

Drunk or Spirit-Filled?, Part 1

Scripture: Ephesians 5:18

Code: 49-32

We're in a study of the book of Ephesians and find ourselves this morning in chapter 5, and I want to draw your attention to verses 18 and 19. So open your Bible, if you will, to Ephesians chapter 5, verses 18 and 19. I'm going to read them, and then we're going to talk about these verses for probably a couple of weeks because this is such an important portion of Scripture. Ephesians 5:18 says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord."

Now obviously, this is a context of worship. Whatever the filling of the Spirit means, whatever it produces, based upon the next verse, it begins with worship. The impact of a Spirit-filled life will show up, starting in verse 22, in marriage; in chapter 6, the beginning of that chapter, in family life; and later in chapter 6, even in your public and business life with the world around you. So being filled with the Spirit is a very foundational reality, as we all know. But what sets this verse apart is the very unusual comparison between being filled with the Spirit and being drunk. That eighteenth verse says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." And then it immediately starts talking about Spirit-filled people worshiping the Lord with particular emphasis in music, "singing and making melody" in their hearts.

Spirit-filled people sing. I know there is a waning of singing in churches. This is being decried by many people today. There are churches that have very little, if any, singing; they sit in the dark and watch somebody else sing on the platform or the stage. But a Spirit-filled believer gathers with other believers, and they express their worship in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their heart to the Lord.

But I want us to focus on the contrast between that and being drunk: "Be not drunk with wine." How do these two things connect? Why is it necessary to compare this with drunkenness? On the surface there doesn't seem to be any comparison at all, unless you say, "Well there's a reasonable comparison; being drunk means you've yielded up control of your faculties to something inside of you, namely alcohol; whereas being filled with the Spirit means you've yielded up control to someone inside of you, namely the Holy Spirit. Drunkenness produces dissipation, debauchery, degradation, and sin, whereas the Holy Spirit produces righteousness in worship and in every relationship in life.

Why is this comparison made? Well on its face it should be obvious, and it is this: because this is a religious comparison, not simply a reasonable one. It's not just an analogy: "Don't be controlled by alcohol; be controlled by the Holy Spirit." There's much, much more than that. That is reasonable to say, of course, but this is really a religious contrast; and to understand this, we have to understand something about the religious history behind it.

Now we are all very much aware of what the Bible says about drunkards, drunkenness. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10, it says drunkards do not inherit the kingdom of God. They're listed with

homosexuals, adulterers, fornicators, and all kinds of other sinners as those people who do not inherit the kingdom of God.

So we understand the sin of drunkenness, but why the comparison to Spirit-filled behavior? And the answer comes: because drunkenness was essential to the ancient forms of religious expression. That's what I want to try to communicate to you this morning. It was standard conduct in pagan religions, even far back into the Old Testament among the idol worshipers that surrounded the nation Israel, and particularly in the New Testament in the Greco-Roman world. It was standard conduct in pagan religious expressions to participate in drunkenness, along with gluttony, along with sexual deviation and orgies; and they were accommodated by plenty of alcohol to drink and temple prostitutes as well. Drunkenness was not just social, it was religious. It was not really, in that sense, even optional. You were expected to be a part of the society's worship; there was no separation of the religious from the secular at all. Essential in the ancient world was the religion of their gods, and that incorporated into its expression drunkenness and all that followed with drunkenness—every imaginable and unimaginable kind of sin.

Now to help you understand that background a little bit, let me give you a little kind of dustup on Greek mythology, OK. Greek mythology said that the great god, the great god Zeus—and this is the mythology that dominated the Mediterranean world in New Testament times—the great god Zeus gave birth to a son. This is obviously a satanic counterfeit of the true God who brought His Son into the world. But god Zeus gave birth to a son. It happened in a very unusual way. This is what the mythology said: The child-god started out being conceived in the womb of his mother, Semele; some goddess named Semele was pregnant. She insisted on seeing Zeus, and so she asked for an audience with Zeus, and when she entered into the presence of Zeus, the all-glorious Zeus, his glory incinerated her, and she was instantly reduced to ashes. However, Zeus reached down and rescued the child in her womb. And then Zeus sewed that child into his thigh until the time for the child to be born.

