

# Scripture's Teaching Regarding Alcohol (3)

## The Proper Limit on its Use

*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.*

*I Timothy 5:23*

In our last article we examined Scripture's teaching regarding when alcohol may be used, and when it may not be used.

This we did to begin answering the question: what is the proper use of alcohol?

But the proper use of alcohol involves more than that it be used at a proper occasion; it also requires us to use it within proper limit.

What is this proper limit? What amount of alcohol is proper for us to consume?

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The proper limit, Paul tells Timothy, is little: "Use a little wine."

This limit as stated in I Timothy 5:23 is in keeping with what other Scriptures say about our consumption of alcohol. Bishops (elders and pastors) are not to be "given to wine" (I Timothy 3:3); deacons may not be "given to much wine" (I Timothy 3:8); nor may aged women who are to teach the younger women in the church (Titus 2:3). In all these passages, the apostle is not prohibiting the use of wine entirely, but is saying that we may not be those who drink too much, or too often. We may drink a little. Timothy, after all, was a bishop (specifically, he was a pastor); when Paul says that bishops may not be "given to wine," yet says that Timothy should use "a little wine," the inspired apostle indicates that wine is permissible - but in the right amount. A little.

To use a little wine will mean that wine will not be one's primary source of liquid refreshment. Our King James Version might leave the impression that Paul is telling Timothy to stop drinking water altogether, and to drink wine instead. In fact, Timothy was a "water drinker," that is, he drank water exclusively. Paul is telling him to stop drinking water exclusively and to supplement his water diet with a little wine. But still, Timothy will drink more water than wine.

He should drink a little wine for two reasons. First, because a little will be enough to help his stomach problems. We all know that when we need medicine, we must use a little. A little helps us heal; too much is dangerous. So with alcohol; a little is good, a lot is bad. Second, because Timothy as pastor must not become under the influence of alcohol; he must set the example for the church. Let him drink little.

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How much is a little?

Notice that Scripture does not specify the proper limit in terms of gallons or liters. This is understandable—we all know that drinking gallons or liters of alcoholic beverages would result in drunkenness.

But Scripture does not specify the proper limit in terms of ounces or milliliters either - or in any earthly unit of measurement. Why? Wouldn't it be easier for us to know God's will if he told us exactly what the "limit" is? But God simply says "little" for two reasons. First, because every person is created different, each can tolerate a different amount of alcohol before being negatively affected by it. So God's limit, if measured in terms of units of measurement, would not be the same for one as for another. Second, God would have us exercise wisdom in our use of alcohol. He desires us to take to heart the one clear rule he gives—"little"—and know prayerfully how to stay within those bound for ourselves.

Not only do the Scriptures not tell us specifically what "little" is, but "little" is also not determined by the state's standard. Many states set the standard for legal intoxication at .08 % blood alcohol content (BAC). States need such a standard in order to apply their laws regarding drinking without being arbitrary and without discriminating. The people of the world need such a guideline to tell them when they have had enough. As citizens of our states or provinces, this law binds us too.

But we ought not suppose that God's definition of "little" is .08% BAC. Nor should we fool ourselves into thinking that perhaps God's definition of "little" is more lax than the states' rule—that it is a BAC in excess of .08%.

Almost certainly, if we abided by God's definition of "little" our blood alcohol content would never reach .08%.

If a policeman stops us, and gives us a Breathalyzer test which indicates that our BAC is .07 %, we are "off the hook" in the eyes of the state, but that does not necessarily mean God is pleased.

Little is a small amount.

Little is just enough to accomplish one's godly purpose for drinking (cheer the heart, improve health, relieve pain) but not enough that one begins to lose control of his thoughts, words, actions, and judgments.

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Child of God, are you determined to drink only little? Young people, when you are of age to drink legally, are you determined to drink only little?

He does not drink little, who carries at his drink. To drink a little, one takes a little, drinks it, and then does not drink more. The winebibber (Proverbs 23:20) carries long at his wine.

He does not drink little, who sets a goal with his buddy to finish off a 12 pack of beer in an evening over a game of cards.

He does not drink little, who finds that the first tastes so good that he will have a second, only to find that the second tasted better yet, so he reaches for a third.

The world tells us to have a designated driver at our social gatherings at which alcohol is served. He does not drink little, who has to plan on needing a designated driver.

Perhaps little is less than you have taken or been served. Then do not suddenly proclaim that the Christian may not waste, and that you must drink your drink because it is in your glass. (Funny, the reasons people will use to justify draining a whole can of beer, when they think nothing of throwing away half of their supper). If you have had your little before the cup or can is empty, dump the rest down the drain! Better to throw away wine or beer, than become drunk by it.

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How are you to find out what little is for you?

Not by trial and error. That is, not by drinking until you have become drunk. To be drunk God forbids.

You will know what little is, when you resolve to drink for the right reasons, when you are aware of the real danger of drunkenness, and when you pray before you drink: "Lord, bless this drink unto me; and cause me to glorify Thee in drinking it. Give me wisdom to know how much is a little."

Such a prayer would mark a Christian who uses alcohol responsibly, to God's glory. And "God's glory" is part of the limit. As soon as I drink one drop to try to enjoy my own life apart from God, or without thinking of God, I have already passed my limit! The limit is "little," when that little is drunk to God's glory.

Young people, when you are of legal age to use alcohol, if you choose to use it, may God give you wisdom to drink little!