luke 7:33-35).

Moderationists attach fundamental importance to this passage. Their reason is clear. They believe it offers an unmistakable proof that Jesus used alcoholic wine. While at the wedding of Cana Christ allegedly made fermented wine, and in His parables about the new wineskins and the old wine He commended alcoholic wine; in His description of His own lifestyle, He openly admitted to have used alcoholic wine.

Kenneth Gentry clearly states this argument, saying: "Jesus himself drank wine. As a matter of fact, in Luke 7:33-35 he makes reference to his practice of drinking wine as a vivid illustration of a distinctive difference between himself and his forerunner, John the Baptist."⁴⁹

Horace Bumstead expresses the same opinion even more emphatically, saying: "The Bible sanctions the use of wine by the example of Christ. This sanction is undeniable and emphatic. Undeniable because we have the statement of fact in Christ's own words; emphatic because his example as a user of wine is expressly contrasted by himself with the example of his forerunner, John the Baptist, who, being a Nazirite, was an abstainer from wine."⁵⁰

Irving Raymond views Christ's contrast to John as a "direct evidence" of His drinking habits. He writes: "Jesus Christ undoubtedly followed the usual customs of His day and drank wine at daily meals and at different kinds of celebrations. For proof of his assertion there is direct evidence both from what others said of Him and from what He Himself actually did. In contrast to St. John the Baptist, 'The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber.'"⁵¹ This reference constitutes for Raymond "sufficient grounds . . . to assert that not only did Jesus Christ Himself use and sanction the use of wine but also that He saw nothing intrinsically evil in wine."⁵²

Two Different Lifestyles. The reasoning that "John drank no wine, while Christ did, therefore we may drink" ignores several crucial considerations. First of all, the phrase "eating and drinking" is used idiomatically to describe not so much the difference in their eating and drinking habits, as the difference in their social lifestyles. Christ's lifestyle was eminently social; therefore, in the common parlance of that time, He came "eating and drinking," even though He was dependent for food and drink upon the gracious hospitality of friends. John's lifestyle was fundamentally eremitic—away from society in the solitude of the wilderness; therefore, in common parlance, he came "neither eating bread nor drinking wine"(NIV). The two phrases serve to emphasize the contrast between John's lifestyle of full social isolation and Christ's lifestyle of free social association. The emphasis is not on alcohol but on social lifestyle.

Ernest Gordon accurately describes the contrast implied by Christ's statement, saying: "It contrasts the isolation of John's life with the social character of Christ's. John was a wilderness prophet. He neither ate nor drank with others and avoided human companionship. Into the wilderness were driven the insane and devil-possessed. Hence the suggestion that he himself was of this class. Our Lord associated freely with others at meals and elsewhere. He too was slandered, called a glutton, and charged with being oinopotes, a drinker of (intoxicating) wine. There is no proof that he was either."⁵³

Two Different Missions. The difference in lifestyle between Jesus and John is indicative of their different missions. John was called to prepare the way for Christ's ministry by preaching a message of repentance and reformation. In order to fulfill this mission he was called to rebuke the excesses of his time by living an abstemious life in the wilderness, away from the haunts of people. Jesus was anointed to another mission, which included proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. In order to fulfill this mission Jesus did not withdraw into the wilderness, but reached the people in their homes, towns and villages.

As the austerity of John's lifestyle led his slanderers to charge him with being demon-possessed, so the sociability of Jesus' lifestyle led the same critics to charge Him with indulgence in sensuous delights, with being "a glutton and a drunkard." Both charges were groundless, because both Jesus and John lived exemplary lives of self-denial. They followed different lifestyles because they had their different mission.

John, a Nazirite. An important reason for Jesus' saying of John the Baptist that he came "drinking no wine" (Luke 7:33), is the fact that John was a Nazirite from his mother's womb. This is the way most commentators interpret Luke 1:15, where the angel instructs Zechariah regarding John, saying: "He shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." Nazirites were people who showed their total consecration to God by abstaining not only from "wine and strong drink" but also from grape juice and grapes (Num 6:1-4).

Jesus, not being a Nazirite, was not under the obligation to abstain from drinking grape juice, made from the fruit of the vine. We know He drank at the Last Supper. It is not necessary to assume that because Jesus, contrary to John, "came drinking," that He drank all kinds of wine, both fermented and unfermented. If that were true for drinking, the same would be true for eating. Yet, no one is arguing that Jesus ate all kinds of food, both good and bad, clean and unclean.

Of whatever food or drink the Lord consumed, it was healthful designed to provide for His physical needs and not to gratify self-indulgence. "My food," Jesus said, "is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). It is hard to believe that Jesus would have fulfilled His Father's will by partaking of intoxicating wine which the Scripture clearly condemns. Thus, it is unwarranted to assume that the kind of food and drink Jesus consumed was calculated to gratify an intemperate appetite robbing Him of clear mental perception and spiritual affection.