He was born, and he was a threat to all other would-be rulers, and after he was born he was kidnapped by the envious Titans—the Titans who were known as the sons of the earth—and they kidnapped this child who had been born from the thigh of Zeus, and they basically tore the child limb from limb; and the Titans cooked the child's parts and ate them. However, in the process, Zeus reached down and once again rescued the heart of this child. Zeus then swallowed the heart of this child, and it became reborn through him a second time, a kind of resurrection; and his name was Dionysus. Zeus then paid back the Titans by blasting them with lightening, and they were reduced also to ashes, and from those ashes—according to Greek mythology—came the human race. So in case you wondered, that's the Greek-mythological spin.

Dionysus then spawned a religion marked by two things: *ekstasia* and *enthousiasmos*, from *ecstasy* and *enthusiasm* in English. And it was a religion that saturated the Greek and Roman world; it was the dominant religion in the ancient Greek and Roman world, and it was base; it was ugly. The worshipers ate the raw flesh of the mystic bull which was sacrificed. They committed atrocities with human genital parts, and they actually worshiped those genital parts. Scandalous brotherhoods were developed in the name of Dionysus. The worship was done in temples that were built all over the Greek and Roman world. It was sordid sexual perversion, and it was accommodated by drunkenness and sorcery.

In the Greek New Testament there is a word that's translated "sorcery"; it's the word *pharmakeia*.

Sound familiar?—"pharmacy." It literally meant "drugs." But drugs were concoctions that sorcerers used, and so *pharmakeia* means "a drug" or "a user of drugs." And then there's *pharmakeus*, which means "the one who deals in drugs." Both of those words appear several times in the book of Revelation, as the world comes to its end and people are caught up in sorcery and drugs and will not repent.

So the ancient Greco-Roman worship of Dionysus, which was the dominant cult, was basically dependent on drunkenness. How else could you give yourself over to debauchery consistently all the time, over and over and over and over again without a screaming conscience? Satan knew that to cause people to behave in that way, they needed to have their thinking altered.

The cult of Dionysus was most recognized for wild dancing—for the kind you would see probably in any modern dance club: madness, a kind of abandonment, music, sexual perversion, drunkenness, and sorcery, or drugs. The ancient Roman writers write a lot about this. Euripides is one who wrote of some of the horrifying rituals that I won't assault your mind with.

Dionysus eventually became known as the god of wine, and his Roman name—that's the Greek name—the Roman name was Bacchus. Have you ever heard of a Bacchanalian feast? That's a drunken orgy. Bacchus is the wine god.

I remember years ago being in Baalbek in the Middle East and visiting the ruins of the Temple of Bacchus, in Baalbek where Bacchus was worshiped. And among the many things you saw, there were carvings of grapes and things like that, signaling the use of wine. But there were great pits in the middle of the floor which were used, the guides told us, for the people to vomit and regurgitate as they feasted and expressed themselves in drunken debauchery. There were also, etched into all of those remaining stones, nymphs and satyrs. It was the height of satanic religion unmasked, and really not a lot unlike Baal worship or the worship of any other false gods in the Old Testament age as well.

So you see, in ancient Greek culture, if you were in the culture and you were socially active and you participated in the culture, you participated in the worship of the culture because that was essentially the heart and soul of the culture. And you needed to comply with the worship, or the god would be angry with you; and if they were angry with you, they would be angry with the city, and the city would pay the consequences of an angry god. So they needed you to conform, and so the society was debauched.

So drinking wine, using drugs was not a way simply to escape your problems. It was not about producing a buzz so that you could have a little joy in an otherwise boring life. It had to do with elevating you to kinds of behaviors that were essentially done to please the sordid, corrupt, demonic deities. In fact, this was so prevailing that when people came to Christ in the ancient Greek and Roman world, they had a hard time divesting themselves from it.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 10. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, I'll give you an illustration of it. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul is writing to the Corinthians about their behavior at the Lord's Table, the Communion. And we can pick it up down in verse 14 of 1 Corinthians 10. And Paul is about to launch into a long section on the Lord's Supper—the rest of chapter 10 and into chapter 11. But he begins by saying this in verse 14: "Therefore, my beloved"—he's talking to believers—"flee from idolatry."

