

put our members to death. What he is saying is that we died *positionally* with Christ when we were saved, but now we must work out that truth in our daily lives. By no means is he directing us to mutilate ourselves or to practice asceticism. He has already denounced that practice as being worthless to help us stop sinning (Col 2:18-23). But he is directing us to eliminate every sinful practice of impurity in our lives.

Now let's consider how we can cleanse our lives from sexual sin. To begin with, we must agree with Paul that immorality is wrong. Immorality is the Greek word for any sexual sin. It includes fornication, adultery, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. In fact any sexual activity outside of marriage is condemned as sinful (1Co 7:4; Heb 13:4). The believer must put all these sins to death.

But sexual purity is much more than not committing the act with one's body. The Holy Spirit directs us to be clean in our hearts. We are to put to death any impurity in our minds. The word "impurity" has reference to the evil and lustful thoughts and intentions of the mind. Matthew 5:28 says that "everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." These lustful thoughts defile the man (Mt 15:19). They are the work of the flesh (Gal 5:19). Believers are commanded to abstain from these thoughts (Eph 5:3). False preachers are characterized by these thoughts (2Pe 2:14). But righteous men such as Job have disciplined themselves to abstain from such thoughts (Job 31:1). Every believer is called not to impurity, but sanctification (1Th 4:7). Only the pure in heart shall see God (Mt 5:8).

Now Paul is going to give us three terms that will trace immorality all the way back to its root. Immoral behavior is caused by impure thinking. The impure thinking that results in immoral deeds has three roots. The first root is passion. It refers to strong desire. The Bible is forbidding the believer from feeding impure thoughts so that they grow powerful and cannot be contained. The root of passion is evil desire. It has reference to craving evil things (1Co 10:6). Here it has reference to evil sexual desires. The Scripture teaches that when evil desire has been consented to in the mind, sin occurs (Jas 1:13-15). The tap root of evil desire is covetousness. It refers to the desire to have more than God allows. It is the opposite of contentment. We must be content to be in the state that God has placed us (Php 4:19). When a person is coveting what God forbids, he makes an idol of himself (Col 3:5). He has dethroned God and placed himself upon the throne of his heart. He is worshipping self.

So then people fall into immorality this way: first, they refuse to be content in the state God has placed them. This is coveting and idolatry: the worship of self. They refuse to die to self. When self rules on the heart's throne, the desires of the flesh are assented to with the volition. These evil desires are fed until they grow into burning passion. Passion bursts forth into the evil deed itself.

Immorality and impurity are very serious sin. Colossians 3:6 says that it is these sins that will bring God's wrath upon a sinning earth. We do not want to participate in the sins that anger God so much that He pours out His eternal wrath upon the unsaved.

**The believer must be determined to destroy the fortress of impurity.**

**Applications for Today:** First, we must consider ourselves to be dead. No longer must we live for what we want. Our life is Christ! (Col 3:4). If we step away from this, we have enthroned self as god, and we are headed for impurity and immorality. Furthermore, we must "flee immorality" (1Co 6:18). Turn away from all the lustful and immoral entertainments. Anything that provokes us to lust and temptation should be removed from the life. Stay away from the strange man or woman (Pr 5:8). Additionally, we must make every effort not to cause others to stumble (Ro 14:13). We must dress modestly lest we provoke others to lust (1Ti 2:9-10). We must avoid flirting (Pr 6:24). Finally, beware of the teachers who will tell you that immorality and impurity are not wrong (Ep.h 5:3-6). This "doctrine of Balaam" (Rev 2:14) is a sure sign of a false teacher (2Pe 2:1-3). "Do not let immorality, or any impurity or greed (lit. "coveting") even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Eph 5:3).

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## The Christian and Alcohol Part 1

Scott Williquette

God commands His people to be holy as He is holy. He commands them to "not love the world or anything in the world" because "everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1Jn 2:14-15). Each generation of believers is responsible to apply biblical teaching regarding personal holiness and reflect Jesus Christ in the world. Each generation inherits teachings from the previous generation, but each must make sure their standards of holiness are truly biblical. Some holiness standards are easy to understand and apply — "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph 4:29). Others take much more thought — "Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do." (1Pe 1:15). The question of the Christian and alcohol is one issue of personal holiness that requires a great amount of thought. The Bible prohibits drunkenness, but it does not directly prohibit the consumption of alcoholic beverages. In fact in 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul commands Timothy to stop drinking water alone and to drink wine instead (a water and wine mixture).

