

Wine in the Pastoral Epistles: An Exegetical Consideration

ANDRIAFALIHERRY Rambeloson Herinosa

Adventist University of Africa, School of Postgraduate Studies, Central Malagasy Conference – P.O. Box: 670 Antananarivo – Madagascar.

*Corresponding Author: ANDRIAFALIHERRY Rambeloson Herinosa

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Citation: Andriafaliherry Rambeloson Herinosa. (2026). Wine in the Pastoral Epistles: An Exegetical Consideration. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(7), 105-117.	<i>In this work, the topic of wine in the Pastoral Epistles is explored by means of exegetical and theological interpretation of the major New Testament passages devoted to this issue. In particular, the present research is aimed at establishing how wine mentioned in 1 Timothy and Titus contributes to the ethical, pastoral, and theological teaching of the early Christian church. Wine was one of the most common elements of everyday life in the Greco-Roman world and had social as well as medicinal importance; however, throughout the Pastoral Epistles, the themes of moderation, self-control, and spirituality predominate over total prohibition or unlimited use of this product. In this paper, the inconsistency between the passages warning the church members against drunkenness and/or addiction to wine and the recommendations of St. Paul for Timothy to drink a little bit of wine for the sake of his health is analyzed.</i> <i>These findings show that Paul's anxiety about wine in this case is pastoral and moral but not ceremonial or ascetic in nature. This law is aimed at fighting against drinking, addiction, and behavior that makes Christians look like hypocrites in front of others, and also permits the use of wine in a proper way. The church leaders especially are required to practice discipline because their conduct has a direct effect on the spiritual life of the church members. Therefore, this research finds out that the Bible's teachings concerning wine in the Pastoral Epistles emphasize temperance and responsible usage of resources.</i> Keywords: Pastoral Epistles, Wine, Exegesis, 1 Timothy, Titus, Christian Ethics, Church Leadership, Temperance, Pastoral Theology.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Finding the main concerns expressed in the Pastoral Epistles about the use of wine is a basic first step in this study. When these books refer to wine, what theological or ethical messages do they hope to convey? This naturally inspires more research: What relationship exists between wine intake and the moral and spiritual standards for church leaders, that is, Elders and Deacons? On the surface, one could think that this issue should not be a concern, or if addressed at all, it would promote total abstinence. Still, the

Pastoral Epistles bring some subtlety. Paul's advice to Timothy to "take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments,"¹ for example, complicates any strict posture toward total abstinence. Deeper exegetical and theological inquiry is deserved by this conflict between caution, moderation, and health-based use.

Background to the study

Wine's role in early Christian society, that is, as encountered in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy,

¹ 1 Timothy 5 :23.

and Titus), is a thorny theological and socio-cultural question that has occasioned scholarly debate as well as ecclesiastical exposition. Wine was never merely a beverage but was part of the standard diet of Greco-Roman civilization with symbolic, medicinal, and social purposes. Its application in Christian literature is therefore twofold, used metaphorically, medically (see 1 Timothy 5:23), and problematically on occasion, to do with church leadership and moral conduct.

Academics have long analyzed Pauline encouragements to church leaders, such as the qualifications of bishops and deacons to be “not given to much wine” (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7). These readings are interpretatively challenging, particularly when viewed in light of church history temperance movements, modern theological ethics, and societal shifts in the consumption of alcohol. The substance of early interpretations emphasized moderation, whereas others later interpreted these readings as absolute abstinence, more influenced by socio-political forces than by hermeneutical depth.

Despite the enormous scholarship on Pauline theology. There is a gap in exegetical literature that addresses wine within the larger pastoral concerns of these epistles. Particularly, how Paul's counsel presents the socio-religious environment of the time, pastoral care ethics, and the administration of the early church. Most researchers also tend to separate these verses rather than examining them against the literary and theological backgrounds of the entire epistles.

Accordingly, this research aims to offer an integral exegetical analysis of the wine references in the Pastoral Epistles, integrating historical, linguistic, and theological dimensions, and examine their meanings for the original audience and contemporary Christian communities. It will overcome the hermeneutic contradictions and contextual misperceptions that have led to disparate doctrinal positions within Christianity.

Statement of the Problem

The interpretation of wine references in the Pastoral Epistles presents a significant hermeneutical and theological challenge. Contrarily, passages like 1 Timothy 5:23, which states, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments,” imply that moderate medicinal use is acceptable. In contrast, Paul expands on this warning against alcoholism directed toward bishops by saying, “Deacons likewise must be... not addicted to much wine.”² This raises

the issue: Is Paul establishing a double standard here, with deacons being exhorted to exercise moderation and bishops (elders, pastors) to abstain, which have been variably interpreted as advocating moderation or total abstinence? The problem lies in the lack of consistent exegetical understanding across both ecclesiastical traditions and scholarly literature. Interpretations are often shaped more by cultural attitudes or denominational ethics than by close textual and contextual analysis. Furthermore, many existing works on Pauline ethics or church leadership do not address the theological significance of wine references in light of Greco-Roman medical practices, communal norms, or early church life. This gap in understanding leads to conflicting views among theologians, pastors, and lay readers.