No Mention of "Wine." Another significant point often overlooked is that Jesus did not mention "wine" in describing His own lifestyle. While of John the Baptist Jesus said that he came "eating no bread and drinking no wine," of Himself He simply said: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking." Some argue that the antithetic parallelism, in which the thought of the first statement is contrasted with the opposite in the second statement, "demands that 'wine' be understood to be assumed in the second part of the statement."⁵⁴ The argument seems plausible but the fact remains that if Jesus had wanted it known that, contrary to John the Baptist He was a wine-drinker, then He could have repeated the word "wine" for the sake of emphasis and clarity. By refusing to specify what kinds of food or drink He consumed, Christ may well have wished to deprive His critics of any basis for their charge of gluttony and drunkenness. The omission of "bread" and "wine" in the second statement (Matthew omits them in both statements) could well have been intended to expose the senselessness of the charge. In other words, Jesus appears to have said, "My critics accuse me of being a glutton and drunkard, just because I do not take meals alone but eat often in the presence of other people. I eat socially. But my critics actually do not know what I eat."

Drunk with Grape Juice? Some argue, "Were it the case that Jesus did not drink wine, how could it be alleged that he was a drunkard?"⁵⁵ The assumption is that Christ could have never been accused of being a drunkard unless He drank alcoholic wine, for the simple reason that grape juice does not make a person drunk. The weakness of this assumption is its failure to realize that the charge is a lie, based not on factual observations but on a fiction fabricated by unscrupulous critics. Assuming that His critics actually saw Jesus drinking something, they would have readily accused Him of being a drunkard, even if they saw Him drinking grape juice, or water, for that matter. On the day of Pentecost, as we shall see in Chapter 6, critics charged the apostles with being drunk on grape-juice (gleukos—Acts 2:13). This goes to show that no matter what Jesus drank, His unscrupulous critics would have maligned Him as a drunkard.

Critics' Charge. To infer that Jesus must have drunk wine because His critics accused Him of being a "drunkard" means to accept as truth the word of Christ's enemies. On two other occasions his critics accused Jesus, saying: "You have a demon" (John 7:20; 8:48). If we believe that Christ must have drunk some alcoholic wine because His critics accused Him of being a drunkard, then we must also believe that He had an evil spirit because His critics accused Him of having a demon. The absurdity of such reasoning shows that using critics' accusations is not safe grounds for defining Biblical teachings.

Jesus answered the baseless charge of His critics, saying: "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" (Luke 7:35). Textual evidence is divided between "children" and "works," but the meaning of this cryptic statement remains the same, namely, that wisdom is to be judged by its results. The wisdom of God is vindicated by the works of goodness to which it gives birth. Thus, to infer that Jesus drank wine because of the aspersions of His critics shows a complete lack of wisdom. The results of His life of self-denial speak for themselves.

PART V: THE COMMUNION WINE

Importance of the Episode. Christ's use of "wine" at the Last Supper to represent His redeeming blood (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24) is seen by moderationists as the clinching proof of the Lord's approval of its use. Horace

Bumstead expresses this conviction emphatically, saying: "To secure the permanence of his example in regard to [alcoholic] wine even to the remotest parts of the earth and to the latest periods of history, he [Christ] chooses wine for one of the elements to be employed in his memorial feast throughout all lands and during all ages."⁵⁶ Fundamental importance is attached to the "wine" of the Last Supper because Christ not only used it, but even commanded it to be used until the end of time. The sequence in which the "wine" episodes have been examined in this chapter reflects somehow the order of importance attributed to them by moderationists. They claim that at the wedding of Cana Christ made alcoholic wine; in the parables of the new wineskins and of the old wine, He commended alcoholic wine; in His description of His lifestyle ("eating and drinking") He admitted having used alcoholic wine; and in the account of the Last Supper, He commanded alcoholic wine to be used until the end of time.

The first three claims have already been examined and found unwarranted. It remains now to examine the last. This we shall do by looking at two major arguments.

1. Is the "Fruit of the Vine" Alcoholic Wine?

"Fruit of the Vine." After offering the cup to His disciples as the symbol of His blood of the new covenant, Jesus said: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29; cf. Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). Moderationists maintain that the phrase "fruit of the vine" is a figurative expression which was used as "a functional equivalent for [fermented] 'wine.'"⁵⁷ Consequently the cup Jesus offered to the disciples contained alcoholic wine. It is true that the phrase "fruit of the vine" was sometimes used as equivalent to *oinos* (wine), but that does not mean that the wine used at the Last Supper must have been fermented. We have shown in Chapter 2 that *oinos*, like the Hebrew *yayin*, was a generic term for the expressed juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, uses *oinos* to translate *yayin* and *tiros* in such passages as Jeremiah 40:10-11 and Judges 9:13, where the idea of fermentation is excluded.

