

ALCOHOLISM: CHRISTIANITY'S BLACK EYE

We have about 5 ½ million alcoholics in this country today, and we will bury about 350,000 of them before the year is out. Alcoholism is the number one social problem in the United States and the number three public health problem. If all the doctors in the country did nothing but treat alcoholics, there wouldn't be enough doctors to go around.

I am well aware that the moment a person begins to voice a negative opinion about the use of alcoholic beverages, he is liable to be branded a "kill-joy" or a "blue-nose" or be accused of bickering! I have no ambition to be branded as a "kill-joy" or a "blue-nose" or be accused of bickering either. But the fact still remains that liquor is our greatest problem. It is a problem that has every thoughtful American worried; and it isn't the blue-noses this time. It is the doctors, sociologists, the educators and law-enforcement people. It is people like these that are really worried. Why should they be worried? Let's look at the record.

Did you know that though there are about 5 ½ million alcoholic victims in the U. S., there are 1,200 persons being added to this list every day? That means 50 persons every hour. Sounds incredible, doesn't it? Nevertheless it is true, horribly true! Chances are 50-50 that within the next five years you will find a member of your family or a near relative added to the list of victims.

Did you know that since this time yesterday 33 persons have been killed in alcoholic-involved accidents? At least one in every three fatal accidents involves a drinking driver, we are not talking about the sodden character who creeps along hugging the side of the road for fear of hitting someone. We are talking about the social drinker. The social drinker is the greatest traffic hazard. You may agree with me mildly or disagree with me violently. It really doesn't matter. It is still true. If we could get the drinking driver off the highway, we might save up to 15,000 lives a year.

The rapid rise and spread of alcoholism is alarming. Law-enforcement agencies have become alarmed at the steady increase of arrests for assaults, misdemeanors and crimes that are committed under the influence of liquor. Alcoholism is a greater scourge than polio, cancer and tuberculosis combined. It is 155 times more prevalent than polio, cancer and tuberculosis and 6 times more prevalent than cancer. Clergymen and social and welfare workers are finding more and more families who have become afflicted with alcoholism. If the number of alcoholics continues to increase during the next ten years as it has during the past ten years, alcoholism will soon affect every family in the United States! Do you think that there is a reason for alarm? There is no doubt about it, the answer is Yes. With a record like this it isn't bickering about a harmless pass time. We are talking about a danger so conspicuous that no one need be in doubt as to its nature.

Arnold Toynbee, English historian, considered one of the greatest historians of our time, said that every civilization but three were destroyed because of decay from within rather than from an attack from without. He listed four contributing factors that caused their disintegration, alcoholism being one of the four. In 1948 he wrote a book entitled, "civilization on Trial." In this

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book he was talking about our own Western Civilization, and one of those dangers is alcoholism.

As a nation we seem to be groping in the dark, unable to cope with this major problem which is not only undermining the physical, mental and moral powers of the individuals, but also ruining the American home and the social and economic life of the nation.

There are many of the strong opinion that the reason for the advances and rise of alcoholism is due to the church's failure in standing resolutely against alcohol. This may be rightly so. Recently I read of two of our larger Protestant communions who had retreated from their historic stand against alcohol. One revised its Church Manual by omitting any mention of the Christian's attitude to the use of alcohol. Another withdrew its temperance journal from publication. Please don't misunderstand me. I am not endeavoring to be critical, neither am I trying to look pious. I am merely illustrating what so many see as the problem affecting the absence of a strong thrust by the church against liquor. Christianity has a black eye. It is the black eye of unconcern. Unconcern in doing anything about the greatest scourge affecting our nation today. The church must take its stand, an intelligent and decided stand. We must be willing to face the issue head on without flinching. We must present the facts and call for a reformation no matter the consequences. For unless we do, we cannot expect to win men and women to Christ.

Now I am well aware that there are and always will be those who come out with that pious expression, "Let the minister stick to the Bible and leave the liquor question to lay-men and politicians." The fact is that if the church and the minister stick to the Bible, they must speak out against alcohol. A careful examination of the Bible will reveal more Scripture against drinking than on the subjects of lying, adultery, swearing, stealing, Sabbath-breaking, cheating, hypocrisy, pride or even blasphemy! The church and the minister have the authority from the example of Scripture to speak out decidedly. Unfortunately there are Christians who argue that the Bible itself, although clearly condemning drunkenness, does not forbid drinking if done moderately. The question is; "Is this a legitimate argument?" That the Bible speaks favorably of "Wine" cannot be doubted. For instance, Psalm 104:15 refers to "wine that maketh glad the heart of man. . ." Zechariah 9:17 tells us that "corn shall make the young men cheerful and new wine the young maids." But on the other hand it speaks about wine quite unfavorably to the point of condemnation. For instance, in Proverbs 20:1—"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Proverbs 23:31, 32: "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." There certainly is no moderation in these texts.