Now you would say to yourself, “Wait a minute. If they are believers, they have already fled from idolatry.” Well they may have fled from idolatry in a saving sense and put their trust in Christ alone, but they had not yet been able to completely divest themselves of the behaviors of that idolatry. They therefore needed to flee in the sanctified sense. “Flee from idolatry.” Can you say that to a believer? Sure. Anytime that a believer, one who belongs to Christ, is entangled with the corruption of the world, you have to remind them to flee fully, in a sanctified sense, what they once fled fully in a salvation sense.

So he goes on to say this, and this will show you how this had infected the Communion and the church. Verse 15, Paul says, “I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say”—“Now I want you to think this through and be wise.” And remember now, last week we talked about “walk in wisdom,” right?—the verse immediately preceding, “Don’t get drunk with wine, which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” The prior command was to be wise, walk wisely.

So here it is again: “Flee . . . idolatry,” which is an expression of wisdom. And then he says in verse 16, “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ?” And the answer is, “Of course.” “Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?” Yes. “Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No,”—“I’m not saying an idol is anything.”

Why does he bring idols up? Why does he start by saying, “Flee from idolatry”? Why does he then talk about the cup of blessing, the blood of Christ, the bread, the body of Christ, and then go back to idols and sacrifices to idols? Because the people had dragged their behaviors from their idolatrous, pagan perversions into the Table of the Lord; and that becomes very obvious.

Verse 20, “The things which the [pagans] sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.” No part of that can be imported. “I don’t want you to become sharers in demons.” And then verse 21 explicitly says it: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord”—which was a cup of wine symbolizing His blood—“and [at the same time] the cup of demons”—which was a cup by which you became drunk—“you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.” This is such an outrage; “you can’t.”

Verse 22 adds, “Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We’re not stronger than He, are we?” “Are you so foolish as to think you can do that, and provoke the Lord to jealousy, and get away with it because you’re stronger than He is?” Clearly what was happening was the forms of their old religion were hard to let go of. Why? They were profoundly habit-forming—as is all drunkenness, as is all immorality. If you had spent years of your life engaged with temple prostitutes, in a drunken stupor and concoctions by sorcerers, and you came to Christ, could you walk away from that? Would not the temptation be fierce? And apparently in Corinth the people were doing that and then coming to the Lord’s Table. And he says, “You can’t do both of those things.”

Over in chapter 11, verse 20, still talking about the Lord’s Table, he says, “Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper.” “What is going on? You’re coming together, but it’s not the Lord’s Supper. It doesn’t qualify.” Why? “For in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or

do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.” “You can’t do this.” So Dionysiac orgies and drunkenness and sorceries and drug use are contrasted with the sweet, pure, serene, beautiful fellowship, power, and joy that comes from the filling of the Spirit. You need to be filled with the Spirit to commune with God, not drunk.

So he’s really contrasting two kinds of worship: satanic worship with true Christian worship. And they were blending the two; they were blending the two. So he says in verse 18—back to Ephesians 5, “Do not get drunk with wine.” “Stop getting drunk. Why in the world are you getting drunk?”

You say, “Well it’s probably hard for them because they had imbibed so long in that kind of stuff, it was a tough habit to break.” You got that right. We know that, don’t we? We know how difficult alcoholism is to conquer. But he just says, “Stop, stop”—the verb is *methuskō*. “To be drunk,” “to become drunk”—it’s used three times in the New Testament. Because drunkenness, he says, leads to “dissipation.” It doesn’t lead to worship. It doesn’t lead to an elevated consciousness of the deities. It leads to *asōtia* in Greek, which means “debauchery,” “abandonment to degradation.”

We all know that. You know, when you’re going to go take an interview somewhere for a job that you want deeply, and you’ve prepared for it, and you know you’re talking to somebody who’s very astute and elevated above you—you don’t get drunk before the interview; that is not going the right direction. You get undrunk if you have to, because you want to be in full use of your faculties.