Josephus' Testimony. More important still is the fact that the phrase "fruit of the vine" was used to designate fresh, unfermented grape juice. A clear example is provided by the Jewish historian, Josephus, who was a contemporary of the apostles. Writing about the dream of Pharaoh's cupbearer who had been imprisoned with Joseph, he says: "He therefore said that in his sleep he saw three clusters of grapes hanging upon three branches of a vine . . . and that he squeezed them into a cup which the king held in his hands; and when he had strained the wine, he gave it to the king to drink."⁵⁸ In interpreting the dream, Joseph told the cupbearer to "to expect to be loosed from his bonds in three days' time, because the king desired his service, and was about to restore him to it again; for he let him know that God bestows the fruit of the vine upon men for good; which wine is poured out to him and is a pledge of fidelity and mutual confidence among men."⁵⁹

Two things are significant about this passage. First, Josephus calls the juice that was squeezed from the three clusters of grapes (*gleukos*), which William Whiston translated as "wine," because at the time of his translation, namely in 1737, "wine" meant grape juice, whether fermented or unfermented. In this case the context clearly indicates that *gleukos* was freshly squeezed grape-juice. Second, Josephus explicitly calls the freshly squeezed grape-juice "the fruit of the vine" (*gennema tes ampelou*). This establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt that the phrase "fruit of the vine" was used to designate the sweet, unfermented juice of the grape. Considering how often the New Testament writers mention the Last Supper, their entire avoidance of the term *oinos* (wine) in its connection is remarkable. The two terms used instead are "the cup" and "the fruit of the vine." The consistent avoidance of the term "wine," especially by Paul in his extended description of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34), suggests that they may have wished to distinguish the content of the cup from what was commonly known as fermented wine.

Natural Produce. Christ calls the content of the cup "the fruit of the vine" (*gennema tes ampelou*). The noun *gennema* (fruit) derives from the verb *gennaō*, to beget or produce, and signifies that which is produced in a natural state, just as it is gathered. In Luke 12:18, for example, the rich man who had a plentiful harvest says: "I will pull down my barns and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain (*ta gennemata* "produce") and my goods." The basic meaning of *gennema*, as this and other examples in the Septuagint (Gen 41:34; 47:24; Ex

23:10) indicate, is the natural fruit or produce of the earth.

In our particular case it can best apply to grape juice as the natural produce of the grapes, which are "the fruit of the vine." Josephus, as we have just seen, offers us a clear example of this meaning. Fermented wine is not the natural "fruit of the vine" but the unnatural fruit of fermentation and disintegration. To apply the phrase "the fruit of the vine" to alcoholic wine which is the product of fermentation and decay, as Frederic Lees puts it, "is just the same absurdity as to call death the fruit of life."

60 It is also absurd to imagine that the "fruit of the vine" that Christ promised to drink again with His followers in the Kingdom, will be fermented wine. We have reasons to hope that the new earth will be free from intoxicating substances.

It seems that in His divine wisdom Christ chose to designate the content of the cup, the memorial of His redeeming blood, "the fruit of the vine" so that future generations of Christians would find no sanction in His words for using alcoholic wine at the Lord's Supper. It is noteworthy that the word "vine" is used only on two occasions in the Gospels, and both are in the context of the Last Supper: the first time occurs in the account of the celebration of the Last Supper, as just noted, and the second in Christ's parting counsel to His disciples following the Supper (John 15:1, 4, 5). In the latter instance, Jesus represents Himself as the genuine living vine and His disciples as the branches dependent upon Him for spiritual life and fruitfulness. The sequence suggests that after Jesus offered to His disciples the natural "fruit of the vine" as the memorial of His redeeming blood, He presented Himself to them as the "living vine" to encourage His disciples to abide in Him as the branches abide in the vine, so that they also, who had just partaken of "the fruit of the vine," might bear "much fruit" (John 15:5). The "fruit" in both instances is a fresh, natural product which can hardly be identified with fermented wine.

2. Was the Passover Wine Alcoholic?

Jewish Practice. A second major argument used to defend the alcoholic nature of the wine contained in the "cup" of the Last Supper, is the alleged prevailing Jewish custom of using fermented wine at Passover. As Everett Tilson puts it, "If the Jews of Jesus' time knew of the prohibition of ordinary wine during this period, it seems strange that the Mishnah in its six thousand words of directions for the observance of the Passover should contain no allusion whatever to it."⁶¹

This argument deserves serious consideration because if it is really true that at the time of Christ, the Jews used only fermented wine for the customary four cups drunk during the Passover meal, it would be possible though not inevitable, that Jesus used fermented wine was used during the Last Supper.

We must never forget that Christ's teachings and practices were not necessarily conditioned by prevailing customs. Jesus often acted contrary to prevailing religious customs of fasting, hand-washing, and burdensome Sabbathkeeping. In fact, His independent spirit is revealed in the very institution of the Lord's Supper. He offered to His disciples the symbolic cup only once, instead of the customary four times, and He used only the bread as the symbol of His body, leaving out the roasted lamb and the bitter herbs as symbols of the ordinance. Thus, it would not have been surprising if Christ had acted contrary to prevailing custom by using unfermented grape juice, especially since He viewed leaven or fermentation as the symbol of moral corruption (Matt 16:6, 12).