This research aims to clarify the role and meaning of wine in the Pastoral Epistles through a detailed exegetical study, thereby offering a clearer framework for interpreting these scriptures. By addressing this gap, the study seeks to answer the “so what?” question, why these passages matter for Christian ethics, church practice, and biblical interpretation today. The research will also indicate why examining such textual nuances is crucial for both historical theology and contemporary application.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive exegetical investigation into the references to wine in the Pastoral Epistles, to offer an accurate and contextually grounded interpretation. Given the multifaceted nature of the issue, including historical, theological, ethical, and pastoral dimensions, this research pursues several interrelated objectives. Chief among them is a critical analysis of the relevant scriptural passages (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:3; 5:23; Titus 1:7) in their literary, cultural, and doctrinal contexts. By addressing longstanding interpretive ambiguities, the study aims to fill significant gaps in biblical scholarship that have contributed to doctrinal misunderstandings and practical misapplications within Christian communities. Ultimately, it seeks to clarify how a proper understanding of these texts can inform responsible Christian conduct and leadership, and prevent further ethical and ecclesial deterioration in both attitude and service to the Lord.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to clarify one of the most debated and often misunderstood issues within Pauline literature, namely, the references to wine in the Pastoral Epistles. By addressing the exegetical and theological tensions surrounding these texts, the research

² (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; Titus 2:3)

provides critical insight for Christians seeking a biblically sound understanding of moderation, health, and leadership ethics. This is particularly relevant to denominations such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, where abstinence from alcohol is a core lifestyle principle. Furthermore, the study contributes meaningfully to academic discourse by filling a notable gap in scholarly engagement with the socio-cultural and doctrinal implications of these passages. In doing so, it equips both scholars and faith communities with a deeper and more historically informed approach to Scripture.

Delimitation of the Study

This research is delimited to a textual and theological analysis of the references to wine within the Pastoral Epistles, focusing strictly on their original historical, linguistic, and cultural context. It does not extend to empirical investigation or the use of contemporary sample groups; rather, it employs a qualitative approach grounded in exegetical and theological literature. The scope is confined to scriptural passages relevant to wine, particularly within the framework of pastoral theology, avoiding broader discussions on alcohol in the entire canon. Special attention is given to key Greek terms such as *paroinos* (given to wine) and *oinos* (wine), and to thematic issues including medicinal use (e.g., 1 Tim 5:23), self-control, abstinence, and ecclesiastical order as they relate to qualifications for church leadership. This focused delimitation ensures depth of analysis within a clearly defined theological and hermeneutical framework.

Methodology and Procedure

Biblical theology and pertinent background information are both included in this paper. In the manner in which the study's exegetical research is conducted, the technique is reflected. Following the introduction, the second chapter

will consist of a literature study based on several readings of pastoral epistles. Studying the context of the study is the emphasis of the third chapter. The passage's meaning or exegetical study is discussed in the fourth chapter. The theological implications are the focus of chapter five. The study ends with the last chapter.

Definition of terms

Different terms used in this study may be defined as follows:

Pastoral Epistles: “The term Pastoral Epistles refers collectively to three New Testament letters, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, which are addressed to individuals rather than churches. These letters focus primarily on church leadership, doctrine, personal conduct, and ecclesiastical order. They are called ‘pastoral’ because they provide practical guidance for the pastoral care and governance of Christian communities.”³

Wine: The term “wine” was defined as “The juice of the grape” in Benjamin Marin's 1748 publication of *Lingua Britannica Reformata*, also known as *A New English Dictionary*. Secondly, a spirit made from fruits other than grapes. Thirdly, the intoxicating aroma of wine it clouds his judgment. What makes this context unique is that the word “wine” was originally meant to mean “the juice of the grape,” completely omitting any reference to fermentation.⁴

Abstinence: In theological discourse, abstinence refers to the complete avoidance of alcohol, often adopted as a moral or spiritual discipline. Although not commanded in Scripture, it became a norm in many Christian traditions influenced by later temperance movements.⁵

Not Given to Wine (Paroinos): The Greek term *paroinos* (πάροινος), used in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7, literally means “beside wine” or “addicted to wine,” implying habitual drunkenness or lack of control around alcohol. It denotes a disqualifier for church leaders.⁶

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW ON UNDERSTANDING

Wine in the Pastoral Epistles has been a source of debate for a long time. Different scholars have interpreted the

Pastoral Epistles from various perspectives regarding wine, with interpretations ranging from permissive to prohibitionist. They emphasized how to use it, and some

³ Gerald W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 13.

⁴ Charles Wesley Ewing, *The Bible and Its Wines* (Denver, 1985), 2.

⁵ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1989), 85.

⁶ S. O. Ademiluka, “Paul’s Teaching on the Use of Alcohol and Its Implications for the Church in Nigeria,” *In die Skriflig* 54, no. 1 (2020): 6.

pointed out its symbolism, especially its implications for pastoral leadership. It is very crucial to focus on these views, to explain the exegetical part for considering culture, medical care, and other considerations, such as ecclesiastical or theological, to understand this research well.