“Don’t get drunk with wine.” We all understand the Bible forbids drunkenness. Again, in lists of sins and transgressions about the people who are not in the kingdom of God, those lists—whether it’s Romans 13, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Corinthians 5, Galatians 5—those lists that include drunkards say they don’t enter the kingdom. They’re included with adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

So just as a general principle, you’ve got to stop drinking. And think about it, folks. This is not something that some people did; this is kind of what life was like for everyone. I mean, this was basically demanded of people. Unless you wanted to make the deities mad and have the deities come after you and incinerate you with lightning bolts, you got into the action. So all of that kind of religion was dependent on intoxication; and that’s got to stop. Wine is *oinos* in the Greek. It’s *yayin* in the Hebrew; and in the Hebrew it’s a mixed wine, as it is in the Greek. I’ll show you that in a few minutes.

The 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia distinguishes *yayin* wine from *shekar* which was the Hebrew word for “strong drink, unmixed.” And the difference was unmixed was very strong in alcohol content. The wine was weak in alcohol content because of its mixture.

Now people ask a simple question: Shouldn’t Christians be able to drink wine because people in the Bible drank wine? And you don’t want to have a simplistic answer to that, so let me help you with the answer so that you’ll know exactly what wisdom would do. It was part of life; but because it was part of life, it was very important to warn people because they were dealing with something that could take over their senses, and they were dealing with something that was ubiquitous in the pagan world and led to all kinds of horrific behaviors. So there’s no place for drunkenness, no place for losing any control. We don’t do that as believers.

In 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 3, we read, “For the time already past is sufficient”—in other words, your past is sufficient—“for you to have carried out the desire of the [pagans]”—the pagan part of your life is now over; that’s all past—when you “pursued a course of”—and listen to these words—“sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.” There you have it. The idolatries are the mix in which all of these other behaviors take place. The pagans worship abominable idols, and to do so they pursue a course of sensuality, lust, drunkenness, carousing, and drinking parties; and it leads, as verse 4 says, to “excesses of dissipation.”

But Peter says, “They are [then] surprised that you don’t run with them in the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you.” You know, you paid a price. If you didn’t join the religious party, you were not just outside the party, you were outside the culture, you were outside the society; and then you were maligned, and you were criticized, and you were mistreated, and you were rejected, and you made people angry. It would be like going into the CDC without a mask. You were vilified. And so there was pressure to stay with the family and extended relatives and the society. Pressure was really great.

In Titus 2:3 it talks about taking care of older women, and it says you can take care of older women—the church can take care of older women who are not to be lingering long beside their wine. Wine was a staple drink. The water was bad. They drank wine, but they didn’t linger long there because they knew the implications of that. And the church is even told, “You don’t have a responsibility to care for a widow who is a drunken widow.” Proverbs 20, verse 1, says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whoever is deceived by them is not wise.” You want to walk wisely, be wise about consuming alcohol.

Now I want you to go to Proverbs chapter 23 for a moment. And I’ll say a lot more about this next week, so if I leave some stones unturned, we’ll cover that next time. But in Proverbs 23, verse 19, “Listen, my son, and be wise.” Here we are again with this connection between wisdom and not being drunk: “Listen, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine”—this went on in the Old Testament time as well—“or gluttonous eaters of meat”—because that’s how they expressed their worship, with gluttony and drunkenness—“for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe one with rags.” You’ll become a stumbling drunk, and it’ll lead to poverty. We see plenty of that today, don’t we?

But notice down in verse 26, “Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways. For a harlot”—a prostitute—“is a deep pit and an adulterous woman is a narrow well. . . . She lurks like a robber, and increases the faithless among men.” Why are we now talking about prostitutes and harlots and adulterous women? Because you go so easily from drunkenness to debauchery, and it immediately comes into verse 29, “Who has woe? Who has sorrow?” You are more likely to find yourself in the arms of a harlot and a prostitute, an adulterous woman who will steal you blind, if you’re drunk than if you’re sober minded.

“Who has woe?” verse 29 asks, “Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without a cause?”—What happened to you? How’d you get all those bruises all over your head?—“Who has redness of eyes?”—I’ll tell you who—“Those who linger long over wine,” and “those who go to taste mixed wine.” Prostitution to drunkenness, connected. You abandon wisdom, you fall into drunkenness, you end up in sexual debauchery.

