

A Response to Earl Edwards' *Can a Christian Drink Alcohol?*

Earl D. Edwards recently wrote a lecture for the Freed Hardeman Lectureship held in February, 2018 titled, "Can a Christian Drink Alcohol?" (*Entrusted With The Faith*, ed. By Douglas Y. Burlison, 147-155) in which he affirms the moderation view of drinking alcoholic beverages while advising a voluntary abstinence. I would like to respond to several arguments made by him.

Bro. Edwards begins his lecture by introducing the position of bro. Guy N. Woods on the use of alcoholic beverages on the Lord's table for the emblem representing the blood of Jesus. Bro. Woods affirms that since Jesus used the phrase "fruit of the vine" then, either fermented or unfermented juice of the grape could be used on the Lord's Table. However, neither Jesus nor the apostles used the word "*oinos*" of the emblem on the Lord's Table which represents the blood of the atonement. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal. At the Passover, all yeast or leaven was forbidden (Lev. 2:3-14; Ex. 12:15-20; 34:25). The Hebrew word *khahmatz* (leaven or fermented substance) means *anything fermented* (Moses Stuart, quoted by William Patton, *Bible Wines and the Laws of Fermentation*, p. 70). "All leaven, i.e. fermentation was excluded from offerings to God. Lev. ii.3-14" (Ibid.) Patton argues that the Lord's body *saw no corruption* (Psa. 16:10 and Acts 2:31). He states, "All admit that the bread was unleavened...and was, therefore, the proper emblem of the body of Christ, which "saw no corruption." For the same reason, there was a necessity that the wine should be unfermented, that it might be the fit emblem of the great Sacrifice which "saw no corruption." (*Bible Wines*, 71). Patton quotes several sources affirming that the Jews in Jesus' time did not use fermented wine in any of their sacred feasts (*Bible Wines*, p. 70). Wilbur Fields makes a similar statement, "During this feast (the feast of unleavened bread-DS) no leaven of any sort was to be tolerated in the Israelites' home." Then a footnote reads, "Jews in later centuries excluded as leaven any product made of grain, such as beer, vinegar, porridge, paste, or cosmetics" (*Bible Study Textbook Series: Exodus*, 251). Surely Jesus would not contradict the Holy Spirit who condemns the use of alcohol and characterizes it as a woe in passages like Proverbs 23:29-35 and Habakkuk 2:15 by permitting its spiritual use on the Lord's table as a representation of His own blood (the cup of blessing, I Cor. 10:16).

Bro. Edwards attempts to use I Cor. 11:21 to show that at least some of the Corinthians used a fermented cup because some of them were drunk. In I Cor. 11:21, Paul said, "For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry and another is drunken." The word drunken (*methuei*) is from the Greek word *methuō*. While this word is commonly used of drunkenness, it also may mean to be satiated in contrast to being hungry (James McKnight, *A New Literal Translation of the Apostolic Epistles*, 181). McKnight states, "And another is filled"—So the Greek word *methuein* signifies here, being opposed to *one is hungry*. The word is used in this sense by the LXX (Septuagint-DS): Psa. 35:9; Jerem. 38:14 and John 2:10 where it is rendered by our translators, 'when men have well drunk,' drunk plentifully. According to grammarians, *methuein* literally signifies to eat and drink (*meta to thuein*) after sacrificing; on which occasions the heathen often drank to excess" (Ibid.). Even if we would allow that the word drunken (*methuei*) refers to drunkenness, Paul condemns the situation and corrects it. This is not proof that the "cup" used *regularly* by the church was an intoxicating drink.