Greco-Roman humoral theory

Paul's instruction to Timothy, in 1 Timothy 5:23, is to “use a little wine for your stomach,” has been interpreted as a medical recommendation rather than an authorization of habitual drinking. Hutson interprets that Paul's instruction is rooted in Greco-Roman humoral theory, where wine was medicinal and appropriate in moderation. Furthermore, he argues that wine usage was part of youth identity and health discourse in antiquity, a fact overlooked in many doctrinal readings. By extension in 1 Timothy 3:8, “Not addicted to much wine” does not command abstinence but aligns with broader Greco-Roman and philosophical ideals of temperance.⁷

Ethical and behavioral

Both 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 emphasize sobriety for church leaders. William Fisher evaluates this within the framework of pastoral care, suggesting that these restrictions were not necessarily prohibitionist, but indicators of self-control and moral credibility.⁸ Kelly considers “not given too much wine” to reflect a concern for sobriety and reputation, not total abstinence. In context, drinking wine was culturally acceptable, but intemperance would dishonor a leader.⁹ Collins emphasizes the ethical tone. It means that the leaders must embody moderation. The Greek term “addicted to too much wine” suggests habitual drunkenness, not social consumption.¹⁰

Cultural-Ecclesial

Philip Towner interprets the passage as regulating social behavior consistent with Roman household codes. Moderation in wine aligns with maintaining order and reputation.¹¹

⁷ C. R. Hutson, “‘A Little Wine’: 1 Timothy 5:23 and Greco-Roman Youth,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 45, no. 3–4 (2013): 79–98.

⁸ W. K. Fisher, *Milligan University Thesis* (Master's thesis, Milligan University, 2023).

⁹ J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 80–82.

¹⁰ R.F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 152–154.

¹¹ Philip H. Towner and I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 267–270.

¹² Donald J. Robertson, *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor: The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2019), 80–82.

Philosophical culture

Concerning the philosophical interpretation of wine use in the Pastoral Epistles, Stoic and Cynic interpreters in parallel views. For Stoics, wine was not evil but required moderation. As 1 Timothy 3:8 mentions that deacons must be self-governed, not abstainers. Furthermore, 1 Timothy 5:23 is practical advice. It means that wine is medical and balanced, not indulgent.¹² For Cynics, the rejection of wine is implicitly challenged in 1 Tim 5:23. R.D. Finn contrasts Cynic asceticism with Stoic ethics; Timothy's view aligns with Stoic control rather than Cynic extremism.¹³

The Moderationist View

Kenneth L. Gentry,¹⁴ G. I. Williamson,¹⁵ and Norman L. Geisler¹⁶ defended the moderationist view. This view maintains that despite the fact Scripture condemns the immoderate use or abuse of alcoholic beverages, it does approve of their moderate use. The core principle of moderationism is that fermented wine is mainly addressed in the Bible, and that it is a gift from God that ought to be enjoyed in moderation. As we'll see, new research challenges the “one win” idea by showing that the Hebrew and Greek words for “wine” (yayin and oinos) can refer to either fermented or unfermented grape juice, depending on context.¹⁷

The Abstentionist View

After seeing the weaknesses in the moderate position, many conservative Christians have come to support what we will refer to as the “abstentionist view.” According to this school of thought, Christians should avoid alcohol altogether due to the numerous negative social and health effects it has on society, even though God did not forbid moderate drinking in biblical times.¹⁸ There is a slightly different basis for the abstentionist view held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It maintains that God did not sanction but only allowed drunkenness. Scriptures that mention alcohol consumption might lead some to believe that God condones it, according to the recently published book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...* However, the

¹³ R.D. Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 58–59.

¹⁴ Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages* (Grand Rapids, 1986).

¹⁵ G. I. Williamson, *Wine in the Bible and the Church* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1976).

¹⁶ Norman L. Geisler, “A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1982): 46–55.

¹⁷ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001), 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 34.

Bible also shows that God's people engaged in societal behaviors that God most certainly did not approve of. It is helpful to remember that God does not always approve of everything that He permits when interpreting such passages of Scripture.¹⁹

The Prohibitionist View

Why does the Bible seem to contradict itself when it comes to wine? Prohibitionists say it is because the Greek and Hebrew words for wine, *oinos* and *yayin*, can mean both fermented wine and unfermented grape juice. Therefore, all

"wine" that God blesses is plain old unfermented grape juice, while the "wine" that He frowns upon is sweet and alcoholic. This school of thought holds that the Bible forbids the consumption of alcoholic drinks because they are unhealthy for humans. In addition to being bad for our health, eating them violates a biblical principle that is supposed to keep us holy and blameless.²⁰ Ellen G. White held a strong prohibitionist view. She maintained that whenever Scripture speaks positively of wine, it refers to unfermented grape juice. In contrast, references to wine in a negative context indicate fermented, intoxicating drink.²¹

CHAPTER III

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

General Background of Pastoral Epistles

Gordon Fee defines the Pastoral Epistles as referring to three letters in the New Testament traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. These epistles are referred to as "pastoral" because they were written to Timothy and Titus, two individuals with pastoral duties in charge of local churches. These letters focus on church leadership, sound doctrine, moral behavior, and pastoral care, offering instruction on how to shepherd congregations and uphold Christian conduct in the community.²²

Historical Context

Authorship:

The authorship of the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) has been a subject of scholarly debate. While traditional attribution is often attributed to the Apostle Paul, critical scholarship, especially post-19th-century German criticism (for instance, Baur, Holtzmann), tends to consider them pseudepigraphal, composed in Paul's name by a later disciple. Internal arguments include vocabulary differences and a unique ecclesiastical structure not found in undisputed Pauline letters. Others defend authenticity based on early canonical inclusion and thematic continuity with Pauline theology.²³

Date:

In the traditional view, which attributes authorship to Paul, 1 Timothy and Titus are believed to have been written after Paul's first Roman imprisonment, around AD 63–65. Many consider 2 Timothy to be Paul's last letter. It was likely written while the Romans incarcerated him again, just before he died, sometime between 66 and 67 AD. Conversely, the critical view, which rejects Pauline authorship, dates these epistles to a later period, around AD 80–100. Proponents of this perspective argue that the differences in vocabulary, church structure, and theological development point to a pseudonymous composition by a later author writing in Paul's name.²⁴

¹⁹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of the 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D.C.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 1988), p. 282.