No Preference Given to Fermented Wine. But Jesus may not have needed to act against a prevailing custom. There are indications that there was no uniformity in the use of Passover wine by the Jews. Such absence of uniformity is present among modern Jews as well. Louis Ginzberg (1873-1941), a distinguished Talmudic scholar who for almost forty years was chairman of the Talmudic and Rabbinic Department at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, provides what is perhaps the most exhaustive analysis of the Talmudic references regarding the use of wine in Jewish religious ceremonies. He concludes his investigation, by saying: "We have thus proven on the basis of the main passages both of the Babylonian Talmud and that of Jerusalem that unfermented wine may be used lekatehillah [optionally] for Kiddush [the consecration of a festival by

means of a cup of wine] and other religious ceremonies outside the temple. In the temple its use is sanctioned only bediabad [after the act]. Indeed, in no way is fermented wine to be given any preference over unfermented in the ceremonies outside the temple. Raba summarizes the law well in the statement: 'One may press the juice of grapes and immediately recite the kiddush over it.'"62

After examining the views of two Jewish codes regarding the use of fermented wine in Jewish religious ceremonies, Ginzberg again concludes: "It is thus seen that according to the views of the two most generally accepted Jewish codes, the Tur and the Shulham 'Aruk, no precedence whatever is given to fermented over unfermented wines. It is not even mitzvah min ha-mubhar [a priority commandment] to use fermented wines."63

Ginberg's conclusion is confirmed by The Jewish Encyclopedia. In its article on "Jesus" it says: "According to the synoptic Gospels, it would appear that on the Thursday evening of the last week of his life Jesus with his disciples entered Jerusalem in order to eat the Passover meal with them in the sacred city; if so, the wafer and the wine of the mass or the communion service then instituted by him as a memorial would be the unleavened bread and the unfermented wine of the Seder service (see Bickell, *Messe und Pascha*, Leipsic, 1872)."64

John Kitto's Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature also refers to the use of unfermented wine at the Passover meal: "The wine used would of course be unfermented, but it is not certain that it was always the fresh expressed juice or 'pure blood of the grape' (Deut 32:14); for the Mishnah states that the Jews were in the habit of using boiled wine. 'They do not boil the wine of the heave-offering, because it diminishes it,' and consequently thickens it, thus rendering the mingling of water with it when drunk necessary; but it is immediately added, 'Rabbi Yehudah permits this, because it improves it' (Teroomoth Perek, c. xi)."65

A Rabbinical Fabrication. Testimonies such as these clearly discredit the claim that only fermented wine was used at the time of Christ during the Passover meal. It would appear that unfermented wine was also used at Passover. The references to fermented wine, according to Lees and Burns, are not found in the text of the Mishnah itself—a collection of Jewish expositions and customs compiled about A.D. 200 by Rabbi Yehuda—but in later annotations of the Talmud: "The Talmud was copiously annotated by Maimonides and Bartenora, celebrated rabbins of the Middle Ages; and it is from their notes, and not from the text of the Mishnah, that references to the intoxicating nature of Passover wine have been extracted."66

The Mishnah expressly specifies that the search for ferment on the night of the Passover extended to the cellars where all the fermented beverages made from grain were to be excluded. These included the cutakh of Babylon, the sheker of the Medes, and the hamets of Idumea. Maimonides and Bartenora, distinguished Spanish rabbis of the twelfth century, in their comments on the Mishnah, argue that the prohibition of fermented drinks applies only to liquors made from grain, but not to those made from fruits. The reason given by Maimonides is that "the liquor of fruit does not engender fermentation, but acidity."67

It is hard to imagine that some rabbis could believe in good faith that fruit beverages such as wine do not ferment. One wonders whether such an imaginative argument was not fabricated to legitimize the use of alcoholic wine. If that were true, it would only serve to show that Rabbis understood that the law of the Passover prohibiting the use of any "fermented thing" (Ex 13:7) during the seven days of the feast, extended also to fermented wine.