Bro. Edwards defines the Greek word *oinos* using Bauer's lexicon, "wine/*oinos* is 'fermented juice of the grape'" (Edwards, 147). Writing of I Tim. 5:23, he affirms, "nothing else makes sense in this context." The passage declares, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (KJV). Bro. Edwards omits some important information revealing he has committed the **fallacy of selective evidence (He refers only to the evidence that supports his argument** see Peter Kreeft, *Socratic Logic*, 103-104). The Greek word *oinos* is used in the Septuagint for both fermented and unfermented wine. "It is important to note that the Hebrew word *tirosh*, "grape juice, unfermented wine," appearing 38 times in the Old Testament (Harris, "*tirosh*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2:969), is almost exclusively translated by *oinos* (36 times). In other words, *oinos* can and does refer to either unfermented or fermented wine in the Septuagint." (*The Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary*—from: <http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVanswers/2008/04-10b.html>). Thayer states, "*oinos* [from Homer down], Septuagint for *yayin*, also for *tirosh* (must, new wine), *chemer*, etc.; wine;..." (*Thayer Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 442). Another authority states, "*Oinos*, the Greek generic term for wine, from the Hebrew *yayin*. It comprehended new wine (*oinos neos*), luscious wine (*gleukos*), pure or unmingled wine (*akraton*), and a thin sour wine (*oxos*)" (John Kitto, *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, 954). The Greek word *oinos* cannot be limited in meaning to an intoxicating drink. Jesus uses it (*oinos*) to describe new wine (Matt. 9:17). Edwards would lead his reader to think otherwise. He affirms that "nothing else makes sense in this context." In determining the meaning of the use of any term in the Bible, we must consider the **remote context** and the **immediate context**. The remote context of the Bible makes a distinction between "good" and "bad" wine. Moses Stuart states, "My final conclusion is this, viz., that whenever the Scriptures speak of wine as a comfort, a blessing or a libation to God, and rank it with such articles as corn and oil, they mean, they can mean only *such wine as contained no alcohol that could have a mischievous tendency*; that whenever they denounce it, and connect it with drunkenness and reveling, they can mean only alcoholic or intoxicating wine" (William Patton, *Bible Wines and the Laws of Fermentation*, 64). Patton gives the distinctions between good and bad wines. Bad wines (fermented) cause intoxication, cause violence and woe, cause self-security and irreligion, are poisonous and destructive and are used as the emblem of eternal destruction. Good wines (unfermented) are presented at the altar as an offering to God; classed as being a blessing, comfort and part of the necessities of life; used as an emblem of spiritual blessings and used as an emblem of the blood of the atonement (Ibid. 55-64). This remote context has a bearing on the interpretation of Matthew 26:27-29 and I Tim. 5:23. The immediate context of this passage does not support the view taken by Edwards that the wine was alcoholic. First, the Greek word *oinos* does not demand an alcoholic wine in this context as shown above. The word is generic. Second, the fact that Timothy was instructed to take a "little" wine for his stomach's sake does not mean that the wine was intoxicating. All medicines are given in doses. A dose of medicine is usually small. Third, the Greeks knew of sweet, unfermented wine that was used for medicinal purposes. In 220 A.D. Athenaeus advised, "And if any one thinks it too much trouble to live on this system, let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, especially that which is called...*protropos*...the sweet Lesbian wine, as being very good for the stomach" (David Brumbelow, *Ancient Wine and the Bible*, 166). Athenaeus in his *Banquet* explains that this sweet, unfermented wine (*protropos*) could be used for the dyspeptic

<http://lavistachurchofchrist.org>. The original reference can be found in *The Deipnosophistae of Athenaeus*, Vol I, Loeb Classical Library, ed. 1927, Excerpts from Book II). *Despepsia* is another word for *indigestion*. The unfermented wine is called *lesbian* because the potency or fermentable power of the wine had been removed. The ancients had several ways of preserving wine unfermented (for a discussion of each method see William Patton, *Bible Wines and the Laws of Fermentation* and David Brumbelow, *Ancient Wine and the Bible*). Consequently, as we can see from the above information, there is **no compelling reason** to interpret I Tim. 5:23 as an intoxicating wine. Alcohol is known to cause problems in the gastrointestinal tract (<https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh21-1/76.pdf>). The juice of grapes is full of vitamins that would supplement a first century diet. Grape juice has antioxidants called flavonoids which are beneficial to the heart and help reduce high blood pressure. These benefits are secured by drinking pure grape juice without the use of alcohol. Alcohol is detrimental to every organ in the body. Experts warn that even **moderate** amounts of alcohol can harm the body. Alcohol is linked with five different types of cancer: liver, mouth (the second leading cause of cancer to the mouth) and throat, esophageal, breast and bowel. It is also associated with: suicide, addiction, depression, anxiety and self-harm. It stops organs including the liver, kidneys and heart from functioning as well, while dehydrating and ageing the skin. Small amounts can cause erectile dysfunction in men and lead to a woman's periods stopping. Alcohol is dangerous in small amounts to women who are pregnant. (Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3387992/Red-wine-s-not-good-Major-shake=alcohol-guidelines-set-rubbish-health-benefits.html#ixzz53FK63Jhe>). On taking intoxicating wines as medicine, Pliny said, "Moreover, how uncertain the result, whether in drinking there may be aid or poison" (Brumbelow, 166 from Pliny, *Natural History*, c. AD 70).

