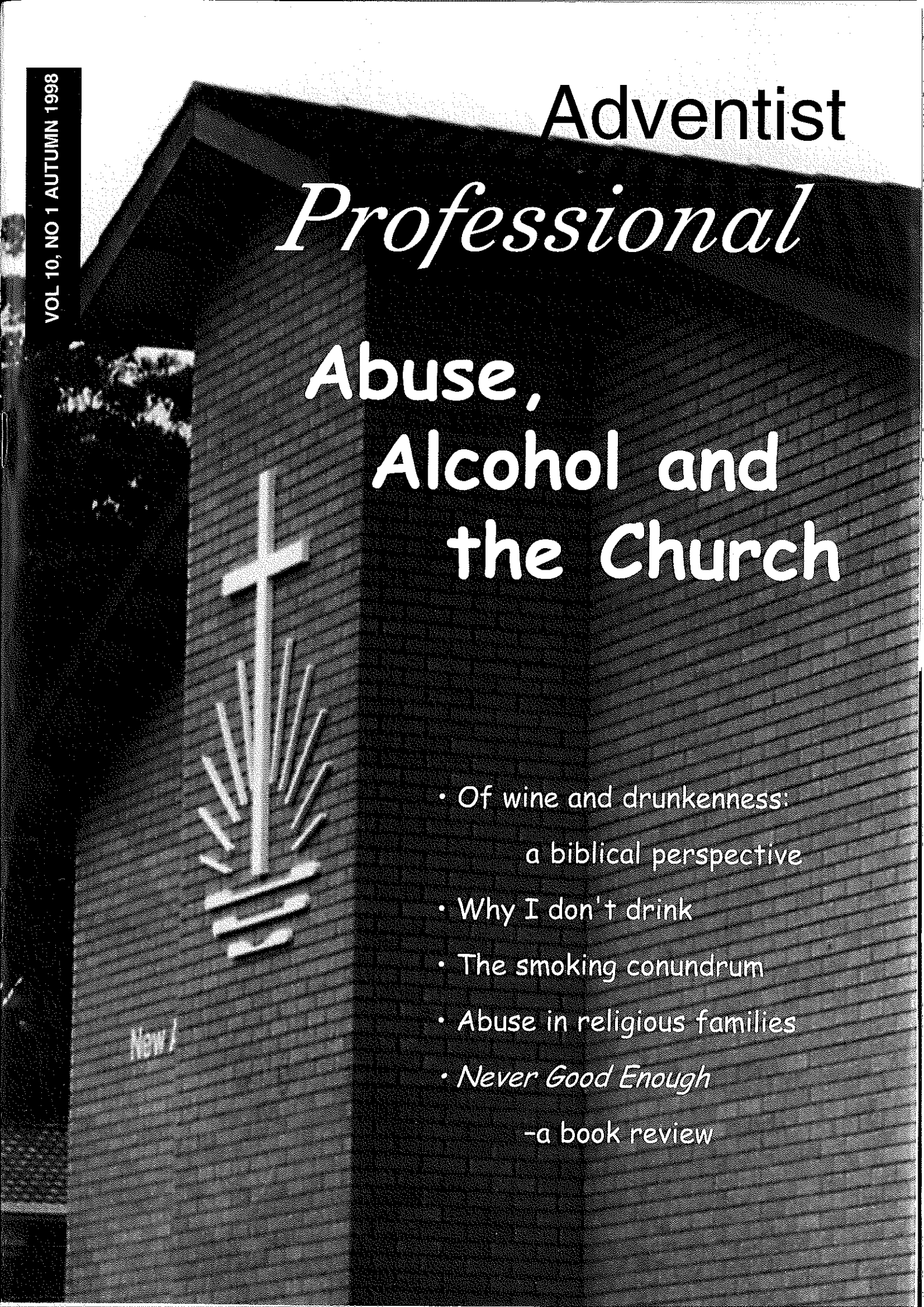
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Adventist Professional