In light of what the Bible teaches about alcoholic wine, what should believers today do? Should believers abstain from drinking alcohol as a beverage, or is it permissible for believers to indulge? Is the consumption of alcohol as a beverage a matter of personal holiness or a matter of personal preference? I have come to the conclusion that when all the information is brought to bear on the subject, it is a matter of personal holiness. There is every reason for Christians today to abstain from the use of alcohol as a beverage and no biblical or practical reason why they should indulge. This article will consider necessary background informa-

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## Putting Theology Back in the Pew

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tion. The next issue of *Sola!* will consider the biblical material that applies to alcohol's use today.

**Wine in the New Testament period and wine today are different beverages.** Regarding wine as it is spoken of in the New Testament we need to answer two questions. The first question is, does the word "wine" in the New Testament refer to grape juice or to fermented alcoholic wine? The Greek word οἶνος, translated "wine" speaks of "the fruit of the grape," which almost always meant wine in some stage of fermentation. Usually when the fruit of the grape was grape juice it was called "new wine." Thus the word οἶνος usually referred to alcoholic wine. The second question is, is the wine that is spoken of in the New Testament similar to wine and other alcoholic beverages we can purchase today? The answer to this question is clearly "No." Grape juice begins to ferment soon after it is treaded from the grapes. During the treading process yeast is released from the grape skins causing slow fermentation. Under normal conditions the resulting wine would

**Christians today should abstain from the use of alcohol as a beverage.**

contain no more than 7% alcohol. Because of the addition of extra yeast and controlled heating conditions, standard table wines produced today have as much as 14% alcohol. So at its strongest, fermented wine in the New Testament period contained 7% alcohol — roughly the alcoholic content of 12 ounces of beer. What is interesting, however, is that people in New Testament times did not drink such wine. Fermented wine was always diluted with water. According to *Collier's Encyclopedia*, "The wine of classical antiquity was very different from modern wine. They . . . always diluted it with water before consumption . . . Only barbarians drank undiluted wine."

In ancient times, before wine was poured into cups it was mixed with water. The ratio of water to fermented wine ranged between 20 parts water to 1 part wine and 2 parts water to 1 part wine. Homer's *Odyssey* mentions a ratio of 20 to 1. Pliny's work entitled *Natural History* mentions an 8 to 1 ratio. Other Classical Greek writers mention similar ratios: Hesiod — 3 to 1, Alexis — 4 to 1, Diocles — 2 to 1, Nichocharis — 5 to 2. Jewish writings also bear out the fact that wine in the New Testament era was always diluted with water. The Talmud, which contains Jewish oral traditions from 200 BC to AD 200, contains several statements to the effect that wine was to be diluted at least 2 or 3 to 1. Wine was always diluted with water. The strongest ratio was 2 to 1 in which case the alcoholic content was around 2½%. Only barbarians drank undiluted wine. Mnesitheus of Athens said,

The gods have revealed wine to mortals, to be the greatest blessing for those who use it aright, but for those who use it without measure, the reverse. For it gives food to them that take it and strength in mind and body. In medicine it is most beneficial. . . . In daily intercourse, to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer; but if you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. *Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse* (emphasis mine).

In the New Testament era "wine" referred to diluted wine. When undiluted wine was spoken of it was called "unmixed wine." Stein states, "To consume the amount of alcohol that is in two martinis by drinking wine containing three parts water to one part wine, one would have to drink over 22 glasses. In other words, it is possible to become intoxicated from wine mixed with water, but one's drinking would probably affect the bladder long before it affected the mind." When we see the word "wine" in the New Testament we automatically assume that it is the same type of wine available today in any grocery store. Clearly it is not. While the goal in the ancient world was to reduce the alcohol content of beverages, the modern world has sought to increase it.

- Beer contains around 7% alcohol.
- Standard table wine contains as much as 14% alcohol.

- Fortified wines like port or sherry have alcohol added resulting in an alcoholic content of 18 to 24%.
- Hard liquor produced by distillation such as vodka or gin contain as much as 40% alcohol.
- The diluted wine consumed in Bible times contained at most 2½% alcohol, and usually much less.

