

Dangerous Wine – Psalm 104:14-15, Prov 20:1

Introduction – We are known as a church that has distanced itself from the temperance movement which still plays a strong role in American evangelical traditions. We have wine at the Lord's Table, we encourage feasting with fat things and good wine, and we tell fathers to teach their children how to drink. But we must not be complacent or naïve to think that we cannot be tempted in these things. Because there have been several instances of misuse in our body, the elders have asked me to address the topic of dangerous wine.

Wine is a Blessing from God (Psalm 104:14-15) – When God blesses people, wine is involved. He uses this image to symbolize joyful blessing (Amos 9:13-15, Isaiah 25:6). Wine cheers the heart of God and man (Judges 9:13, Psalm 104:14-15). Abraham and Melchizedek celebrated victory with wine (Gen 14:18-20). In Deut 14:26 the Israelites were told to spend some of their tithe money on “*wine or strong drink*” and then “*rejoice*” with their households. It was used in the Old Covenant sacrifices (Exod 29:38-40). In the New Testament we find Jesus making wine (John 2) and partaking of wine (Luke 7:33-35). Finally, Jesus sets wine, along with bread and His Word, in the very center of the service of Christian worship (Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25-26). Joy with wine is a big deal.

Wine is a Mocker (Prov 20:1) – When God curses a people, wine is involved. He uses this image to symbolize a people under the wrath of God (Psalm 75:8, Ezek 23:28-33) and to describe those enslaved in presumptuous sin and lust (Isaiah 56:9-12). But this is always when wine is used unto drunkenness (Jer 13:13-14). Drunkenness is expressly condemned in Scripture (Isaiah 28:1, Rom 13:13, Gal 5:19-21); drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:10). We are told not to associate with so-called brothers who are drunkards (1 Cor 5:11). This kind of life leads to ruin (Prov 23:21). Drunkenness is a big deal.

“Do Not Get Drunk with Wine” (Eph 5:18) – First of all, this command is helpful in making the case that the wine in the New Testament is in fact a fermented drink capable of making one inebriated. Second of all, this phrase is a synecdoche (a part for the whole), and therefore it does not mean that getting drunk on whiskey is OK. Drunkenness is the sinful influence by means of any substance that leaves one controlled by the substance in our thinking, reasoning, passions, and actions.

Rule-Nazis (Col 2:6-23) – Drunkenness is a sin. So is making rules for everyone else that the Bible hasn't made. This is because Jesus alone is sufficient for our salvation and our sanctification. We protect ourselves from all kinds of temptations and false teachings by walking in Christ, rooted and growing in Him with all thankfulness (vv6-7). We are to beware of cheaters out there who would add to Christ's work as ways to continue in our spiritual journey; our fullness and completeness are all in Christ alone (vv8-10). The works of our flesh have been put away by the work of God in Christ's triumphing crucifixion and resurrection (v11-14) which was a death blow to the prince of this age and his principalities (v15). Therefore, ceremonial laws, sacrifices, and feasts can no longer bring you closer to the Lord, nor will mystical pursuits including asceticism (vv16-19). Paul makes clear what Jesus had made clear: you do not become more holy or pure by keeping substances out of your body (vv20-23, Matt 15:17-20). Jesus lives this way even when it hampered his reputation (Matt 11:19) because “*...wisdom is justified by her children.*”

We Live in a Dangerous World – Guns don't kill people, sex doesn't make people immoral, and wine doesn't make drunkards. We live in a dangerous world, a world filled with dangerous things that we are to receive with thankfulness from God and with which we are to steward this world to the glory of His name. Yes, alcohol is dangerous. So is food. So is music. So is sex. So are electricity and knives and nuclear power. So is social media. So are cars and trains and spaceships. So is prosperity. So is the office of teaching. So is parenting. So what? In all of these gifts, we have to grow up to maturity; we have to learn how to use them and how to not let them become idols that control us. Therefore, the charge to the drunkard and the rule-nazi is this: grow up!

With Regard to the World – You will be considered weird not to use these things for your own fleshly desires. They think it is natural (1 Pet 4:3-4).

With Regard to the Overscrupulous – You will have to bear the reproach of those who call you libertines (1 Tim 4:1-5, 10). Frankly, it is hard work to refuse to govern by extra rules.

Dangerous Wine at a Dangerous Table – Where are we commanded to receive wine from the Lord with thankfulness? It is, of course, at the Eucharist, the Table of Thanksgiving. Prior to the Reformation the people were not given wine at the Lord's Table because it was too dangerous to give it to them (they might spill it!). Today, evangelicals do not give their people wine because it is too dangerous (they might be tempted to get drunk!). But the Table is dangerous because the Gospel is dangerous because God is dangerous (Heb 12:28-29). We are proclaiming the Lord's death (and ours in His), demanded by God to satisfy His holy wrath. Should that taste like wine or grape juice? What did Jesus say and do?

The Lord's Table and, flowing from that Table to tables of family, fellowship, and feasting, these are the places where we learn what wine is for. This is where we instruct. This is where we mature. This is where we celebrate with wine “*that makes glad the heart of man,*” because this is where we partake of the blood that reconciles us to God.