Abuse, Alcohol and the Church

- Of wine and drunkenness: a biblical perspective
- Why I don't drink
- The smoking conundrum
- Abuse in religious families
- *Never Good Enough* -a book review

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The major theme for this issue has to do with several distinguishing features of the Adventist lifestyle. We are proud of our lifestyle and believe that it is, in part, the result of healthful living. This healthful lifestyle is achieved through a vegetarian diet and abstinence from such harmful drugs as alcohol and tobacco. Steve Thompson leads with an article which explores the evidence with regard to the use of wine in Old Testament and Early Church times. Jonathan Hopper, a young man, gives a personal testimony with regard to his abstinence from alcohol. Bill Johnson identifies reasons why, despite their knowledge of the potentially fatal effects of tobacco, young people persist in smoking.

As a consequence of healthful living and our religious values we would expect that family relationships would reflect the best in Christian relationships. Bryan Craig and Bradley Strahan lift us however, from our comfort zone with an expose of abuse within the Adventist family.

Ritchie Way uses imagery suggested by the square to challenge us individually and corporately to avoid stagnation. Growth and progress requires that we step outside the square and take risks. From its inception, *Adventist Professional* has very deliberately refrained from the use of articles which debate theological issues. The inclusion of an article by Kevin Ferris is not an abandonment of that policy. While Ferris identifies the very different theological presuppositions of Adventist A and Adventist B, the main thrust of his article is to encourage Adventists, irrespective of where they fall on the doctrinal spectrum, to work harmoniously together and to benefit from their ideological differences.

Last year an article from the pen of Robert Folkenberg appeared in the *Record.* Most Adventists would have agreed with the sentiments expressed by Folkenberg. To Robert Wolfgramm, however, the article raised a number of red flags. He shares his concerns with us.

We hope the variety of articles in this issue, along with the regular features, challenges your thinking and provides you with good reading. Our thanks to the authors and to you, our readers.

Of wine and drunkenness: a biblical perspective

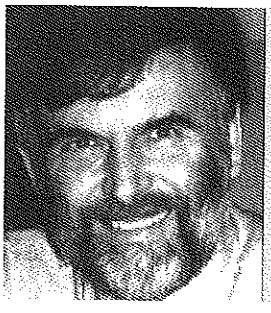
by Steven Thompson

Seventh-day Adventists from the beginning opposed the use of distilled alcoholic drinks. Joseph Bates in 1821 came under conviction to give up drinking ardent spirits.[1] James White "never drank spirituous liquor"[2] and J N Andrews "was kept from even tasting strong drink."[3] The attitude of early SDAs was well expressed by the opening line of the first article on alcohol in the *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald:* "It is unnecessary to preach to any who believe and practice the present truth, a sermon on the evils of intemperance to deter them from the use of spirituous liquors."[4]

The Adventist stand against use of beer, cider and wine came a bit later. Joseph Bates gave up beer and wine in the 1820s, but he apparently never insisted that others take this step. Temperance societies prior to the 1870s did not usually advocate abstinence from beer, cider and wine.[5] The cause of fermentation was not understood until later in the century, pasteurisation was unavailable, and home production and storage of fruit juices led almost always to some fermentation. During the 1870s SDA leaders adopted total abstinence, advocating it strongly for the church, but there is evidence that some members were slow to respond. Ellen White wrote in 1882 that many readers were still producing, marketing and consuming milder intoxicants. "Many, as they read this, will laugh at the warning of danger. They will say, Surely the little wine or cider that I use cannot hurt me."[6] During December of the previous year the General Conference in session *"Resolved,* That we express it as the judgment of this body that the use of domestic wines as a beverage, or the manufacture of the same, in order that they may be employed for that purpose, should be discountenanced at all times by members of our denomination, as being contrary to the plain teachings of Scripture, and the highest interests of society."[7] During the 1890s use of alcoholic drinks among SDAs, even communion wine, ceased and total abstinence became both official position and standard practice.