Later Testimonies. There is much evidence that among the Jews the custom of using unfermented wine at Passover has survived through the centuries. The *Arba Turim*, a digest of Talmudic law compiled in the thirteenth century by Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, says of the four Passover cups: "If needful, he must sell what he has, in order to keep the injunction of the wise men. Let him sell what he has, until he procures yayin or zimmoogim—wine or raisins."68

Raisins were used to make Passover wine by boiling chopped raisins in water and then straining their juice. The learned Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel, in his book *Vindicia Judaeorum* (*The Claims of the Jews*, published in

Amsterdam, 1656), says of the Passover: "Here, at this feast, every confection [matzoth] ought to be so pure as not to admit of any ferment or of anything that will readily fermentate."⁶⁹

In his book on Modern Judaism, published in 1830, J. Allen writes regarding the Passover wine: "They [the Jews] are forbidden to drink any liquor made from grain, or that has passed through the process of fermentation. Their drink is either pure water or raisin-wine prepared by themselves."⁷⁰

Rabbi S. M. Isaac, an eminent nineteenth-century rabbi and editor of *The Jewish Messenger*, says: "The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, including the marriage feast, ever use any kind of fermented drinks. In their oblations and libations, both private and public, they employ the fruit of the vine—that is, fresh grapes—unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction. Fermentation is to them always a symbol of corruption."⁷¹

Rabbi Isaac's statement is not quite accurate; Jewish sources are not unanimous on the kind of wine to be used at Passover. The eighth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1895) explains the reason for the conflicting views: "Wine also to the quantity of four or five cups was drunk by each person. Considerable dispute has been raised as to whether the wine used on this occasion was fermented or unfermented,—was the ordinary wine, in short, or the pure juice of the grape. Those who hold it was unfermented appeal mainly to the expression 'unfermented things,' which is the true rendering of the word translated 'unleavened bread.' The rabbins would seem to have interpreted the command respecting ferment as extending to the wine as well as to the bread of the passover. The modern Jews, accordingly, generally use raisin wine, after the injunction of the rabbins."⁷²

The last statement is not quite correct either, for we have seen not all rabbis extended the law of "unfermented things" to the wine. The two different interpretations of the Mosaic law regarding "unfermented things" (Ex 13:7) are indicative of different religious traditions among the Jews. The Orthodox Jews, who are conservative, use mostly unfermented wine, while the Reformed Jews, who are liberal, use mostly fermented wine.

In the introduction to his compilation of Talmudic statements regarding wine and strong drink, Rabbi Isidore Koplowitz, an Orthodox Jew, says: "The four cups of wine used at the Seder table (the table set in order with Passover symbols in accordance with the ritual), on Passover night, at the home service are not ordained in the Jewish Bible. Moses, the Prophets in Israel and the Men of the Great Synod have never prescribed or commanded the drinking of wine or any other intoxicating liquors at any religious function whatever. This custom is but a Rabbinic institution.

"Yet, the greatest Rabbinic authority in orthodox Israel of today, namely, the 'Shulchan Aruch,' clearly and distinctly permits the use of 'boiled wine' (raisins boiled in water), for the four cups of wine at the Seder table.

"It is permissible to recite the prescribed Kiddush (sanctification), on Passover night, over boiled wine and over wine mixed with honey. (Shulchun Aruch Druch Chayim Cup 273, parag. 9)."⁷³

Our sampling of both ancient and modern Jewish testimonies, should suffice to discredit the claim that only fermented wine was used at the time of Christ during the Passover meal. The Jews differed in their practice of this matter as they were influenced by two different rabbinical interpretations of the Mosaic prescription regarding the exclusion of "fermented things" from their dwellings during Passover.

Our ultimate concern is to determine not the Jewish custom but the conduct of Christ. On this, as we shall see, there can be no controversy. Christ would not have ignored the law regarding fermentation (Ex 13:6-7) by celebrating Passover with fermented wine, which could not have served fittingly to represent His incorruptible life-giving blood.

3. Jesus Used the *Unfermented* "Fruit of the Vine"

The foregoing discussion has dealt with two of the major arguments advanced in favor of the fermented nature of Passover wine. Another important argument, namely, the alleged exclusive use of fermented wine for the

Lord's Supper during Christian history will be examined later in this chapter. At this point I wish to present four major reasons for supporting the Saviour's use of the unfermented "fruit of the vine" at the Last Supper.

Obedience to the Mosaic Law. Jesus used unfermented grape juice at the Last Supper because He understood and observed the Mosaic law requiring the absence of all fermented articles during the Passover feast. The law forbade the use and presence in the house of seor (Ex 12:15), which means leaven, yeast or whatever can produce fermentation. As Leon C. Field explains, "It means literally 'the sourer,' and is applicable to any matter capable of producing fermentation—to all yeastly or decaying albuminous substances—and so may be translated 'ferment.'"⁷⁴

Whatever had been subject to the action of seor—that is fermentation, was also forbidden. This was called hametz and is translated "leavened bread" in the KJV (Ex 12:15; 13:7). The word "bread," however, is not in the text; thus a more accurate translation is "fermented thing." For seven days the Jews were to partake of matzoth, usually translated "unleavened bread" (Ex 13:6-7). As in the case of hametz, the word "bread" is not in the text, thus, a more accurate translation is "unfermented things." This translation is confirmed by Robert Young, author of Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible. In his Young's Literal Translation of the Bible, Young renders Exodus 12:14, 19 as follows: ". . . for anyone eating anything fermented from the first day till the seventh day, even that person hath been cut off from Israel. . . anything fermented ye do not eat, in all your dwellings ye do not eat leavened things." Thus the entire passage of Exodus 13:6-7 may with literal accuracy be rendered: "Seven days you shall eat of unfermented things, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unfermented things shall be eaten for seven days; no fermented thing shall be seen with you in all your territory."