Was the water at Ephesus so bad that Paul tells Timothy to drink alcoholic wine? Bro. Edwards affirms that it was. However, Timothy drank only water (this is the force of the grammatical construction of the phrase, "drink no longer water")! Paul had to instruct him to take a little wine for his stomach's sake. If the water at Ephesus was as bad as Edwards claims, Timothy would have been sick continually and unable to accomplish his missionary work. Not only would Timothy be sick continually, but everybody in Ephesus (population estimated at about 175,000-200,000) would have been sick continuously as well. Archeological evidence shows that the city of Ephesus had an elaborate and sophisticated water system. This system provided water for many different reasons: for commerce, medicine, religion, daily living, and waste removal. The city of Ephesus had civic laws that protected the water system. The people of Ephesus had potable water (suitable for drinking) and unpotable water resources. For a complete detailed analysis of the water system at Ephesus, I would refer the reader to Cecelia Feldman Weiss' doctoral dissertation titled, "Living Fluidly: Uses and Meanings of Water in Asia Minor (Second Century BCE—Second Century CE)". Weiss did her doctoral thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in the Department of Archeology and the Ancient World at Brown University in May, 2011 (repository.library.brown.edu). A second resource is a blog written by Peter Sommer (petersommer.com) titled, *A Slice of Roman City Life Terrace House 2 at Ephesus*. Sommer reveals the use of private wells for potable water in dwellings at Ephesus. Ephesus had natural springs, wells, and cisterns that provided potable water. We must admit that we do not know the precise ailment Timothy suffered from. Therefore, to postulate that drinking an alcoholic wine to "cure" the stomach malady is not possible to prove.

Timothy's abstinence from drinking alcoholic beverages would be attributed to Paul's teaching about setting a godly example. Paul tells Timothy to be an example of the believers in word, in conversation (manner of life), in charity (love), in spirit, in faith, and in purity (I Tim. 4:12). He also tells Timothy to follow his own manner of life (II Tim. 3:10, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience" and "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus," II Tim. 1:13).

Timothy refrained from drinking alcoholic beverages because of Paul's teaching in passages like Eph. 5:18 and Gal. 5:21. Paul condemned both the process of getting drunk and the state of being drunk. Bro. Edwards states that he believes those who hold the abstinent view have confused the process of getting drunk with the state of being drunk. He openly ridicules the statement, "if you drink one drink you are one drink drunk." He states, "Some of the arguments we have made against its use (alcoholic wine-DS) are frivolous and invalid. For example, the one which says "If it takes five drinks to make you drunk, then with one, you are one-fifth drunk!" (Edwards, 148). Does Paul condemn the process of getting drunk? The answer is in Eph. 5:18. Bro. Edwards **never** mentions this passage which was taught by Paul to the Ephesians (Timothy labored at Ephesus—I Tim. 1:3). In Eph. 5:18, Paul says, "Be not drunk with wine...." The phrase is an imperative prohibition. What is Paul prohibiting? He uses the Greek word *methusko* (be drunk) and puts the negative (not) with it. *Methusko* refers to the process of getting drunk. W. E. Vine states, "*METHUSKŌ*...signifies to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in No. 1), to become intoxicated (No. 1 is the verb *methuō*-DS) (Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, I, 341) (Further lexical information may be found in Wigram's *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament*, 261 and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd Edition, 701). Consequently, we have a strong apostolic imperative against taking the first drink in the process of becoming drunk. Paul condemns the state of drunkenness in Gal. 5:21 where he lists drunkenness as a work of the flesh. Paul lists seventeen sins in this context and the state of being inebriated or drunk is one of them. The word *drunkenness* is from *methē* which means drunkenness or habitual intoxication (Vine, I, 341-342). Therefore, the apostle condemns both the process of getting drunk and the state of being drunk. Please remember, that Paul taught the same thing in every church (I Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1-2). Any precisely stated proposition that contradicts a plain passage or passages of Scripture is a false proposition. Bro. Edwards **contradicts** the apostle Paul and teaches a false view.