²⁰ Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible*, 37.

²¹ Ellen G. White, *Temperance* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1949), 65.

²² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 102.

²³ Brett M. Graham, *Echoes of Scripture and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha in the Pastoral Epistles* (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2018), 10–13.

²⁴ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 554–558.

Provenance:

The provenance of the epistle pastoral: 1 Timothy, likely written from Macedonia, after Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment. Titus was possibly written from Nicopolis, where Paul planned to spend the winter (Titus 3:12). Moreover, 2 Timothy was written from Rome, during Paul's second imprisonment, shortly before his martyrdom.²⁵

Destination:

Each epistle is addressed to individual coworkers of Paul. The epistles 1 and 2 are written to Timothy, who is a resident of Ephesus. Titus is addressed to Titus, stationed in Crete (Titus 1:5). Their destinations likely served as model communities for structuring ecclesial life.²⁶

Purpose:

One of the primary purposes of the Pastoral Epistles is to combat false teaching. Paul warns Timothy and Titus about the spread of heretical doctrines and urges them to uphold sound instruction (1 Tim 1:3–7; Titus 1:10–11). Another key aim is to provide guidance for church leadership. Paul outlines the qualifications for elders and deacons to promote proper order and integrity within the church (1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). Additionally, the letters emphasize godly living and sound doctrine, highlighting the importance of ethical conduct, doctrinal purity, and spiritual discipline for both leaders and members (Titus 2:1–15). Finally, Paul writes to offer personal encouragement and pastoral counsel, especially in 2 Timothy, where he exhorts Timothy to remain faithful in ministry, endure hardship, and fulfill his calling (2 Tim 4:18).²⁷

Literary Context

Genre:

The Pastoral Epistles are best understood as paraenetic letters, intended to exhort and instruct their recipients. They incorporate a variety of literary features, blending epistolary elements such as greetings and closings with ecclesial instructions, including detailed qualifications for church leaders, and theological polemics aimed at countering heretical teachings. In addition to their pastoral and doctrinal concerns, some scholars argue that these epistles also bear resemblance to mandate letters, official instructions given to delegates, or to testamentary literature, reflecting the tone of Hellenistic moral exhortation often

used by aged teachers passing on wisdom to successors. This multi-genre composition highlights the unique role the Pastoral Epistles play in shaping both the structure and ethics of the early church.²⁸

Structure or limits of the Passage:

1 Timothy: Focuses on church order, leadership ethics, and instruction (6 chapters).

Opening greeting (1:1–2)

Warning against false doctrine (1:3–20)

Paul's charge to Timothy (1:3–11)

Paul's testimony and encouragement (1:12–17)

The charge re-emphasized (1:18–20)

Instructions on worship and order (2:1–3:16)

Public worship and prayer (2:1–15)

Qualifications for overseers and deacons (3:1–13)

The mystery of godliness (3:14–16)

Warnings and instructions for ministry (4:1–6:2)

Apostasy and true godliness (4:1–10)

Duties of Timothy (4:11–16)

Instructions about various groups (5:1–6:2)

Final warnings and exhortations (6:3–21)

Dangers of false teachers and wealth (6:3–10)

A charge to Timothy (6:11–21)

2 Timothy: A more personal exhortation framed as Paul's "farewell" (4 chapters).

Opening greeting (1:1–2)

Thanksgiving and exhortation to faithfulness (1:3–18)

Paul's gratitude and reminder of Timothy's calling (1:3–7)

Encouragement to suffer for the gospel (1:8–18)

Call to perseverance and endurance (2:1–26)

Be strong in grace and teach others (2:1–13)

Avoid quarrels and pursue righteousness (2:14–26)

Warnings of difficult times (3:1–17)

Characteristics of the last days (3:1–9)

²⁵ Ibid, 555.

²⁶ Graham, *Pastoral Epistles*, 11, 12.

²⁷ Carson, *an Introduction*, 552, 553.

²⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 55–58.

Timothy's example and the value of Scripture (3:10–17)

Final charge and personal remarks (4:1–22)

Preach the word (4:1–8)

Final personal requests and farewell (4:9–22)

Titus: Concise directives on leadership and sound doctrine (3 chapters).

Greeting and salutation (Titus 1:1–4)

Church leadership: appointing elders (Titus 1:5–9)

Rebuking false teachers (Titus 1:10–16)

Instructions for Godly living (Titus 2:1–15)

Christian conduct in society (Titus 3:1–11)

Personal instructions and final greetings (Titus 3:12–15)

Wine

Wine is *oinos* in Greek, whether new or fermented. Some argue that Paul is referring to grape juice, not fermented wine, because if he were to say otherwise, it would go against his general teachings about intoxicating drink in the Bible (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29–32; John 2:9) and his statement against defiling the body (1 Corinthians 6:19; 10:31). In this passage, some argue, Paul allows for the moderate use of common wine. They state that if he were referring to grape juice, he wouldn't have to caution the deacons against consuming “much” of it and would have no right to prohibit the elders from consuming any of it. The passage is admittedly difficult. See on Deut. 14:26; cf. on 1 Tim. 5:23.²⁹

Not addicted to wine:

Nichol asserts that “not addicted to wine “or not given to wine” is the same meaning as “not a drunkard.” The elders were not to give any ground for the charge that they were drunkards or pleasure seekers (cf. on verse 8; chapter 5:23). They, above all others in the church, were to be models of sobriety.³⁰

Sober:

Sober means “self-restrained,” “discreet”; the same Greek as in Tit 2:2, “temperate.” H. E. Jacobs states that:

²⁹ Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 299.