Compliance with the Mosaic law would require the exclusion of fermented wine. The rabbis debated this question at great length and, as we have seen, some circumvented the law by arguing that the juice of fruits, such as wine, do not ferment. There is no reason to believe that Jesus, who had come to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17), would violate the Passover law against the use of "fermented things," especially since He recognized and affirmed the moral symbolism of fermentation when He warned His disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt 16:6). "Leaven" for Christ represented corrupt nature and teachings, as the disciples later understood (Matt 16:12).

Paul gives to "leaven" the same symbolic meaning when he admonishes the Corinthians to "cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:7-8). The exclusion of fermented things during the Passover feast was not merely to remind the Israelites of the haste with which they left Egypt (Deut 16:3), having no time to put leaven in their dough. This is evident from Exodus 12:8, 39 where the command to eat unleavened bread was given before the departure from Egypt, when there was plenty of time for the dough to rise.

The primary purpose of the law against leaven is found in the symbolic meaning Scripture attaches to leaven which, as we have seen, is sin and corruption. Ellen White brings out this purpose of the law, saying: "Among the Jews, leaven was sometimes used as an emblem of sin. At the time of the Passover the people were directed to remove all the leaven from their houses, as they were to put away sin from their hearts."⁷⁵ If ferment, the symbol of corruption and insincerity, was out of place at the Jewish Passover, how much more unsuitable it should be at the Christian Lord's Supper!

The symbolic, moral significance attached to leaven is further indicated by its exclusion from the cereal offering (Lev 2:11), the sin offering (Lev 6:17), the consecration offering (Ex 29:2), the Nazarite offering (Num 6:15) and the showbread (Lev 24:5-9). But salt, because it represents preservation from corruption, was required with sacrifices: "With all your offerings you shall offer salt" (Lev 2:13). If leaven was not allowed with the sacrifices, which were a type of Christ's atoning blood, how much more out of place would be fermented wine to represent His atoning blood!

Jesus understood the meaning of the letter and spirit of the Mosaic law regarding "unfermented things," as indicated by His teaching (Matt 16:6, 12). This gives us reason to believe that the cup He "blessed" and gave to His disciples did not contain any "fermented thing" prohibited by Scripture. We cannot imagine that our Lord disregarded a Biblical command by choosing fermented wine to perpetuate the memory of His sacrifice, of which all the other sacrifices were but types.

Consistency of Symbol. A second reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is the consistency and beauty of the blood symbolism which cannot be fittingly represented by fermented wine. Leaven, we have seen, was used by Christ to represent the corrupt teachings of the Pharisees and is viewed in Scripture as an emblem of sin and corruption. Could Christ have offered His disciples a cup of fermented wine to symbolize His untainted blood shed for the remission of our sins? Could the redeeming and cleansing blood of Christ have been represented aptly by an intoxicating cup which stands in the Scripture for human depravity and divine indignation?

We cannot conceive that Christ bent over to bless in grateful prayer a cup containing alcoholic wine which the Scripture warns us not to look at (Prov 23:31). A cup that intoxicates is a cup of cursing and not "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10:16); it is "the cup of demons" and not "the cup of the Lord" (1 Cor 10:21).

Up to that moment the redeeming blood of Christ had been represented by the blood of goats and bulls (Heb 9:13-14); henceforth the new emblem was to be the wine of the Lord's Supper. The blood of Christ was free from defilement and corruption. There was no taint of sin in His veins. "He whom God raised up saw no corruption" (Acts 13:37) either in life or in death. To symbolize the purity of His blood (life) poured out for the remission of sin, Jesus took a cup and over its content, declared: "This is my blood" (Matt 26:28). The content of the cup could hardly have been fermented wine, because the latter cannot properly symbolize the incorruptible and precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet 1:18-19).

Fermented wine is an appropriate emblem for decay and death, for fermentation destroys most of the nutrients found in grape juice. On the other hand, unfermented grape juice, on account of its innocent and nutritious properties, is a proper symbol of the blessings of salvation and immortal life bestowed upon us through the blood of Christ. His blood is said to purify our "conscience from dead works" (Heb 9:14), but fermented wine weakens our moral inhibitions and awakens our baser passions, thus causing the defilement of our consciences. Can such a product properly represent the cleansing power of Christ's redeeming blood? Hardly so. It is more fitted to represent moral disease and guilt than pardon and purification.