Now the question that comes to us is, "How can it be possible for anything to be both very good and very bad?" it doesn't seem logical. It isn't logical. Can the Bible then be that inconsistent? The answer is No, of course. Then what do we do with these two divergent attitudes toward the use of wine? We investigate them. When we investigate them we discover first of all that when the Bible was first written, it was written in principally two different languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek. Our English Bible was translated from these two languages. Now when we read our English Bible and we

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come to the word wine, we immediately see in that word fermentation. We believe it to be fermented wine. This is the meaning that we attach to the word wine. However, in the languages from which we translated our Bible, we are dealing with three main words that are translated "wine." In the Old Testament Hebrew we have two words, "Tirosh" and "Yayin." Let us look at these two words first.

The word "tirosh" occurs about 38 times and is translated literally "must," fresh or new wine by Brown, Driver and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon. A glance at the usage of the word will show that it does not refer to a fermented drink. Of the 38 references, 11 speak to wine as a first fruit fresh from the field. In 17 more cases "tirosh" is used in such connections with grain and oil as natural products of the field. That seems to clearly imply fresh wine; that is grape juice.

In Joel 2:24, Hosea 9:2 and Proverbs 3:10 the "tirosh" is said to be filling the presses. Obviously the freshly pressed juice is meant in Isaiah 65:8 as the "tirosh" is pictured as still in the cluster of grapes. Micah 6:15 is clearest of all in mentioning "tirosh" as the material from which fermented wine is formed. "Tirosh" is the specific word for grape juice which is unfermented, a non-intoxicating wine, and is employed 38 times. In the Bible, man's use of "tirosh" is constantly approved of.

The other word translated "wine" is the word "yayin" which occurs about 140 times. It is a generic term meaning wine in general. In other words, it does not specifically refer to the character of wine. It is whether it is intoxicating or non-intoxicating. It often means fermented wine, but is a general term only. The only way one can know the character "yayin" takes, is by the context in which the word is found. In at least 30 instances "yayin" is definitely associated with drunkenness. In fact, over half of the passages mentioning the word "yayin" in the Old Testament are clearly denunciatory.

The significant thing is that the Old Testament nowhere in its condemnation of wine makes the distinction so popular today between moderate drinking and drunkenness. Do you remember what Solomon said in Proverbs 23:31-32? "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." The command is clear. Do not drink moderately because it will lead to sin, sorrow and misery. So the conclusion is that the Old Testament uses these two main words for wine, "tirosh" meaning grape juice, a product which is never condemned and frequently commended, and "yayin" meaning wine which is frequently condemned, often associated with drunkenness and never spoken of in any favorable light.

When we turn to the New Testament we are dealing with only one main word, "oinos." Dr. Lyman Abbot, in his "Dictionary of Religious Knowledge," says: "It is tolerably clear that the word wine does not necessarily imply fermented liquor. It signifies only a production of the vine." "Oinos" without qualification can in the New Testament easily mean unfermented wine. In fact, this word was also used to denote various kinds of drinks or confections of other fruits such as date and lotus fruits, according to Lidell and Soctt's Lexicon, two authorities in the Greek language. Sir Richard Jebb of Cambridge University define "oinos" as a general term which might include all kinds of beverages.

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Of course, there are those who hold that there could not have been any unfermented, non-intoxicating "wines" because the ancients knew no process by which to prevent fermentation. However, ancient writers like Aristotle, Cato, Horace, Herodotus, Josephus, Pliny, Plutarch and Xenophon cite at least five processes by which fruits were preserved and fruit juices kept unfermented—by cold, heat, boiling, straining, and chemicals (sulphur), and mention "wines that do not make the heart heavy." These historians show that unfermented drinks were in common use and were designated "the best wines."

It is not realized how widely the natural juice of the vine was used in the classical world. Pliny, Roman historian, speaks of many varieties of sweet wine, raisin wine, with methods of preparation. He says that the "semper mustum, or fresh grape juice, was grape juice put into casks, immediately plunged under water and left until the winter solstice was past and the frosty weather at hand." The great classical authority on agriculture, Columella, writes in Book 12, chapter 29 how to keep grape juice sweet for a year. In the Georgics (1:295) the wife is pictured preparing grape juice against fermentation.

Dr. Lyman Abbot, who by the way was no friend of the anti-alcohol movement, in his "Dictionary of Religious Knowledge", page 573, states: "Fermented wine was the least common (in Biblical times) and the percentage of alcohol was small. New wines were wholly without alcohol and were easily preserved in this condition for several months. There were also wines in which, by boiling or by drugs, the process of fermentation was prevented and alcohol excluded. These were mixed with water and constituted the most common drink of the land."