³⁰ Ibid, 298.

“In the Pastoral Epistles, this virtue is especially commended to certain classes. Because of extravagances characterizing particular periods of life that had to be guarded against, namely to aged men. With reference to the querulousness of old age (Tit 2:2); to young men. With reference to their sanguine views of life, and their tendency to disregard consequences (Tit 2:6); enjoined upon young women, with reference to extravagance in dress and speech (Tit 2:5; 1 Tim 2:9); and, in a similar manner, commended to ministers, because of the importance of their judgment and conduct, as teachers and exemplars (1 Tim 3:2).”³¹

Much wine:

We argue that “not addicted to much wine” cannot refer to moderate alcohol use because it contradicts Paul's abstinence requirement for bishops. What is the meaning of this phrase? First, realize that this phrase refers to one of the four requirements for deacon candidates. The phrase “addicted to much wine” excludes individuals who are known to be excessively reliant on alcohol, rather than establishing a general principle about moderate wine consumption. According to Albert Barnes, deacons should not drink as much as bishops, but those who are heavily involved in alcohol consumption should not be deacons.³² Barnes states that this qualification was universally considered essential for religious ministers. Heathen priests entering temples did not drink wine. Wine and strong drinks were strictly prohibited for Jewish ministers of all ranks before serving God (Lev 10:9). Why is it more appropriate for Christian ministers to drink wine than Jewish or heathen priests? Should gospel ministers be less holy than others? Will he lose sight of the purity of his vocation?³³

Little wine:

The fact that 1 Timothy 5:23 refers to “little wine” is another crucial piece of evidence that can lead us to the meaning of “much wine.” The word “wine” appears only once more in the second of these instances in 1 Timothy. Two things have emerged from our examination of this passage: The wine that Paul advised Timothy to drink was likely unfermented grape juice, since (1) he was advising him to do so for medicinal purposes and (2) some pagan writers had made remarks about the medicinal use of wine and Paul had warned him to abstain. In keeping with his

³¹ H. E. Jacobs, “Sober, Sobriety, Soberness,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr et al. (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2820.

³² Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (New York, 1873), p. 144.

³³ Ibid,

previous advice to Timothy to abstain from wine for medical reasons, Paul could scarcely have encouraged deacons to drink moderately for pleasure if he had approved of Timothy's abstinence. Such limited "little" and conditional "for the sake of your stomach" advice would not have been given by Paul to Timothy if he truly thought that moderate alcohol consumption was appropriate for Christians. Given these facts, it is likely that the phrase "not addicted to much wine" is just a way of saying that someone isn't addicted to drinking wine.³⁴

Background of the Studies

Some English translations, like ESV and LEB, put 1 Tim 5:23 in parentheses because it seems to interrupt Paul's main point in 1 Tim 5:17–25. Paul tells Timothy to "use a little wine" and not "drink only water." Wine was the traditional beverage in the ancient Mediterranean, so this instruction seems odd. Baugh suggests Timothy avoided Ephesus wine because "The wine produced there was notoriously bad."³⁵ Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* covered first-century wines. The idea that Timothy's preference for water was religious asceticism is questionable if Baugh is right. This verse's anti-gnostic polemic interpretation by Dibelius and Conzelmann is also unlikely.³⁶

Paul appears to advise Timothy about his health. Nevertheless, fitting the verse into the context always raises the issue of religious abstinence. Towner cites ancient parallels linking water drinking to asceticism. Three possible reasons for Timothy's abstinence are the false teachers' asceticism (1 Tim 4:3), the warnings about drunkenness (1 Tim 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7), and his concern for purity (1 Tim 5:22). It makes sense to read this advice as an explanation for Paul's 1 Tim 5:22 command to "keep yourself pure".³⁷ The second half of 1 Tim 5:23 emphasizes the health benefits of small amounts of wine. Many ancient physicians prescribed wine for digestive issues. Paul's reference to Timothy's "frequent weaknesses" is too vague to determine his health issues, but wine may have been an effective remedy.³⁸

³⁴ Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible*, 215, 216.

³⁵ S. M. Baugh, "The Fall of the House of Widows: The Structure of 1 Timothy 5," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 2 (2002): 469.

³⁶ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia, A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 80–81.

At the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, our Lord miraculously provided the wine (John 2:1–11). Judah 35 forbade the use of wine by the Rechabite people. For the duration of their vow, the Nazarites were to refrain from using it as well (Num. 6:1–4). Those who were set apart as Nazarites at birth were commanded to do so forever (Judg. 13:4, 5; Luke 1:15; 7:33). Even the priests were forbade from partaking in wine and other strong drinks while performing rituals (Leviticus 10:1, 9–11). Since Muslims are forbidden to drink it and adherents of other faiths avoid it as much as possible, wine has fallen out of favor in the East. It is customary to dilute it with water before consumption, and this practice persisted even during the time of Christ. People in hot climates are generally quite sober; in fact, it is almost impossible to spot an intoxicated individual," (Geikie's *Life of Christ*). More than seventy times in the Bible, either metaphorically or literally, the sin of drunkenness is mentioned, so it must have been common in ancient times.