We have outlasted nearly every other Protestant denomination in our belief that total abstinence is more than just a health principle or a social obligation but a moral obligation, the will of God. Are we correct in this? Where has God expressed His will on this matter? Early SDAs heard God's call for abstinence both through natural theology and through revelation in the Scriptures. The expression "laws of health" was used by Ellen White and early Adventists to refer to God's natural laws, which they considered equal in authority to God's revealed law in Scripture. Ellen White wrote: "It is as truly a sin to violate the laws of our being as it is to break the ten commandments."[8]

Early SDAs also heard God's total abstinence commanded in the Scriptures. "The Bible nowhere sanctions the use of intoxicating wine".[9] Temperance societies during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, engaged in an enormous struggle against the out-of-control distribution and consumption of alcohol, enlisted many Protestant Christian supporters, SDAs among them. The all-out warfare called for undivided support, including the Scriptures. In order to account for the Bible's approving comments about drinking, temperance Bible interpreters suggested that the Bible refers to two types of wine, one containing alcohol the other unfermented grape juice.[10] They argued that when the Bible makes an disapproving references such as Hosea 4:11 ". . .wine and new wine take away the heart." It refers to the alcoholic variety, but every approving reference such as Psalm 104: 14, 15: "He causeth. . .wine that maketh glad the heart of man" is to grape juice.[11]



Dr Steve Thompson has been head of the Avondale College Theology Department for seven years. He has been researching attitudes towards wine in the ancient world for about ten years and is currently preparing a book on the topic.

Today conservative Christians, including SDAs, removed from the social tensions of temperance and prohibition of a century ago, are themselves divided about whether the Bible clearly prohibits drinking alcohol. Some have revived the two types of wine explanations but others point out the absence of any specific "thus saith the Lord."[12] Both positions use the same biblical data, emphasising different parts of that data. We will briefly survey that biblical data.

Wine in Old Testament times

The grape was widely cultivated in most of the lands of the Bible from very early times. Left to itself, without human intervention, the grape will produce alcohol. The microscopic yeasts on its skin will interact with the escaping juice and if temperature and other conditions allow produce alcohol Through human intervention of harvesting and pressing the grapes and storing the juice, wine results. The story of Noah's vineyard (Genesis 9:20) summarises the human experience of alcoholic drink. The Old Testament contains about 180 occurrences of the words *tirosh* and *yayin* (both words usually translated "wine" sometimes "new wine," "grape juice"), indicating it was closely connected to the life of ancient Israel [13] It was a beverage for both everyday and special occasions, a medicine, a trade commodity. It accompanied sacrifices, was subject to tithe, and used as an intoxicant. Wine was produced and consumed by Israelites, but it is unlikely that ordinary working people drank on a daily basis. Bread, vegetables and fruit in season, accompanied by water, was their typical meal, with wine reserved for special occasions. However the risk of contaminated water was high, and the antiseptic effect of the alcohol in wine was desirable to make water safer. The situation may have been different among the wealthy. An abundance of wine was understood as a sign of God's blessing (Amos 9:13; Joel 3:18).

The Old Testament warns of the dangers of wine: it mocks, deceives, leads astray. It is poison, leads to violence, poverty and sickness, and contributes to the material and spiritual ruin of individuals and downfall of kingdoms. It symbolises the wrath of God as He delivers final judgment on the enemies of his people. Certain Israelites were prohibited the use of wine, either for a period of time, or permanently. Priests on duty at the temple (Lev 10:9), Samson's mother-to-be (Judg 13), Daniel during at least part of his education (Dan 1:5, 8, 16; 10:3). Nazirites (Num 6:3) and Rechabites (Jer 35) were never to use any grape product. Drunkenness in Israel was a problem among men and women which God condemned through the prophets (Amos 6:6; 4: 1), and through the law He declared harsh penalties for criminal acts aided by drunkenness (Deut 21:20), so while there is no general Old Testament prohibition of drinking wine, drunkenness was considered a grave spiritual problem which could easily separate the drunkard from God and bring him under God's judgment.

