



The Good News

October 4th, 2020

Volume 20, Issue 33

To whom should wine be given?

By Jerry Fite, Edited by Michael McCleary

Proverbs 31:4-7 reads, *“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes to say, ‘Where is strong drink?’. Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the justice due to any that is afflicted. Give strong drink un-to him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul: let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.”*

The distinction between wine and strong drink in this context is not that wine is merely grape juice and the strong drink is an alcoholic drink. There is no doubt that the wine under consideration in these verses is wine, which undergoes natural fermentation, and adds the alcohol component. The only difference between the two is that strong drink is heavier in its percentage of alcohol than the wine.

Alcohol in the blood stream adversely affects memory and good judgment. Therefore, those in places of authority, such as kings and princes, who are given the responsibility to render righteous judgment, were not to drink or even seek such mind altering beverages. The same abstinence applied to the priests for similar reasons when they were entering the tabernacle upon service. They needed to *“...make a distinction between the holy and common, and the clean and un-clean”* (Leviticus 10:10). They also had the responsibility to *“...teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Jehovah hath spoken unto them by Moses”* (Leviticus 10:11). We can definitely see where a mind intoxicated by wine and strong drink would adversely affect the righteous judgment, and clear thinking responsibilities of those who serve as priests, kings or princes.

Then, who should be given wine and strong drink? Lemuel’s counsel directs one to give strong drink to the one on his death bed, who is ready to perish. It very well may be that he is remembering his poverty in his last hour. Strong drink’s stronger numbing effect on the brain could ease the last hours of his pain.

The wine is for one who has an embittered soul, and is in misery. While the effects of alcohol in the wine are slowing down one’s physical reaction time, it is also releasing the hormone dopamine that causes us to feel pleasure. The upbeat pleasurable feeling due to the dopamine release in the brain, such as a runner experiences after running awhile, causes a person to feel joy after drinking wine instead of feeling the plaguing bitterness and misery that has troubled his soul.

With the text before us, should the Christian be the one given strong drink and wine? Just because we are not a king or a prince, does this mean we should drink strong drink and alcoholic wine? Like kings and princes, the Christian must make righteous judgments at all times (*Jn. 7:24*). Like priests, the Christian must be able to distinguish between the holy and the unclean because he must continually present himself as a holy and living sacrifice (*Romans 12:1*). Like the priests, the Christian is to be sober and alert as he teaches others the truth (*2 Timothy 4:2, 5; 2:2*).

What if kings, princes and priests run on to hard times and are depressed? This passage does not give them the right to lighten their spirits with a drink of wine. Such drink is not for them. Neither is it for the Christian. With a clear mind, rejoice in the Lord. The Christian should not, under the influence, rejoice from the wine. (*Philippians 4:4*).