The daily sacrifice, the first-fruits offering, and other sacrifices all included a drink-offering of wine (Exodus 29:40, 41; Leviticus 23:13; Numbers 15:5, 7, 10). During the Passover celebration, wine was used. At the institution of the Lord's Supper, our Lord designated the unleavened bread and wine that were present at the paschal table as symbols of his body and blood.³⁹

Visitation at home:

The church deacon was responsible for providing assistance to those in need and collecting offerings from home to home. The church leader may assign a deacon to frequently visit homes on official assignment. Paul defined the four qualifications for deacons as qualities necessary for their unique ministry in homes (1 Tim 3:8).

The deacon's first quality, "serious," reflects the sacredness of his office. The second principle is to avoid double-tonguedness during home visits, as deacons should not tell different stories to different members to please everyone. He was to maintain the truth. The third deacon is not wine-addicted, as they are typically offered unfermented wine when visiting members' homes. The fourth tenet is "not

³⁷ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 376.

³⁸ Douglas Mungum and E. Tod Twist, *1 Timothy*, ed. Douglas Mungum and Derek R. Brown, Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 1 Tim. 5:23.

³⁹ M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 693.

greedy for gain,” as deacons collected and distributed offerings from home to home for the needy. A deacon must possess these qualities to hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience.⁴⁰

Christians who were taught by Paul to abstain from alcohol would offer unfermented grape juice to deacons when he visited their homes. This could be fresh, boiled, diluted with water or prepared with raisins. In those days, and still today, welcoming guests with a drink was customary.

According to cultural norms, Paul advised deacons to drink moderate amounts of grape juice when visiting members to maintain their reputation and the church's image. A deacon who drank multiple cups of grape juice upon visiting homes became known for his gluttony. In this view, Paul's advice is consistent and positive. Christians, particularly church leaders, were advised to avoid fermented wine. Deacons, frequently visiting church members at home, were expected to use unfermented wine moderately to maintain their reputation and the church's.⁴¹

CHAPTER IV

THE MEANING OF PASSAGE AND EXEGETICAL STUDIES

Exegetical Studies

In this section, we are going to focus on the grammatical analysis of *νηφάλιον, πάροινον, προσέχοντας, οἶνον, δεδουλωμένας*. After is the syntactical analysis.

Grammatical/Syntactical Analysis

Analyze the Grammar

To begin the exploration of exegetical studies, it is essential to lay a solid foundation through grammatical analysis. At the heart of this process is the morphological parsing of key Greek terms that are directly relevant to the research questions. This grammatical groundwork is crucial for accurately interpreting the text and for achieving the broader objectives of this study. The parsing results presented in this section have been carefully derived using Bible Works 10.⁴²

νηφάλιον: adjective normal accusative masculine singular no degree from *νηφάλιος*: The range of meaning is strictly holding no wine, without wine; of persons sober, temperate, abstinent.

πάροινον: adjective normal accusative masculine singular no degree from *πάροινος*. The range of meaning is addicted to wine, drunken, of one who tends to be quarrelsome as he habitually drinks too much; substantively, a drunkard.

προσέχοντας: verb participle present active accusative masculine plural from *προσέχω*. The range of meaning is firstly active, as turning or holding one's mind to someone or something. (a) With the dative of person, give heed to, pay attention to (Acts 8.10). (b) With the dative of the thing, give or pay close attention to (Acts 8.6). (c) as a warning when followed by *ἀπό* (from, of), *μή* (not) plus an

infinitive, or *μήποτε* (lest): watch out for, beware (of), be on guard (against), take care (not to) (Mat. 6.1; 7.15; Luke 21.34). (d) As occupying one's mind with something, devote oneself to, attend to (1 Tim 4.13); of wine be addicted to (1Tim 3.8); (2) middle cling to; figuratively continue to believe (1Tim 6.3) firmly.

οἶνον: noun dative masculine singular common from *οἶνος*. The range of meaning is (1) literally, of the juice of grapes, usually fermented (Luke 1.15); (2) figuratively, in apocalyptic symbolism; (a) as indicating the wrath of God outpoured in judgment (Rev 14.10); (b) as an enticement to immorality, like a love potion (Rev 17.2).

ὀλίγω: adjective normal dative masculine singular no degree from *ὀλίγος*. The meaning of range is: (1) of the number or size of a group, few, small (Mat 15.34), opposite *πολλοί* (many). Substantively *ὀλίγοι* few people (Mat 7.14); *ὀλίγα* few things (Rev 2.14). (2) Of quantity little, small (Luke 7.47a), opposite *πολύ* (much); substantively *τὸ ὀλίγον* small amount (2Cor 8.15). (3) Of degree little, mild, slight (Acts 12.18), opposite *μέγας* (great). (4) Of time duration short (Rev 12.12). (5) Neuter as an adverb *ὀλίγον*. (a) Of a little distance (way), a short distance (Mar 1.19). (b) Of time a little while, for a short time (Mark 6.31); (c) of degree a little (bit), to a small extent (Luke 7.47b); (d) with prepositions: *ἐν ὀλίγω* of quantity in brief, briefly, soon, quickly (Acts 26.28); *πρὸς ὀλίγον* of time for a short time (Jam 4.14); of degree for a little (bit) (1Tim 4.8).

