

Did Jesus Make Wine or Grape Juice?

By Rev. Sam Harris

Question: Our church is very strong against drinking in any form, and I don't drink—mostly because of what I have seen when alcohol destroyed several members of my family and a marriage. But I also concur with my church's stand. Our preacher recently preached on the passage in John 2:1-12 where Jesus performed His first miracle at Cana—turning water into wine. He stated that Jesus actually turned the water into grape juice. My pastor uses the *New King James Version*, and the word “wine” is used in this passage. I'm confused; what is the real truth here?

Answer: Thanks for the question; it's a “horse” that has been ridden many times. This miracle was never meant to emphasize the water into wine, but to demonstrate the awesome power and deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. As you read through the Gospel of John, all of the miracles focus attention on Christ's deity.

As Christians, we should all be most concerned about the abuse of alcohol. There are very few families that have not been torn apart by alcohol. Working now in a trauma one emergency department, I have seen first hand the results of alcohol abuse—often causing serious physical disabilities and even death. Alcoholism is a serious problem that must be addressed!

Now, did Jesus turn water into wine or grape juice? According to the Greek text, the word used here is *oinos*, a wine derived from grapes; there is no evidence that wine is to be translated “grape juice.”

If you go back into the Old Testament, you find that wine was a symbol of joy and blessing. Psalm 104:15: “And wine which makes the heart glad, so that he may make his face glisten with oil, and food which sustains a man's heart.” Wine was used as a part of the offering to God (Exodus 29:40). We also know that wine was drunk at feasts, look at 1 Samuel 25:18. Paul recommended to Timothy that a little wine was good for the stomach and your frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5: 23). Notice that Paul uses the word “little” here.

Now, before I get mobbed, there are certainly many passages that speak out against drinking wine. Lot's children used wine to get their father drunk in order to “preserve our family through our father” (Gen. 19:32f.). The Lord told Aaron (Lev. 10: 9), “Do not drink wine or strong drink... when you come into the tent of meeting.” There are numerous passages in Proverbs: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise” (20:1); “Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine or with gluttonous eaters of meat” (23:20). These are but a mere sample of the many scriptures dealing with wine. Find a good concordance for further research.

In the New Testament, we read that John the Baptist would “drink no wine or liquor” (Luke 1:15). In Ephesians 5:18, Paul tells us “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Holy Spirit.” In 1 Timothy 3:3, Paul writes of the qualifications of overseers and deacons; they are “not to be addicted to wine,” and in verse 8: “Deacons... not addicted to much wine.”

What is the bottom line here? I think the key here is an understanding that the miracle at

Cana is not an endorsement of the use of alcohol. Both the Old and New Testaments will decry the abuse of alcohol in any form and drunkenness. Drunkenness is not the characteristic of a Christian testimony (1 Peter 4:4). The operative word here is “abuse.” You can abuse your body by overeating, not enough rest, the proper foods, etc., as well as alcohol.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:19, that our “bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit...” And in verse 20 “... we are to “glorify God in your body.” Finally, in 1 Corinthians 10: 31, Paul writes, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.” In our life and testimony, our goal is to always glorify God. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in heaven.”