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Conducted by  
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**WHAT** is meant by the words, "Not given to wine" (Titus 1:7 and 2:3)?

The phrase, "not given to wine" must have been over the centuries one of the most hotly discussed statements in the New Testament, especially where it refers to the qualifications of elders. Every Bible study group at one time or another must have struggled with the true interpretation of the qualifications of elders and have puzzled over "not given to wine". The phrase is not of course, confined to the question of elders' qualifications but is used in reference to deacons and to the aged women in the church.

Perhaps we could quote the verses involved, including and additional to the references mentioned by the questioner. Firstly, in reference to the qualities required of elders we read in 1st Tim. 3:3 "Not given to wine..." In the same chapter, verse 8, regarding the qualifications of deacons we read, "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not given to much wine." In Titus 1:7 we have recorded, again in reference to the qualifications of elders, "For an elder must be blameless, not given to wine..." In Titus 2:3 we read, "The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not given to much wine." Thus we have two instances (in 1st Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7) where the phrase, "*not given to wine*" is employed, in both cases referring to the kind of men that elders should be. The phrase is also used twice (in 1st Tim 3:8 and Titus 2:3) the former occasion being in reference to the qualifications of deacons and in the latter case required of the "aged women" in the church.

#### How Much is "Much"?

Usually when the subject is discussed the supposition is advanced that clearly the evil lies in being given too *much* wine, and that therefore there is nothing wrong with being given to a *moderate quantity* of wine. I suppose that this may seem a reasonable assumption to many reasonable people, but does the one necessarily follow from the other? Who decides on what a moderate quantity is, even supposing that such reasoning is valid? There is also the argument that because Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding feast it must therefore be admissible to drink whisky *ad lib* at the local pub or hostelry! The scriptures draw a clear distinction between *wine* and *strong drink*. although for the moment this has nothing to do with the question in hand. "Wine" is the fermented juice of the grape, but in the scriptures quoted it has a blanket application to all intoxicating liquors. It would be ludicrous to suppose that elders should not be given to *wine* but could lawfully be given to *other kinds* of strong drink. Allowing that the elder should not be given to wine or to much wine I am presuming that the real point behind the question is can we suppose from the language in these verses that it is not permissible to drink wine at all?

Most members of the Lord's church are total abstainers from intoxicating drink, and believe that the general tenor of the scriptures is that this should be so. These four portions of scripture quoted do not however, in my opinion, teach total abstinence nor were they intended to. If we take, for instance, 1st Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7, both of which state in the King James Version that an elder should "not be given to wine". we find that an *excess of wine* is being referred to, not total abstinence. Indeed, if we look at the Revised Version and other modern versions we shall find

that wine is not once mentioned and that *brawling due to an excess of wine* is the intended meaning. The Greek word employed is *paroinos*, a different word from that employed in 1st Tim. 3:8 and Titus 2:3 referring to deacons and the aged women. The word *paroinos* means not only wine but more: it means "alongside of wine", or under its influence. Greek scholars say that the phrase means "not a drunken brawler". Weymouth translates it "not a hard drinker"; The King James Version renders it "not given to wine"; but the Revised Version gives it as "no brawler". I therefore believe it would be difficult to sustain a case for total abstinence from *paroinos*.

#### Applies to Elders

Perhaps when we discuss the qualifications of elders we are inclined to read too much into them and make them mean a little more than they were intended to. The elder, like any other workman, requires to be duly qualified for his duties. He must be blameless and must not lie under any scandal. He must be the husband of a wife — and just one wife. He must be vigilant and watchful against Satan. He must be sober, temperate and moderate in all his actions and in the use of all his creature comforts. He must be of good behaviour, not light, vain or frothy. He must be given to hospitality. He must be able to teach and be able and willing to communicate to others the knowledge of God. He must be no drunkard, no striker and not quarrelsome. He must do everything with mildness, gentleness and love. He must not be greedy for material gain. He must be patient and keep his family in order with all gravity. This is the kind of person an elder *must* be. These qualifications are minimal. There is nothing spectacular in this catalogue of qualities and indeed most of them should be found in most disciples of Christ. Obviously an elder must be free from any degree of intemperance in the use of wine and strong drink which would both be scandalous for him and render him unfit for the duties of his high station. Some have suggested that the prohibition regarding "wine" would have been unnecessary had all the church members been total abstainers. However we can certainly see the precaution in the prohibition, and can envisage the reception an elder would get if he came to us a little unsteady on his feet, smelling of drink and slurred in his speech!