So verse 31 warns, you “don’t [even] look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly.” And you see the guys on television with the big wine glass, swirling it around; birds are chirping, and beautiful scenery and mountains and snow. And the guy is a macho man that every woman dreamed of, and he’s swirling this, and the sunlight is bouncing off of it. That’s exactly what the Bible says not to do.

Yeah, verse 32 says, “At the last”—in the end—“it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper”—and you wind up on Wilshire Boulevard in a tent. “And your eyes,” verse 33, “will see strange things and your mind will utter perverse things. And you’ll be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea”—it’ll drown you, it will drown you—“or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.” If you’re a sailor, and there’s a storm, and your boat is in the storm, the last place you want to go is to the top of the mast because that is the most precarious place on the boat. Get in the bottom where there’s the least disturbance. If you’re trying to sleep at the top of the mast, you’re going to get catapulted into the sea; it’s destructive.

Verse 35, “They struck me, but I didn’t become ill”—this is the alcoholic talking—“they beat me, but I didn’t know it”—“I didn’t feel it”—“When shall I awake? I’ll seek another drink.” This is the insanity of it all. So the author passes from harlotry and prostitution and immorality to drunkenness, and shows the folly of it. It’s a terrible trap. Isaiah 5:11 talks about those who rise up early and start drinking and drink all the way till night—the horrors of that. The Bible has a lot to say about it, I won’t take anymore time with that. But I do want to balance that off for a moment and say this.

While the Bible forbids drunkenness, the Bible also speaks about wine in positive terms. In fact in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 23, there are prescribed drink offerings that were part of the worship of Israel to offer a drink offering. There was actually some wine kept in the Temple, according to 1 Chronicles, that could be used for the drink offering.

In Judges and chapter 9, verse 13, there’s a comment about “wine . . . cheers.” In Isaiah 55 it’s a symbol of salvation blessing, “without money and without price,” “come [and] buy wine,” and it’s talking about salvation. Wine was used in the Passover. Wine was used in the Lord’s Supper, and the Lord Himself introduced it—took the wine and said, “This is now going to be the symbol of My blood.” And Paul instructed Timothy to “stop drinking so much water, and take a little wine for your stomach’s sake,” 1 Timothy 5:23. It was definitely a part of daily life.

Now there were some people in the Old Testament, some people in Israel, who didn’t drink at all. First, according to Leviticus 10, the priests were not to drink; the priests were not to drink. Isaiah indicts the priests and the prophets because they were stupid drunks. They were supposed to be the ones who didn’t drink; that was part of God’s command to the sons of Levi back in Leviticus chapter 10. But by the time you get to Isaiah’s time, the priests and the prophets are drunk and leading the people astray.

And then there were rulers who were not to drink. Proverbs 31 says, “It’s not for kings to drink,” because they’re in a situation to where they have to make very serious judgments. And Isaiah also condemns rulers who were drunk.

And then there were the Nazarites. The most extreme vow you could take as a Jew was the Nazarite

vow. You vowed not to cut your hair. You were sort of indifferent to fashion and all of that. You were going to be completely devoted to God. And as a part of the Nazarite vow, you didn't drink wine or strong drink. So there were some people who didn't drink.

In the New Testament, pastors and elders—1 Timothy and Titus—are those who are not permitted to be in a situation where they drink—where they could be drunk. We'll see more about that next time.

So yes, there were non-drinkers in the Old Testament. I think if you take the strong interpretation of Titus and Timothy—it's not wise for one in ministry leadership to drink—if it's not wise for a ruler, how much more for one who is in the kingdom of God, a sort of contemporary to a priest and a prophet?

So what about the rest of us? How do we approach this whole thing of wine? Well let me just wrap it up and take you in a kind of final direction. Paul is saying that walking the worthy walk is walking in humility and love and unity and holiness and wisdom, and never seeking an altered state of consciousness by being drunk, never assuming that that enhances your religious experience. That is the devil's lie. You need to be filled with the Spirit. And even in a non-religious sense, this is the forbidding of drunkenness. But certainly in the religious sense, it is saying absolutely not, because the table of demons and the cup of demons cannot be shared with the Table of the Lord and the cup of the Lord.