I cite Pliny again, a Roman author of the time of Christ, in his "Natural History" says that mixing wine with water was practiced in Homer's day (Book 14, chapter 6) and that in his own day the Greek wines (sold in Rome) contained a portion of water. (Book 14, chapter 23) This dilution was especially common in using grape vinegar. The acid drink was diluted so as to have a mild tartness like our soft drinks and used as the every-day drink of the Roman soldiers. This drink was called "posca." It was, of course, non-alcoholic and was what Christ received from the soldiers who crucified Him. (John 19:30) You may notice that He rejected the wine. (Mark 15:23)

We could go on and on and on citing from ancient history; the evidence is overwhelming, but our time is limited. There is no reason to believe that juices could not be kept unfermented. They were in use as the common drink of the land, while the fermented drinks were not. There are a number of incidents that are appealed to in the New Testament as proof for moderation. We cannot deal with all of them. One of the main ones used is the first miracle of Christ in turning water to wine. We have already discussed the word "wine" as having nothing definite in its meaning as to its character in the New Testament. However, for the sake of the argument there are two or three factors that must be considered.

One is that the account tells us that they brought Him six stone jars, two or three firkins apiece. This unit was almost nine gallons, firkin or metretas. Each pot could hold 16 to 27 gallons. You multiply that by six and you have 108 to 162 gallons. Moderation? In a village like Cana there was enough wine, if fermented, to inebriate the whole town. However, there is something more severe that needs to be considered.

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Modern physiological science has made it clear, the contrast between the cup of the Lord and the cup of the devil. The fruit of the vine contains the delicate elements which in our day have been found to be essential for the body's life and prosperity. Dr. Alfred Pfleiderer in "Atlas Zur Alkoholfraage" gives its general content: 2.8% albumen, 1.2% acids and extractives, 83.7% carbohydrates and 2.3% mineral salts.

Fermentation destroys 98% of the albumen, 47% of the acids and extractives, 98% of the carbohydrates and 76% of the mineral salts. The life is gone. The life of the grape has become a liquid corpse. "The alcohol that remains," says Dr. Dauphin, "is a dehydrant. It paralyzes the sensibility and the contractibility of the living cells. It is a diffusible poison. It passes rapidly into all the organs. It destroys the active and useful elements and develops sclerotic tissue, the mark of old age. It is premature old age, premature decay. Who is willing to accuse Christ of creating a poison? Was His first miracle spent in creating a substance that has cursed men through the ages? He once said: "If a son asks for bread, does the father give him a stone?" No! Neither will he give him poison.

What is the significance of all that we have said? It is this. The Bible cannot be resorted to for permission or proof for moderation. Only a superficial student of Scripture would appeal to it for moderation. We cannot say that the Bible speaks in favor of moderation, especially when we discover the early church's attitude to the use of fermented wine. For in the New Testament we see a word occurring over and over again, it is the word "sober." The admonition is "Be ye sober." It is the Greek word "nepho" or "nephaios." Its basic and primary meaning is "to abstain from wine." Much more could be said about the word and its usage's in the New Testament writings, but the lack of time forbids it now. However, Baronius is quoted by Farrar Fenton as saying: "The practice of abstinence was so widespread among the early Christians, and prized so much, that in some places scandal was given if a Christian were seen to depart from it and drink intoxicating wine."

What did Abraham Lincoln say? "Alcohol has many defenders, but no defense." Jesus once said to some people who had become so selfish that they did what they pleased when they pleased with regard to no one: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Matthew 7:12. A true Christian will do all things in the context of his brother. This is the greatest and most potential argument against alcohol—love for my fellow humans!

The apostle Paul put it this way: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended or is made weak." Romans 14:21. The application of these words is that the Christian is propelled in his dealings of life by love. No matter what you think, or your knowledge may be of things, a true Christian must be mastered by love! And Paul says to put a stumbling block in the way of a weak man is to sin against Christ Himself. Christ died to free him from the evils of life and you as a Christian are placing before him an example that you lead him back into enslavement. A professed Christian who insists on using alcoholic beverages is doing it at the expense of others. He cannot be expected to oppose the evils resulting from its use, for every time he uses it he must say "Yes" to all the sorrow, misery, death and sin that it produces.

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Oh, church of Christ, why do you remain so unconcerned when all about us hear the cry of broken homes and battered lives? Christ said: "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." The time has come to raise the ax of truth and love and strike the roots of evils that have entwined themselves around humanity. Let us heed the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow."

Robert Zamora