For similar reasons in 1st Tim. 3:8 and Titus 2:3 the deacons and the aged women (who were to be teachers of the younger women) were required not to be "given to much wine" or, as the Revised Version puts it "not enslaved to much wine".

#### Applies to All Christians

It has been explained that especially amongst the churches consisting mainly of *Gentiles* the exhortation to temperance was most urgent and necessary. This certainly seems to be corroborated by Peter (in 1st Peter 4:3) where he says "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, *excess of wine*, revellings, banquetings and abominable idolatries!" Paul also exhorted the Christians at Ephesus (Eph. 5:18) "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit". We have no difficulty therefore with the question of *excess of wine*. Such a state is strictly prohibited and ought never to exist amongst members of the churches.

But should members of the church drink wine at all? It is true, of course, that Paul (in 1st Tim. 2:3) suggested that Timothy should "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities". Paul therefore, it would seem, advocates the use of a little wine (just a little) for medicinal purposes. Paul is not suggesting that Timothy stop drinking water altogether, as would seem from the verse, but, as I understand it, is saying that Timothy should add a little wine to the water he was drinking. Apparently Timothy had an ailing stomach and

other infirmities. Unlike our good water supplies, the water that the apostles, and others, had to drink in their travels and missionary journeys was far from fresh and wholesome. No doubt this verse has been often invoked to justify social drinking by many who have very little wrong with their stomachs!

#### Total Abstinence & The Reasons

The same apostle Paul said to the Christians at Rome (Rom. 14:21) that, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or made weak." Paul, whatever else can be said of this verse, is here enunciating a principle which we should observe throughout the churches *i.e.* that we should refrain from *anything* even supposing it was otherwise perfectly lawful, that is likely to cause offence to a brother or make him to stumble or be weaker in faith. Paul mentions the eating of meat and the drinking of wine. Whatever we think of the drinking of wine the eating of meat was perfectly lawful. Thus Paul says if the doing of anything, legitimate in itself, causes offence or stumbling, or weakness, he would refrain from it. Whether or not, therefore, we consider the drinking of wine to be lawful we ought to refrain from it if it would cause any brother offence, or to stumble or to weaken his faith. In my view, if any members of the church were wine-drinkers they would set a very bad example and would bring about the stumbling and weakening of those younger members in the faith. The man who claims to drink moderately is not sure if he will *always* be able to make such a claim for, who knows, he may become an alcoholic in his later years? Strong drink has ruined countless numbers of good, honest and intelligent men, and is no respecter of persons. Drunks come from all sectors of humanity. The golden rule is for men never to take that first drink. Proverbs 20:1 says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." The poor wretched alcoholics we see lying in the gutter didn't set out to become like that. They were bright young men at one time, sitting in the jovial company of friends, enjoying a social drink in the pleasant little bar. "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without a cause? who hath redness of the eyes? they who tarry long at the wine", says Solomon (Prov. 23:29).

May it never be said of any of us that we, by any form of social drinking, gave such a bad example to any of our brethren, or even to those outside the church, that we set them on the road to alcoholism and ruin. Our advice to anyone, especially the young, whether in the church or not, should be that *they never take that first drink*. no matter how innocent it may seem to be, That way we shall never become clients of Alcoholics Anonymous, and indeed never have any drink problems. My own father was not a member of the church and certainly enjoyed a drink, but he was always offering the above advice to every young man. I have ever been glad that I took his advice. All sorts of pressures are brought to bear on the young these days and if they don't join their friends in a few drinks they are looked upon as being a stick-in-the mud, mean, or not manly, or downright unsociable. All such accusations should be borne cheerfully, but our resolution not to touch the stuff should be undiminished, unconquerable. A study of the scriptures on wine and strong drink will, I think, bear out these remarks. Total abstinence was enjoined upon the priests in their duties of office (Lev. 10:9) and was the law of the Nazarites (Num. 6:3) and the law of the Rechabites (Jer. 35:6) and was practised by John the Baptist. There are many others.

"It is not for kings... to drink wine: nor for princes strong drink. Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgement of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that are of heavy hearts..." (Proverbs 31:4-7) Heavy hearts can now find solace in Christ.

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