Now all that leads to a series of questions that I want to give you. I have eight of them, but only one for now. Here's the question: Is the alcohol beverage that you drink today the same as in ancient times? Is it the same? Does it correspond? We can answer that question, I think, historically.

Alcohol produced today is produced to be intoxicating. It is a multinational, global, massive production. The distillation process didn't even come till a thousand years after the New Testament era. So now, today, you have production of this, and it is ubiquitous, and the supply is never ever, ever ending, and they now have the capacity to take it up to 80 percent alcohol. Alcoholic beverages in ancient times were not like that; they didn't even know anything about such distillation processes. It was designed in ancient times to be safe, not to be harmful. It was designed by God to be safe. Wine was low in alcohol, fermented by the Jews perhaps two or three days, maybe 2-3 percent alcohol. The Greeks more, because they weren't worried about being restrained, they were worried about the opposite.

Just to give you an illustration, wine first appears in the ministry of Jesus in John chapter 2 when He went to the wedding of Cana. You remember, there were six pots with about thirty gallons each, and Jesus said, "Fill the pots with"—what?—"water." Now could He have created wine? Yes, He could have created wine. But to create 180 gallons of wine would have either meant that He produced wine that already had fermented, or that He produced wine that did not ferment but would eventually ferment in that volume sitting in pots. There would have been confusion on the part of the people if Jesus had created pure wine because they always mixed it with water. It might have been an outrage.

And the fact is, this is a large group of people; this is a large home, and they ran out of wine. "Well," you say, "why didn't they go to the liquor store?" That's the point; there was none. This was an agrarian culture. You grew the grapes, you crushed the grapes, you took the juice. This was a very, very simple, local process. And they ran out. It's a far cry from what you have today.

They mixed it with water. And you can find anywhere from 3-to-1 to 20-to-1 mixture, which reduces the 2-4 percent even down lower. But there was something else they did. They boiled the juice that came out of the grapes. There's a lot of interesting discussion of this in ancient Greek literature, the boiling of the juice when it was first taken out of the grapes. Classical writers like Horace in 35 BC, "Here you drink under a shade cups of unintoxicating wine." Plutarch, 60 AD, "That filtered wine neither inflames the brain nor infects the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink."

Aristotle spoke of sweet wine that didn't intoxicate. It was so thick, it was necessary to scrape it from the skin containers and dissolve the scrapings in water. Virgil in 30 BC talked about sweet wine boiled down and then used in a luscious juice. "What are you talking about?" What they did was boil the juice, which boiled out the alcohol. They reduced it to a paste; it would be like jam or like the consistency of honey or something like that. They put it in a skin, and they would scrape it or squeeze it like you would squeeze jam out of a tube, and they would mix it with water to reconstitute it as grape juice. Both that boiled paste that became eventually wine, and the wine that was mixed with water, would have a very low alcohol content.

There's all kinds of literature. There's an interesting book called *Grecian Antiquities* which talks about how the people boiled their wine, how they prepared: immediately expressing the juice from the grapes, bottled it, boiled it, kept it for use. This was, one writer says, the mode of general practice among the ancient people. Strong drink, unmixed and unboiled, was barbaric, unacceptable.

So we're establishing that the wine in those days was different. There's fortified wine today that's 20 percent alcohol. That was very different. They worked very hard to prevent drunkenness—the believers did, the people of Israel did.

So diluting wine is spoken about by Homer, Plato, Pliny the Elder. Jewish Midrash, or Mishnah, says four cups of wine were poured out for Passover, mixed with water, two or three parts. They called it *mazug*. Commonly, wine was boiled so that all the alcohol evaporated. The residue paste was then remixed with water, alcohol-free. This was common in Rome, in Egypt, and in all Jewish life. It was called *yayin mevushal*. And you have references to mixed wine in the Old Testament, particularly in Proverbs 9—maybe we'll look at that next time; we don't have time this time.