Since bro. Edwards affirms the moderation view, he has the obligation to define moderate drinking so that each person can know the precise moment he transitions from not sinning to sinning. This is an important consideration. How could I keep myself from sin, if I do not know when I am sinning and when I am not sinning (James 1:27)? Bro. Edwards admits that he does not know the precise line that one crosses between moderately drinking and being drunk (Edwards, 150). He states that not knowing the precise line is not justification for the abstinence view. In my experience of forty years of preaching the gospel, I have never known a moderate drinker who monitors his/her drinking so closely that they know when the next sip would cause them to sin. It is a known fact that drunkenness is relative to the person and that there are many factors that influence the degree of impairment that one may experience while under the influence of alcohol. It is also a fact that one drink of alcohol begins the effect of that

drug on the central nervous system. Alcohol is a drug that depresses the central nervous system, affecting the brain, reflexes, vision, self-restraint and sound mindedness. You cannot drink even a small amount of alcohol without experiencing some degree of these effects. The more you drink alcohol, the greater the effects on the mind and body. Paul taught that a Christian must live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). *Soberly* “denotes of sound mind...hence, self-controlled, soberminded” (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, 44). The use of alcohol is counterproductive to the development and exercise of the virtues of sound mindedness and self-control. This is one of the reasons why Paul condemns the process of getting drunk (Eph. 5:18).

Bro. Edwards introduces an analogy into his argumentation and attempts to draw a comparison between drunkenness and gluttony. He commits the **fallacy of analogy** in this line of argumentation (“**This fallacy consists, not in using an analogy, but either in (1) using a false analogy, one that is not a real resemblance, or in (2) using an analogy falsely, by assuming that when two things are similar in one way they will also be similar in another way**” (Peter Kreeft, *Socratic Logic*, 102). Edwards uses an analogy falsely. He cited Proverbs 23:21 and comments on this verse. He states, “Now, that does not mean drunkenness and gluttony are alike in every sense, but they are in the sense that both lead to “poverty” as well as the fact that each describes an excess to something” (Edwards, 149). He continues, “Now, if you accept the argument that drunkenness happens at five drinks and say that taking one drink makes you “one drink drunk,” that is, already in the state of drunkenness, then that has consequences. That is, if five pieces of chicken make you a glutton, then when you have eaten one piece, that makes you “one piece a glutton; that is, already in the state of gluttony and therefore in sin!” (Edwards, 149). He then writes, “If the first is true, there is no way of avoiding the second! What foolishness!” (Ibid.). Bro. Edwards seems to miss the point that alcohol is a drug while chicken is not a drug. Also, Paul explicitly condemns the process of getting drunk (Eph. 5:18). In addition, Paul condones the use of meats when he writes, “Forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (I Tim. 4:2-3). Bro. Edwards’ analogy fails because the two substances, alcohol and chicken, are not intrinsically similar. The effects of drinking one and eating the other are vastly different. Paul approves eating meats and forbids the drinking of alcohol.

Bro. Edwards believes that Paul condemns the abuse and not the use of wine by deacons in I Tim. 3:8. He affirms the moderation view in this passage (Edwards, 150-151). I could not improve on the analysis of these passages given by Dave Miller on the Apologetics Press web site: www.apologeticspress.org. The article is *Elders, Deacons, Timothy, and Wine*. Bro. Miller refutes Edwards’ arguments. The reader is encouraged to read this article. Please consider the remarks of Guy N. Woods on I Tim. 3:8, “Obviously, any man, elder, deacon, preacher, Bible school teacher, or other person in the church cannot set the proper example of Christian living who engages in the use, in any degree, of that which has been the occasion of so much sorrow, grief, and ruin in the world. Temperance in the use of harmful things, is *total* abstinence. There is no such thing as a proper moderate use of drugs, alcohol, and other harmful substances” (“Elders and Deacons in the Church” *Adult Gospel Quarterly* 83 (9 October 1977): 30-31 (quoted by W. D. Jeffcoat, *The Bible and Social Drinking*, 74).

Bro. Edwards is ensnared in **logical self-contradiction**. His opinion about abstaining from social drinking contradicts his studied conclusion (the moderation view) drawn from Scripture (as he understands it). Edwards states that he restudied the issue of drinking alcohol several years ago (Edwards, 152). He states that he does not participate in social drinking and advises others to avoid it (Edwards, 153). Then, he writes, "However, wishing to be perfectly candid, I would not tell a Christian who decides to go against my advice and drink small amounts of alcohol, maybe in his own home, that he has sinned with the first drink, though I would tell him he runs a greater risk of sinning" (Edwards, 153). Several observations can be made concerning this statement. First, Paul condemns the process of getting drunk in Eph. 5:18. Bro. Edwards contradicts Paul. Second, Edwards admits that you cannot tell when a person crosses the line from moderate drinking to drunkenness (Edwards, 150). Third, Edwards condones the use of an addictive and dangerous drug for recreational use. Fourth, his advice contradicts his studied view of what the Scriptures teach. This means that his conscience is not guided by the Scriptures. Bro. Edwards asks people to abstain from drinking alcohol based upon his own opinion while his Scriptural view is that the moderation view is the correct Scriptural position. We are bound by God's Word and not human opinion (Matt. 15:9, Col. 3:17). Fifth, how could Edwards restrict the location of drinking *a little* to the home? If his Scriptural interpretation is correct, then, any person can drink "a little" in any acceptable location like a bar, a restaurant, a social gathering of friends to watch a sports event, even a church social gathering, or a college campus, etc. His opinion would not carry the necessary authority to prevent it when his studied Scriptural conclusion supports it.