The value of a symbol is determined by its capacity to help us conceptualize and experience the spiritual reality it represents. Grape juice untouched by fermentation supplies life-sustaining nutrients to our bodies, thus it has the capacity for helping us to conceptualize and to experience the assurance of salvation represented by Christ's blood. Ellen White aptly says: "The Passover wine, untouched by fermentation, is on the table. These emblems Christ employs to represent His own unblemished sacrifice. Nothing corrupted by fermentation, the symbol of sin and death, could represent the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot'" (1 Pet 1:19).⁷⁶

The Language of the Last Supper. A third reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is suggested by the language in which its institution is recorded. The words have been preserved with singular uniformity in the synoptic Gospels and almost in the same form in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We will briefly consider three phrases of the narrative. After blessing and breaking the bread Jesus "took a cup" (Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23; cf. Luke 22:17; 1 Cor 11:25). Most authorities suggest that the reference is to the third of the four cups of the Passover meal, called the "cup of benediction" (Cos ha-Berachah). This cup by which the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted retained its name as "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10:16).

Evidently the name was derived from the blessing Christ pronounced over its contents. Such could never be the intoxicating wine of which God clearly disapproves in the Scripture. As mentioned earlier, we cannot imagine Christ bending over prayerfully to bless a cup containing intoxicating wine. The supposition is sacrilegious.

Such cup would be a cup of cursing rather than a cup of blessing, "the cup of demons" rather than "the cup of the Lord" (1 Cor 10:21).

After blessing the cup, Jesus gave it to His disciples and said: "Drink of it, all of you" (Matt 26:27, cf. Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17). Christ's invitation to drink the memorial cup of His blood is extended to "all" without exception. There is no reason that anyone should refuse the cup, if its content is unfermented, nutritious grape juice. But if its content is fermented, intoxicating wine, many of Christ's faithful followers cannot and should not partake of it.

The cup Jesus offered to His disciples contained not just a sip of wine, as do today's communion cups, but about three-quarters of a pint of wine. According to the Talmud, each person at Passover was supplied with at least four cups of wine, and had permission to drink extra in between. Each cup, says J. B. Lightfoot, was to contain "not less than the fourth part of a quarter of a hin, besides what water was mingled with it."⁷⁷ A hin contained twelve English pints, so the four cups would amount to three-quarters of a pint each.

Three pints of alcoholic wine is sufficient to make any person, except a heavy drinker, grossly intoxicated. This is apparently what happened to some of those who drank alcoholic wine at Passover. An example is its effect on Rabbi Judah. He drank no wine "except at religious ceremonies, such as . . . the Seder of Passover (four cups). The Seder wine affected him so seriously that he was compelled to keep his head swathed till the following feast-day—Pentecost."⁷⁸

To imagine that Christ would sanction such ill-effects by personally offering a sizeable cup of alcoholic wine to His disciples, is tantamount to destroying the moral integrity of His character. Believers who truly accept Christ as their sinless Saviour instinctively recoil from such a thought. Christ commands "all" of His followers to drink the cup. If the content of the cup were alcoholic wine, not all Christians could drink. There are some to whom alcohol in any form is very harmful. Young children participate at the Lord's table should certainly not touch wine. There are those to whom the simple taste or smell of alcohol awakens in them a dormant or conquered craving for alcohol. Could Christ, who taught us to pray "Lead us not into temptation," have made His memorial table a place of irresistible temptation for some and of danger for all?

This may be a reason that the Catholic Church eventually decided to deny the cup to the laity, limiting it to the clergy. Protestants strongly object to this practice and have restored to the people the visible symbol which for several centuries was withheld from them. Yet, they also for reasons of safety have limited the amount of wine to a mouthful. The quantity of wine in the tiny cups is so small that it must be sipped rather than sipped. The wine of the Lord's Supper can never be taken freely and festally as long as it is alcoholic and intoxicating.

Another significant element of the language of the Last Supper is the phrase "fruit of the vine," used by Jesus to describe the content of the cup. We noticed earlier that this designation best applies to natural, unfermented juice. Fermented wine is not the natural "fruit" of the vine but is the result of disintegrating forces. Thus, the very designation used by Christ, "fruit of the vine" supports the unfermented nature of the wine used at the Last Supper.

The Survival of the Practice. A fourth reason for believing that Jesus used unfermented wine at the Last Supper is the survival of such a practice among certain Christian groups or churches. A significant example is the apocryphal Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle, which circulated in the third century. A heavenly voice instructs the local Bishop Plato, saying: "Read the Gospel and bring as an offering the holy bread; and having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when He rose from the dead on the third day."⁷⁹

This is a clear testimony of the use of freshly pressed grape juice in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Another indication is provided by the view expressed by Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200), Bishop of Lyons, that the communion bread and wine are the first fruits offered to God: "Giving directions to His disciples to offer to God the first-fruits of His own created things . . . He [Christ] took that created thing, bread, and gave thanks, and

said, 'This is My body.' And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong, He confessed to be His blood."⁸⁰

The concept of "the first fruits" was applied not only to the bread and wine, but also to the actual grapes and grain offered on the altar. In his classic study *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Joseph Bingham explains that some of the Canons of the African Church prescribe that "no other first-fruits are allowed to be offered at the altar but only grapes and corn, as being the materials of bread and wine, out of which the eucharist was taken."⁸¹