"...the risk of contaminated water was high and the antiseptic effect of the alcohol in wine was desirable to make the water safe."

Judaism after the close of the Old Testament period eventually came under the influence of Greece, then Rome. These combined influences created a cosmopolitan culture in which hundreds of local and regional cultures in the eastern Mediterranean world, including the Jews, lived in a mixture of Semitic, Greek and Roman ways of life. One common factor right across this world was its use of wine. Grapes were grown nearly everywhere and most peoples were significantly influenced by the availability of wine. Both Greeks and Romans held to the custom of drinking wine diluted with water. The amount varied according to occasion, typically one part of wine to three parts of water. This meant that the amount of alcohol consumed was significantly less than by modern drinkers. Poets sang wine's praises and warned of its destructive effects. Its use was widespread in the religions of the day. In household worship and in state religions it was often used in offerings, purifications and sacrifices. Many people in the absence of knowledge of alcohol and its intoxicating effect believed that a spirit or god resided in the wine, and by drinking to the point of intoxication they could experience closeness to the god. Greek and Roman wine gods became very popular, especially because of the annual festivals dedicated to them. In the midst of this widespread interest in wine and drinking the Jews retained a cautious attitude and practice. While they produced and consumed wine in moderation, they continued to demand abstinence for priests on temple duty, and for Nazirites (at this time most Nazirite vows lasted sixty days). Wine had a place at meals and in worship. It was drunk on Friday evenings to welcome the Sabbath, at marriage ceremonies, circumcisions, funerals and at Passover. But always the amount was prescribed by the rabbis, usually only one cup, often accompanied by a prayer. In the case of Passover four cups were passed around to the participants. Wine was mixed with water, but still the rabbis cautioned against its free use, and against the social and moral effects

of drunkenness, reminding the nation it was God's chosen people and accountable to Him. The Jews were not known for heavy drinking and alcoholism.

Wine in the gospels

The early church emerged from its Jewish heritage into the larger Greek and Roman world with a new set of values. Their source was the Christian view of life provided by the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus became the picture of how people were to live, and the coming of the Holy Spirit brought a power and a new relationship to his followers. For ethical questions Christians looked to Jesus as their example, and from the Spirit received the power needed to transform their lives. What example did Jesus provide on the questions of use of wine and drunkenness?

There are relatively few references in the Gospels to drinking. Wine mixed with water, and bread are found on the table. It appears at celebrations and at Passover, and mixed with myrrh as a pain killer. There is no Gospel reference to Jesus drinking except the general statement that He drank and was accused of being "a winebibber" in contrast to John the Baptist (Mat 11: 19). At the Last Supper He abstained from the wine (Mat 26:29). The story of the wedding feast in Cana is probably the most hotly debated wine reference in the Bible. We cannot determine empirically whether the wine provided by Jesus was alcoholic and the Gospel does not answer the question. Ellen White clearly says "By a miracle he transformed the water into the pure juice of the grape..."[14] Another debated passage is found in the account of the Passover kept by Jesus and his disciples. Passover occurred in March/April, about six months after the previous grape harvest. Could the Jews have preserved grape juice unfermented for six months? The answer is yes, they could have, because the technology was available. The grape juice was boiled to reduce it to a syrup which would then be mixed with water before use. But were they motivated to do so? Was drinking wine prohibited? There is no clear evidence that non-fermented Passover wine was important to the Jews.

"Jesus taught temperance by example. To him drunkenness was contrary to God's will and would unsuit his followers for living in the last days when they need to be sober and watchful."

Did Jesus prohibit, by word or example, wine drinking? The Gospels are silent on this question. On the other hand Jesus was the embodiment of self-control. No one can conceive of Jesus becoming drunk; He warned his followers that drunkenness is a characteristic of people unready for his second coming (Matt 24:38, 49). Jesus taught temperance by example. To Him drunkenness was contrary to God's will and would unsuit his followers for living in the last days when they need to be sober and watchful.