So you say, "Well why did God give them something like this, that could make people drunk?" Well understand that there was no refrigeration, right? So it didn't matter what the juice was; it would eventually ferment because this is a fallen world, and fermentation is part of it. So we would say, first of all, God wanted them to mix it and to boil it for the sake of conservation, because it was not an unlimited supply. Secondly, He wanted them to mix it with water to increase the flavor.

So interesting. I read an article in *New York Times* about how water is a flavor enhancer in wine, as it is in coffee. If you've ever gone to Brazil and asked for a coffee, you get a tiny teaspoonful that knocks you back onto the ground. It is the worst-tasting thing. It is like a mega dose of caffeine, jolting your veins. Coffee's much more tolerable when mostly it's water, right? Its flavor is enhanced. Same is true with wine.

So they use it to enhance the flavor. They also use it to extend its usefulness. And they mixed it, and

they boiled it, to prevent drunkenness because they had to drink a lot. You know, there was probably somebody going around in the New Testament era in town saying, “Stay hydrated. Stay hydrated.” Well if you needed to be hydrated when it was 120 degrees in the summer in the Middle East, you probably wouldn’t want to drink the water because there was no sanitation, and there was no sterilization, and the water was dangerous. So this degree of fermentation was a gift from God as an antiseptic. It was as much to sanitize the water as anything. The water made it taste better, and the wine made the water safe. Sanitize the water. That’s why Paul says to Timothy, “Stop drinking water, and take a little wine for your stomach’s sake.” Fermentation was a gift in a fallen world.

Two microbiologists at Oregon State University have discovered that wine killed—they use the technical word “inactivated”; “killed” is my word—killed bugs. What bugs? Pathogens like E. coli, salmonella, staphylococcus, and klebsiella within 30 to 60 minutes. So God was giving us something like so many things that we have—that if used wrongly could ruin your life, if used rightly can protect your life. Fermented made it lethal to pathogens. How good is God, how kind is He; part of His protection. In fact, it’s so effective that there’s some formulas now of wine-based spray disinfectant that you can purchase.

So God knew exactly what He was doing. It’s a gift when used properly. God never intended it to be turned into a disaster for an entire nation. America’s number four in alcohol consumption in the world. Finland, Denmark, Australia, and UK are the ones around us. But listen to this. Drugs—America is number one in the world in drug consumption, drugs and alcohol. Disastrous to our society. Fifty percent of Americans don’t drink, but 50 percent do, and of the 50 percent who do, 25 percent binge drink. One hundred thousand people die every year in America because of alcohol-related death. One hundred thousand are now dying a year with the drug fentanyl, millions with the other drugs.

So for Christians, we have nothing to do with that. We understand the provision God has made in giving us fruit that we can turn into juice and drink, we understand its antiseptic benefits, but we don’t ever want to be under the control of the alcohol, right? That leads to dissipation. That leads to doing things, saying things, and behaving in a way that doesn’t demonstrate wisdom, and certainly doesn’t fulfill the will of God—which wisdom always does.

Now the first question was, Is the alcohol that we have today the same as the ancient times?
Answer: No, clearly not. I have seven more questions for next week. Let’s pray.

Our Father, we thank You again for Your Word, the entrance of which gives light. We thank You for its instruction to us. We thank You for its truthfulness. We thank You for the wisdom that comes from above. Thank You for this wonderful church, these precious people. Thank You for their faithfulness. Thank You for Your work in their lives. Protect every one of them, every single one from the kind of dissipation that can come from alcohol.

We thank You, Lord, that we live in a time when we don’t even need it at all. We have all the science and all the mechanisms now to drink to our fill a thousand different kinds of thirst-quenching drinks without ever having to touch anything that’s full of alcohol. In a world in which that wasn’t possible, You gave so much guidance, and the people had so much wisdom to mitigate that potential. In those days you would have to stay beside your wine so long and drink so much because it was mixed or because there was no alcohol content left in the paste, that it would be almost impossible to become drunk unless you purposely intended it.

But today, Lord, we are being hammered by those who would cause us to be drunk, and in the drunkenness, that we would be dependent, and that dependency would become alcoholism dependence, and that would mean that we keep purchasing the product. So Lord, I pray that You'll deliver all of us from that. And may we know what it is to walk in the joy and peace and love of the Holy Spirit who fills us, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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