In some places the custom developed of distributing the actual grapes and grain together with the bread and wine. To rectify this innovation, the Council of Trullo (A.D. 692) ordered to have "a distinct consecration, and a distinct distribution, if the people were desirous to eat their first-fruits in the church." ⁸²

The identification of the communion bread and wine with the first-fruits and the consecration of grain and grapes as first-fruits distributed to the people together with bread and wine, indicates how the latter were perceived as the natural, unfermented produce of the land. The practice of pressing preserved grapes directly into the communion cup is attested by the third Council of Braga (A.D. 675), which reports that Cyprian (died 258 A.D.) condemned those who "used no other wine but what they pressed out of the cluster of grapes that were then presented at the Lord's table."⁸³

Such a practice shows the concern of some Christians to obey Christ's words by offering a genuine "fruit of the vine" made out of fresh or dried grapes presented and pressed at the Lord's table.

Cyprian condemned not so much the use of freshly pressed wine (*expressum vinum*) but the failure to mix it with water. Apparently, the practice of mingling wine with water originated, as Leon C. Field points out, "not necessarily in the weakening of alcoholic wine, but in the thinning of boiled wines and the thick juices of the crushed grapes."⁸⁴

Instructions in this regard had already been given three centuries before by Pope Julius I (A. D. 337) in a decree which says: "If necessary let the cluster be pressed into the cup and water mingled with it."⁸⁵

Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-1274) quotes and supports Julius' decree, because "must has already the species of wine [*speciem vinum*] . . . consequently this sacrament can be made from must."⁸⁶ The same view is expressed by other Western theologians such as Jacobus a Vitriaco, Dionysius Bonsalibi, and Johannes Beletus.⁸⁷ The latter speaks of the custom "well known in certain places" of celebrating the Lord's Supper, especially on August 6, Day of the Transfiguration, with new wine or freshly squeezed grape juice: "Let us notice that on this same day the blood of Christ is set forth from new wine, if it can be found, or from ripe grapes pressed into the cup."⁸⁸ The use of unfermented wine is well documented, especially among Eastern Churches. Leon C. Field, G. W. Samson, Frederic Lees and Dawson Burns, provide valuable information in their respective studies about such churches as the Abyssinian Church, the Nestorian Church of Western Asia, the Christians of St. Thomas in India, the Coptic monasteries in Egypt, and the Christians of St. John in Persia, all of which celebrated the Lord's Supper with unfermented wine made either with fresh or dried grapes. ⁸⁹ The reader is referred to these authors for documentation and information about these oriental churches.

Our inquiry into several aspects of the communion wine, such as the Jewish Passover wine, the language of the Last Supper, the Passover law of fermentation, the consistency of the symbol, and the survival of the use of unfermented grape juice at the Lord's Supper, has shown that all of these indicate our Lord used and commanded the use of unfermented, nutritious grape juice to perpetuate the memory of His blood shed for the remission of our sins.

CONCLUSION

We have examined at considerable length the major wine-related stories or sayings of Jesus that are commonly used to prove that our Savior made, commended, used and commanded the use of alcoholic wine until the end

of time. We have found these claims to rest on unfounded assumptions, devoid of textual, contextual and historical support.

The "good wine" Jesus made at Canaan was "good" not because of its high alcoholic content but because it was fresh, unfermented grape-juice. The "new wine" Jesus commended through the parable of the new wineskins is unfermented must, either boiled or filtered, because not even new wineskins could withstand the pressure of the gas produced by fermenting new wine. Jesus' description of Himself as "eating and drinking" does not imply that He used alcoholic wine but that He associated with people freely at their meals and elsewhere. The "fruit of the vine" that Christ commanded to be used as a memorial of His redeeming blood was not fermented wine, which in the Scripture represents human depravity, corruption and divine indignation, but unfermented and pure grape juice, a fitting emblem of Christ's untainted blood shed for the remission of our sins.

The claim that Christ used and sanctioned the use of alcoholic beverages has been found to be unsubstantiated. The evidence we have submitted shows that Jesus abstained from all intoxicating substances and gave no sanction to His followers to use them.

NOTES ON CHAPTER V

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8. For example, Howard H. Charles says: "Even though we may wish it otherwise, honest exegesis compels the candid admission that on this occasion Jesus deliberately added to the stock of wine available for consumption at the wedding feast" (n. 4), p. 19.
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24. See, for example, John Charles Ellicott, ed., *The Four Gospels in Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1954), vol. 6, p. 394; William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia, 1956), p. 84; Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (Nashville, n. d.), vol. 5, p. 527; G. H. MacGregor, *The Gospel of John* (London, 1953), p. 53.
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28. William L. Pettingill, *Bible Questions Answered* (Wheaton, Illinois, n. d.), pp. 223-224.
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