Bro. Edwards makes the following comment, "One more thing regarding young people: I suppose more have left the Lord because of our ill-advised efforts to force the Bible to say that "one drink makes you one drink drunk," than have ever left him (sic) because of drinking alcohol! Our young people are not foolish! They catch on when we play "fast and loose" with the Bible" (Edwards, 154). Several observations can be made in response to this statement. First, Edwards states this as his own opinion without giving any factual statistics to prove it. Thus, this statement is an unproven opinion that does not prove his case. Second, Paul condemns the process of getting drunk (Eph. 5:18) and the state of drunkenness (Gal. 5:21). Earl Edwards condones the *process* of getting drunk by upholding the moderation view. This puts him in conflict with Paul. Third, the statement is an indictment against every faithful gospel preacher who upholds the abstinence view on Scriptural grounds. Young people must be taught sound doctrine and remain faithful to God's Word. This is exactly what Paul told Timothy to do. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself" (I Tim. 6:3-5).

One final thing needs to be addressed. Bro. Edwards admits that he was influenced in the past by the temperance movement and by Lyman Beecher with regard to his interpretation of the Scriptural passages under review. He held the abstinence view until just a few years ago because of this. Now, he knows that he has correctly interpreted I Tim. 5:23 and other passages which he claims teach the moderation view. He declares, "I would note, however, that from about 1840 to 1935 or so, our society was characterized by a lot of white-hot rhetoric

on the use of alcohol and all of us know that such rhetoric often produces more heat than light. My fear is that some of us have allowed our position on alcohol to be influenced by the rhetoric that came directly from Protestant preachers like Beecher, rather than from a calm restudy of all Bible passages on the subject. I believe I was, without realizing it, so influenced until I restudied the issues several years ago" (Edwards, 152). Bro. Edwards admits to faulty hermeneutics in the past and then projects on many of this fellow-laborers in preaching that they, too, have been involved in faulty hermeneutics. Speaking for myself, I have never used the temperance movement and Lyman Beecher as a means of interpreting I Tim. 5:23. Proper hermeneutics follows a historical-grammatical approach to interpreting the Scriptures. Gospel preachers must make every attempt to remain objective and search the Scriptures themselves to discover truth. How do we know that bro. Edwards is not being influenced now by our present culture both inside the church and outside of the church that condones the use of alcohol for social and recreational purposes? His admitted hermeneutical failure should not be projected on all of the faithful gospel preachers who studied God's word diligently to ascertain the truth.

If the reader will take the time to evaluate what bro. Edwards has taught, he/she will know that he **violates the law of rationality** in order to make his case. The law of rationality states that we must gather all of the evidence, then, reason about that evidence correctly and draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. Dear reader, you will have to evaluate whether or not bro. Edwards has done this.

A **disclaimer** is placed at the front of the lectureship book that reads, "Although the FHU Lectureship Committee does not necessarily agree with every detail of all the manuscripts in this book, it does recommend them all as challenging and thought provoking." Some observations need to be made concerning disclaimers. The governor of Judea at the time of Jesus' crucifixion was Pontius Pilate. When Jesus appeared before him in the civil trials before the crucifixion, Pilate concluded that He was an innocent man. He sought various ways to release Jesus and keep Him from death, but they all ended in vain. "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (Matt. 27:24). The symbolic act of *washing his hands* was his disclaimer. Did his "disclaimer" relieve him of the culpability of what he had just done? He sentenced an innocent man to death. This was and is a tremendous breach of justice. Whenever, brethren write disclaimers in front of their published materials it betrays the fact that they believe that some of the information is not true. Does the disclaimer relieve them of the responsibility of teaching through print the truth of God's Word? By distributing error through the lectureship book, is the lectureship committee responsible/complicit in the spread of false doctrine? (II John 9-11)? How much error can be printed in a lectureship book before we conclude that it is not acceptable? The whole tenor of the books written by the apostle Paul to Timothy is against false doctrine and affirms that only sound doctrine saves the soul and secures the purity of the church of Christ.