δεδουλωμένας: verb participle perfect passive accusative feminine plural from *δουλόω*. Enslave, make someone a slave (Acts 7.6), gain control over someone figuratively, passively (be enslaved, be subject to, Galatians 4.30), and verbally (be under obligation, be bound to, 1 Corinthians 7.15), as the object of one who gives up personal rights for

⁴⁰ Ibid, 218.

⁴¹ Ibid, 219.

⁴² “Wine in Pastoral Epistle”, *Bible Works* (Norfolk, V.A: service@Bibleworks.com, 1992-2002).

the sake of others, makes oneself a slave, submits oneself to (1 Corinthians 9.19).

Syntactical Analysis

The verse exhibits a coordinated adjectival structure in the accusative plural masculine, modifying the implied object “deacons” (διάκονοι), governed by the continuation of the infinitive εἶναι (“to be”) from verse 2. Paul constructs a balanced list of qualifications, primarily using both adjectives and participial phrases, to outline the moral and ethical expectations for deacons. These attributes are presented in both negative prohibitions and positive affirmations, closely paralleling the format employed for overseers in verse 2. The syntax reinforces key virtues such as moral integrity, truthfulness in speech, moderation, and financial uprightness, underscoring the character essential for those serving in ecclesiastical roles.⁴³

Lexical Analysis

It is very crucial to make a study of key terms to understand the idea that the writer wants to convey.

νηφάλιον:

“The term νηφάλιον conveys more than physical sobriety. It denotes a temperate, vigilant disposition, especially relevant for church leaders who must possess clear judgment and emotional restraint. While overlapping with σώφρονα (sensible), it includes the nuance of inner spiritual discipline.”⁴⁴

πάροιον:

The term πάροιον is a near-hapax legomenon in the New Testament, occurring only in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7, both in the context of pastoral qualifications. Etymologically, it derives from παρά (para, “beside”) and οἶνος (oinos, “wine”), painting a vivid picture of someone who “lingers beside wine”—that is, a person with a habitual association with drinking, often suggestive of problematic or excessive use. Importantly, the term does not mandate total abstinence, but rather underscores the necessity of moderation, restraint, and freedom from dependency, particularly for those in positions of spiritual leadership. In

broader lexical scope, πάροιον also carries connotations of belligerence, impulsiveness, or impaired judgment that may result from intoxication, thereby marking it as a warning against both addiction and the behavioral consequences of overindulgence.⁴⁵

προσέχοντας:

This accusative Plural Masculine is used when the participle modifies a masculine noun/pronoun in the accusative plural, or when it functions as part of an accusative absolute or supplementary participial phrase. It can act as an attributive participle (modifying a noun) or as a supplementary participle (completing the meaning of verbs like “see,” “hear,” “find,” etc.).⁴⁶

οἶνον:

The dative form οἶνον reflects typical second-declension inflection patterns in Ancient Greek. As a dative, it often appears in contexts involving indirect objects, such as offerings (“to wine”), instrumental means (“with wine”), or spatial/temporal references. For example, in Homeric texts, it might describe actions performed with wine (e.g., libations) or states influenced by wine.⁴⁷

δεδουλωμένας:

The word δεδουλωμένας is the accusative plural feminine perfect passive participle of the verb δουλόω, meaning “to enslave.” It describes those who have been enslaved, emphasizing a completed action with ongoing results. The form reflects a state of bondage, either literal or metaphorical, and is commonly found in Greek literature to denote individuals subjected to servitude.⁴⁸

Synthesis

At first look, the Septuagint, an Old Testament translation used by the apostles, translates the Hebrew word for grape juice, *tirosh*, into the Intertestamental Greek word *oinos* at least thirty-three times (Ps 4:7-8, Is 65:8; Joel 1:10-12; 2:23-24). “*Oinos*” is the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew word for fresh grape juice, “*tirosh*,” found in Proverbs 3:10. A new harvest will be forthcoming from

⁴³ A. Adeyemi, *A Stylistic Analysis of Apostle Paul's First Epistle to Timothy* (2016), 42–45.

⁴⁴ P.J. King, *Qualifications of Overseers: 1 Timothy 3:1–7* (University Park, PA: CiteSeer, 2011), 35.

⁴⁵ A. L. Faught, *Quality Service from Qualified Servants* (Dallas, TX: Theological University of America, 2003), 42–43, <http://74.62.99.61:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1416/FaughtQuality.pdf>.

⁴⁶ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 263–265.

⁴⁷ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 1174.

⁴⁸ Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., revised and edited by Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 178.

your presses, according to the King James Version (Proverbs 3:10). The Hebrew word *tirosh* means “new wine,” but the Septuagint transliterates it as “*oinos*” without the adjective “new.” Ernest Gordon observes, “*Oinos* without qualification, then, can easily mean unfermented wine in the New Testament,” and this immediately proves his point.⁴⁹ *Oinos* could mean both fermented and unfermented grape juice, since the Septuagint translators used it to translate *tirosh*, the common Hebrew word, for fresh grape juice.

This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the Greek word *oinos* was used by the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *yayin*, which means freshly pressed grape juice. “No treader treads out wine [*oinos* in the Septuagint] in the presses” is translated as “*yayin*” by the Septuagint in Isaiah 16:10. Due to the substantial influence of the Septuagint language on the New Testament writers, it is logical to assume that the same two interpretations of “*oinos*,” meaning fermented or unfermented grape juice, are also present in the New Testament. Timothy usually drank water, as shown here. In modern terms, he was a “teetotaler.” Paul would not have exhorted him if he had used wine. Timothy must have been very temperate to need Paul’s permission to drink wine! Timothy was abstinent for many reasons. His mother Eunice and grandmother Lois likely influenced him. Paul’s teachings and example likely had a significant impact on the young evangelist.