Wine and the early Christian church

As soon as the infant church moved from the shelter of the synagogue into the wider world it encountered the full blast of paganism, with its tendency to worship wine at the same time it abused its use and indulged in a range of reprehensible practices totally unacceptable for followers of Christ. Pagans were soon attracted to Christianity and started entering the Jewish Christian churches, which then had to contend with some of their pagan practices. The best insights into that stage of the life of the church is provided by the letters of Paul, evangelist to the gentiles. He stressed three central themes of Christian belief: holiness, Christ-likeness, and unity. The believer's body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit (lCor 6: 19) and the believer becomes a member of the new reality known as the body of Christ (lCor 12:27). In this new reality the old destructive practices, including drunkenness, are prohibited.

Paul was aware that some church members drank and he did not exclude them from leadership for doing so (lTim 3:3, 8), and he approved the use of wine as medicine (lTim 5:23), but he firmly opposed drunkenness, declaring it unacceptable for Christians. He rebuked Corinthian Christians who came to church drunk (lCor 11:21) and declared repeatedly that drunkards have no place in God's kingdom (Gal 5:21; lCor 6:10; Eph 5:18). He advocated total abstinence from wine for the sake of the "weaker brother" whose Christian experience would be upset by others drinking: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth..." (Rom 14:21). Even though abstinence is not a divine command, it became necessary in order not to offend fellow Christians. This is probably the beginning point of total abstinence in Christianity.

Paul's faith was not however one of dull, grim asceticism and self denial. To the contrary he knew that Christ never asked fellow Christians to give up something without offering them a better alternative. Instead of wine they were offered the Holy Spirit: "be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5: 18) and "the

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Of wine and drunkenness: a biblical perspective

by Steve Thompson ...cont from p 6

Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom 14:17).

Wine and present-day Christians

The Bible addresses God's people in the ancient world where wine production and drinking was widespread. It acknowledges that some ancient Hebrews and early Christians drank small amounts of wine, strictly limited by economic factors, by the rituals which surrounded the drinking occasions, and by the fact that the alcohol content was diluted by adding water. In the setting of both Old and New Testaments drunkenness was forbidden to the people of God, and they were offered instead something better—God's Holy Spirit. True union with God and with each other was achieved not though alcohol but by The Holy Spirit.

The Bible does not address directly our age in which alcohol has become much more widely available to people of all income brackets, and where due to the process of distillation it is consumed in high concentrations and in vast quantities which were simply not available in the world of the Bible. But today as never before the biblical principle of remaining sober is relevant: "they that be drunken are drunken by night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober. .." (lCor 15:7f). The step from sobriety to drunkenness is a small one and for many people irreversible. Alcohol is readily available and socially approved. Ancient restrictions to drinking are no longer in place. In light of the times our position of total abstinence is arguably the truest interpretation of the intents and principles of the Scriptures.

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[2] Ibid., p 65.
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[4] *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald vol.* 23 December 22, 1863, p 3.
[5] Robinson, ibid., p 41.
[6] Ellen White, (1882) *Testimony 32* Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald Publishing Co., p 358 in consolidated edition, vol. 5.
[7] *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald* vol. 59, 3 January, 1882, p 11.
[8] *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* (1890), Battle Creek, MI: Good Health Publishing Co., p 53.
[9] *Ministry of Healing* (1905), Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, p 333.
[10] This hypothesis was argued extensively in nineteenth-century temperance literature, for example in *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* by Frederic Lees and Dawson Burns. NY: Sheldon & Co., 1870.
[11] See Samuele Bacchiocchi, (1989) *Wine in the Bible.* Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives.
[12] See William Johnsson, (1982), "The Compleat Person" *Adventist Review* 25 February, p 4.
[13] For a brief survey of biblical passages containing the words for wine and strong drink see William Shea, "Notes on Alcoholic Beverages and the Bible" unpublished paper, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, no date.
[14] *The Signs of the Times* 16 April, 1896, p 4.