

Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

Alcohol and the Believer Part 2: The New Testament Words

In our previous article, we were examining the issue of the use of alcohol and the believer, and were seeking to determine what exactly the Bible has to say on this topic. We examined all the various Hebrew words for alcoholic beverages in the Old Testament, what they mean, and what the Lord has to say about them. Now, we will move on and do the same thing with the New Testament words regarding alcohol.

1. Oinos

In the New Testament, which, of course, is in the Greek language rather than Hebrew, there are only two words that are used that are translated as an alcoholic drink. The first of these is oinos. It is the word the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) used to translate “yayin” and “tirosh.” It means “wine.”

The Lord teaches using the making of wine as an example in the first occurrence of “oinos” in the New Testament in Matthew 9:17.

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.

The Lord was arguing about doing things that are appropriate to the time and situation you are in, and uses the idea of putting wine into the right kind of wineskins as His example.

One of the Lord’s parables had to do with winemaking, as we read in Mark 12:1.

1. Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

The good Samaritan used oinos as a medicine to pour on wounds in the Lord’s parable in Luke 10:34.

34. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

John the Baptist was not to drink oinos according to the angel that spoke to his father in Luke 1:15.

15. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

The Lord refers to the fact that he did this in Luke 7:33.

33. *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, "He has a demon."*

Oinos is the word used in the miracle of the turning of the water into wine in John 2:1-11, so here we have the Lord Jesus creating wine from water. An example is verse 9.

9. *When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.*

The Lord was offered drugged wine before being crucified, but He refused to take it in Mark 15:23.

23. *Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.*

He was also offered other drinks on the cross, but these were not oinos but oxos, which is "sour wine" or vinegar.

A famous passage including this word "oinos" is the first use of it by the apostle Paul in his epistles (canonically). We read in Romans 14:21:

21. *It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*

Here, it is unclear what Paul means by wine making some weak, as he has been talking about meat offered to idols. It may be that he is referring to wine that is likewise offered to idols, and not to the intoxicating qualities of wine that could make a brother stumble. Yet this is clearly what he is referring to in the next passage wherein he uses the word "oinos," in Ephesians 5:18.

18. *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.*

He also speaks badly of the misuse of wine in I Timothy 3:3 and 3:8.

3. *not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;*

Here, the phrase "given to wine" is actually "paroinos," which means "beside wine." The idea is one who would always be found with an alcoholic drink at hand. I have seen pictures of people where in every picture they are holding a beer. Paul did not want them to choose someone like this to be a leader.

8. *Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,*

The word is just "oinos," not "paroinos" here, but it has the same basic meaning as verse 3. Paul expresses similar sentiments to these in Titus 1:7 and 2:3.

7. *For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,*

Here again "given to wine" is "paroinos."

3. *the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things--*

The command to female elders is likewise that they not be given to much wine. Here the word is just "oinos," but again carries the same idea.

The only passage wherein Paul speaks positively of wine is in I Timothy 5:23.

23. No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

This is also a well-known passage related to this topic. Paul advises Timothy to use wine as a form of medication. Notice, though, that he emphasizes the idea that he should use “a little” wine. It would have been hypocritical of him otherwise, having frowned upon those who are given to “much wine” earlier in the book.

The word “oinos” occurs several times in Revelation. The first occurrence is an indication of God’s judgment causing its price to be unusually high. In Revelation 6:6, we read,

6. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."

In Revelation, wine is often used symbolically of God’s wrath. One example is Revelation 16:19.

19. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

Wine was also used symbolically of fornication, perhaps because of the almost intoxicating or addicting qualities of sexual sin. One example is Revelation 17:2, again speaking of future Babylon.

2. with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

Wine is also used as one of the items trafficked in by Babylon in Revelation 18:13.

13. and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men.

2. Gleukos

The second word for alcoholic drinks in the New Testament Greek is gleukos. It was used most often in medical works, and thus it is no surprise that we find this word in a book written by Luke, the doctor. It is translated as “new wine.”

The only occurrence of “gleukos” is in Acts 2:13. There, men were mocking the miracle of speaking in tongues that the disciples were performing by claiming that they were drunk.

13. Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."

Clearly, new wine was something one could get drunk with, as is further demonstrated by Peter’s response to this accusation in verse 16 of the same chapter.

So we see that there is really no difference that we can make between the words used for beverages that are acceptable to drink and those that are used to cause drunkenness, which is condemned. The same words are used in both cases. Yet I think our study of the issue would be incomplete if we did not pause to consider why God said such things as in Ecclesiastes 9:7, which we examined earlier.

*7. Go, eat your bread with joy,
And drink your wine with a merry heart;
For God has already accepted your works.*

Here, the Lord clearly seems to be encouraging the use of wine (yayin.) Another passage to question is Amos 9:14, where wine (yayin) is promised as a blessing.

*14. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;
They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them;
They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them;
They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.*

Those who encourage the use of alcohol today would suggest that such passages clearly give us the permission and the Biblical right to drink alcohol if we so desire. If God Himself encourages it and offers wine as a blessing, than how can we have any problem with drinking it or suggest that a believer should not be involved with it? That is the issue we will consider in our next and final chapter in this study.

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