**The use of diluted wine, or any alcoholic beverage, is no longer necessary today.** Diluted wine was consumed in Bible times for two main reasons. First, there was little else to drink. As we will see water alone was often undrinkable, so the juice of crushed fruits was the only option. Wine was consumed because little else was available. But wine had a liability — it would ferment over time producing a beverage that could cause undesirable side effects. How did people minimize that liability? They diluted wine with water sometimes as much as 8, 15, or 20%. When it comes to beverages today, God's people have hundreds of nonalcoholic options. The other factor we have to realize is that diluted wine was often consumed because the water supplies were contaminated and the slight alcoholic content in the wine killed bacteria. There were two ways drinking water was purified in Bible times — boiling the water, which was time consuming and inconvenient, or mixing it with fermented wine. Today, God's people can turn a small lever in multiple rooms in their homes and out comes drinkable water. The bottom line is this: In Bible times God's people had to drink diluted wine. Today we do not.

**Drunkenness is forbidden in the Bible.** Under normal life circumstances the believer must never allow alcohol or any drug to take control of his thinking. God commands His people to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, not wine. There is no question that drunkenness is sin. There is no question that at the point where alcohol or any other drug replaces the Holy Spirit as the believer's controlling force, the believer is sinning.

1 Corinthians 5:11 reads, "But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is . . . a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat."

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 reads, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived:

Neither the sexually immoral . . . nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

Ephesians 5:18 reads, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

Galatians 5:19-21 reads, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, . . . drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

**The diluted wine consumed in Bible times contained at most 2½% alcohol, and usually much less.**

**Conclusion.** Modern alcoholic beverages are quite different from the alcoholic wine consumed in Bible times. One cannot legitimately say, "Jesus turned water into alcoholic wine, and Paul commanded Timothy to drink alcoholic wine, so I can drink wine and other alcoholic beverages today. Wine is wine." Wine consumed in Bible times was mixed wine containing very little alcohol. It was different from every modern alcoholic beverage. Furthermore, unlike God's people in Bible times, today we have hundreds of beverages to choose from which contain no alcohol at all. Jesus, Paul, and Timothy did not. Last, the danger with alcoholic beverages is that it may dull the senses and ultimately replace the Holy Spirit as the believer's controlling influence. The Bible universally forbids this. The best way to steer clear of such sin is to take advantage of the hundreds of options God has provided us today. Water, milk, fruit juice, ice tea, Gatoraid — all of these will satisfy your body's need without impairing the Spirit's control.

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## The Very First Step to Christlikeness

Steven Owen

Every builder knows that before he can begin building he must first tear down. Site preparation is essential to a successful project. Every building, tree, bush, and rock that stands

on the building site must be removed. Perhaps the site itself will need to be leveled. Trenches will have to be dug for the footers, and excess dirt and debris must be hauled away. All these things must be done before the first nail can be driven.

Likewise, the very first step to Christlikeness is the removal of sins that hinder or block the growth in Christlikeness. There can be no progress in the Christian life until the fortresses of sin are razed. From the time of a person's birth until his salvation experience, Satan has been constructing fortresses to resist the work of God in the life (2Co 10:4).

But once a person is saved, those fortresses must be destroyed. The Scriptures are replete with admonitions for the Christian to demolish those fortresses of sin so that growth in Christlikeness may proceed (cf. Jas 1:21; 1Pe 2:1-2; Heb 12:1-2). In Colossians chapters 3 and 4, the Apostle Paul describes for us a blueprint for becoming Christlike. That blueprint begins with preparation for spiritual growth: the removal of sins from the life. In Colossians 3:5, the Apostle Paul directs every believer to take the very first step to Christlikeness: the destruction of the fortress of sexual impurity.

It is not surprising that the Holy Spirit directed the Apostle to list this sin first. The Colossian believers lived in a culture that promoted sexual impurity. Consequently every kind of sexual vice was practiced. Satan openly used the cultural values of their day to erect fortresses of impurity that he could use to resist the work of God in the life. And it is no different in our culture. Almost every radio and TV program, magazine, computer game, internet advertisement, and web site promotes lust. Consider the women's fashions of our culture. Even the everyday dress is oriented toward seductiveness. Children's fashions are designed to promote seductiveness amongst our girls from the earliest ages. The Christian man and woman (as well as the unsaved person) are literally bombarded by Satanic cultural norms designed to promote impurity and to resist the work of God in the life.

But now that one is saved and has died to the sins of the past (Col 3:3-4), all that must go. The former manner of life in this area is to be put to death. The believer must be determined to destroy the fortress of impurity. Colossians 3:5 says "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed." Literally, the Greek commands, "All of you therefore kill the members on the earth." Paul seems to contradict himself when he says in verse 3 that we have died and then in verse 5 commands us to