

1 Timothy 3:8 (NIV)

“In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.”

This verse is often misunderstood. Some interpret it to mean that a moderate amount of alcohol is permissible for Christians, as long as they avoid excess. But this raises a critical question: Is a little wine acceptable for believers today? What is the scriptural and theological foundation for Paul’s instruction?

1. Context Matters: A Word on Spiritual Discernment

2 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)

“Who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

Without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, one can misuse

Scripture to justify sin. Satan himself quoted Scripture to tempt Jesus (see Matthew 4:6–7), twisting its context. Jesus responded with discernment, rightly dividing the Word (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15).

So, Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 3:8 must be read in full context and with Spirit-led understanding. Let’s examine Paul’s advice to Timothy more closely.

2. Medicinal Use vs. Recreational Use

1 Timothy 5:23 (NIV)

“Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.”

Here, Paul advises Timothy to take a little wine for medicinal purposes. The Greek word used here for “wine” is *oinos*, which refers to fermented wine, not just grape juice. However, Paul limits the quantity to “a little” (*oligon*, Greek: ὀλίγον), clearly indicating moderation and purpose not indulgence or recreation.

This instruction is pastoral and practical. Timothy likely avoided

wine entirely to uphold his reputation as a church leader, but Paul, knowing his health challenges, recommends a medicinal allowance. It is not a blanket endorsement of social drinking.

3. Historical and Cultural Context

In the ancient world, water quality was poor, and small amounts of wine were sometimes mixed with water to purify it or treat stomach issues. Moreover, wine had topical uses as a disinfectant for wounds.

Luke 10:34 (KJV)

“And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine...”

The Good Samaritan uses wine as an antiseptic. This aligns with the broader Greco-Roman medicinal practices of the time.

Therefore, when Paul permits “a little wine” for Timothy, he is not encouraging social drinking, but recognizing a common medical treatment of the day.

4. Drunkenness Is a Sin

Ephesians 5:18 (NIV)

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

Paul directly contrasts being “filled” with wine and being “filled” with the Holy Spirit. One leads to loss of control and moral compromise; the other to godly living and spiritual empowerment.

Galatians 5:21 (NIV)

“Envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Drunkenness is listed alongside other works of the flesh that disqualify one from the kingdom of God. The Bible makes no allowance for casual intoxication.

5. The Modern Application: Do We Still Need Wine Medicinally?

In today's world, we have access to clean water, pharmaceuticals, and advanced medicine. There is no longer a need for wine to serve as a treatment for illness. The argument for medicinal use of alcohol has little practical relevance today outside of rare cases or remote locations.

Thus, to use 1 Timothy 5:23 as justification for casual drinking is to misuse the text.

6. Summary

- Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 3:8 and 5:23 are not contradictory. One prohibits excess, the other permits medicinal moderation.
- The purpose of wine in Scripture, where permitted, was functional, cultural, or symbolic, not recreational.
- Drunkenness is explicitly condemned in both Old and New Testaments (see also Proverbs 20:1, Isaiah 5:11, Romans 13:13).
- In the New Covenant, believers are called to holiness and self-control (cf. Titus 2:11-12), filled not with wine but with the Spirit of God.

A Final Call: Repentance and Salvation

Galatians 5:19–21 (NIV) clearly warns that habitual sin, including drunkenness, excludes one from God’s kingdom. If you are caught in addiction or compromise, turn to Christ.

Acts 3:19 (NIV)

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”

Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Do not delay. Receive Jesus, be cleansed, and walk in the newness of life.

Maranatha Come, Lord Jesus!

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