In 1 Tim 3:2-3, Paul instructs Timothy to require a Christian bishop to be abstinent (*nephalion*) and a nonparticipant at drinking places and parties (*me paroinon*). The apostle would have taught Timothy about abstinence before requiring it from church leaders. The fact that Timothy is drinking only water suggests he followed his master’s advice diligently.

The abstinence of Christian ministers was likely based on legislation prohibiting priests from drinking alcohol (Lev 10:9-10). A Christian leader should be as holy as a Jewish priest, as the Jewish law requires distinguishing between the holy and the common, and teaching the people of Israel the statutes spoken to them by Moses (Lev 10:10-11). Paul’s recommendation did not violate abstinence because it recommended a small amount of wine for medical purposes, not for pleasure. To conclude, understanding Paul’s advice to Timothy to use wine for stomach issues

supports the abstinence from alcohol in the early church. Paul supported Timothy’s abstinence.

We find the apostle’s language and prudent caution particularly significant. Instead of saying “No longer drink water,” he says, “No longer drink only water.” He suggests using a small amount of wine with water, not drinking it. Instead of “for the physical pleasure of your belly,” he says, “for the medical need of your stomach.” Regular use of wine, whether fermented or unfermented, is not recommended.

Reflection

Many Christians justify drinking wine containing alcohol based on certain verses they interpret from the Bible. First, they point to qualifications for deacons found in 1 Timothy 3:8 and Titus 1:7; 2:3, which say: “not given to much wine.” Second, they refer to Paul’s advice to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23, where he says: “use a little wine.”

At first glance, without careful study of the context and without a thorough exegetical analysis, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that drinking fermented wine or alcoholic beverages is acceptable, as long as it is done in moderation. However, when examined more closely, Paul’s Pastoral Epistles should not be seen as containing contradictions. After all, it would be problematic to assume that a single inspired author is presenting conflicting teachings.

In fact, when Paul warns that “Deacons likewise must be... not addicted to much wine” (1 Timothy 3:8), this comes in the broader context of his instructions to bishops to be “blameless.” This raises an important question: Is Paul setting a double standard, urging bishops (elders or pastors) to abstain completely, while permitting deacons to drink in moderation?

What must be emphasized here is this: when performing exegetical analysis, the usage of the word wine (*οἶνος*) should be interpreted based on its contextual tone. If the reference is positive, it often implies unfermented wine (i.e., grape juice); if negative, it generally refers to fermented, alcoholic wine.

Moreover, we must not overlook the crucial role of both the immediate context, the broader literary setting, and the historical-cultural background. These factors are essential in arriving at a sound interpretation of biblical teaching regarding wine and alcohol.

⁴⁹ Ernest Gordon, *Christ, the Apostles and Wine* (Philadelphia: 1944), 14.

CHAPTER V

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Jesus and the wine

Jesus supposedly drank from the fermented wine at the Cana wedding and then made extra to share with His disciples at the Last Supper, according to some accounts. As an example, Norman L. Geisler states categorically in his article “A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking” that “it is false to say that Jesus made unfermented wine.” As an example... After sampling the wine that He had just made, the guests at the Cana wedding feast thought it was even better. Had they disliked the flavor, they would have

remained silent. John 2:9, 10 actually calls it “wine” (oinos) and “good wine” (kalon oinon). The same terms for wine that has been fermented appear elsewhere in the New Testament.⁵⁰

Communion Wine

Christ commanded the use of pure grape juice as a memorial of His atoning blood, which appropriately symbolizes His sinless sacrifice for our sins, rather than fermented wine, which in the Bible stands for human sinfulness, corruption, and God's wrath..⁵¹

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This research helps readers to understand the statement of the problem above. The previous interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:8 suggests that the phrase "not addicted to much wine" does not support a moderate consumption of alcoholic wine. Five main arguments support this verdict. To begin with, this reading would create an absurd double standard since it runs counter to Paul's command that elders (both male and female) refrain from sexual activity. Secondly, just because something is illegal in one context does not imply that it is okay in another, even in modern times, when the law of implied consent is in place. Third, the main point of this phrase is not to endorse moderate drinking, but to disqualify anyone who is known to be heavily intoxicated from serving as a deacon. Fourth, the apostle Paul could never have recommended that deacons

moderately consume intoxicating wine for pleasure, given his instruction to Timothy to take little wine for medicinal purposes. Lastly, cultural and contextual factors raise the possibility that the phrase means that deacons should limit their consumption of grape juice while visiting homes to protect both their own and the church's reputation.

A different, but no less compelling, way that 1 Timothy 5:23 bolsters the principle of abstinence is that it states that Paul advised Timothy to use a small amount of wine, not for the pleasure of the belly, but for the medical necessity of his stomach. In conclusion, our research into the Bible's teachings on alcohol consumption has led us to the conclusion that God commands us to drink moderately from healthy, unfermented drinks and to abstain from alcoholic, fermented drinks.⁵²

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⁵⁰ Norman L. Geisler, “A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1982): 49.

⁵¹ Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible*, 145.

⁵² Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible*, 220.

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