

# The Brown Street Beacon

*"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,*

*holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)*



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## Did Paul Sanction Social Drinking?

**"Would you explain 1 Timothy 5:23 about Paul's advice to Timothy to drink wine?"**

This verse has long been a source of controversy. It is the "wino's" golden text, though abused mightily in the effort. Paul encourages his friend: *"Be no longer a drinker of water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities."* Perhaps the most convenient way to deal with this text is to segment it by its significant points.

(1) Timothy was afflicted with a stomach ailment, the nature of which is not precisely known. It was a sickness that came and went, but apparently more often "came" than otherwise. The apostle obviously suspects bad "water" as the source of the young man's problem. Since the days of Hippocrates it was recognized that contaminated water could produce illnesses. Moreover, Ephesus was an ancient and decaying city. Its harbor was silting up which, in turn, created sewage problems that poisoned some of the underground water supplies. Such might well have been the cause of Timothy's medical ailment (Williams, p. 101).

(2) The sentence is elliptical, i.e., certain words must be mentally supplied in order to complete the thought. The sense thus should be: "Be no longer a drinker of water **only**, but **also** take a little wine?" (see John 6:27; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:20 with 1 Thessalonians 1:5). The apostle is not instructing Timothy to abstain from water entirely; rather, for medicinal purposes the youth was enjoined to mix with his water a "little wine."

(3) The use of wine was a widely recognized remedy for some illnesses among both Jews and Greeks, as reflected in the Hebrew Talmud, the writings of Hippocrates, Plutarch, and Pliny (Fee, p. 135). "Wine was often helpful in settling stomachs and preventing dysentery (it disinfected water)" (Keener, p. 619).

(4) Something of Timothy's character is revealed. He had refrained even from the medicinal use of wine, a perfectly legitimate remedy, for the sake of his influence. Such was going too far, however. His service to Christ was more valuable than the possible damage that might be done by some misguided critic. Incidentally, this negates the speculation of some that "wine" here possibly was grape juice. The young man would hardly have needed exhortation to use a little grape juice with his water.

(5) To suggest, as some have done, that Paul sees in Timothy a "false asceticism" due to the influence of the false teachers at Ephesus, is an example of drawing a conclusion without sufficient evidence.

(6) This passage can hardly provide any comfort for those who desire to engage in the pleasurable consumption of beverage alcohol. Imbibers rarely drink just a "little," nor do they dilute their wine

with water. They are looking for the “glow,” the “buzz.” Furthermore, ancient wines were not nearly as potent as today’s fortified wines.

(7) Finally, to contend that this passage is much too personal to warrant any importance, and therefore such constitutes an argument negating the Bible’s claim of verbal inspiration (as liberal critics charge), is absurd in the extreme. In fact, as Spence has argued, this passage provides evidence of the genuine Pauline authorship of this document. No forger of the 2nd or 3rd century would ever have dreamed of weaving something of this nature into the text (p. 207). It does, however, reveal the great love and concern of Paul for his young companion in the gospel.

#### Sources/Footnotes

- Fee, Gordon (1984), *New International Biblical Commentary — 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson).
- Keener, Craig (1993), *The IVP Background Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).
- Spence, H.D.M. (1959 ed.), *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus — Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan).
- Williams, David (1999), *Paul’s Metaphors — Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson).

\*Ref. my files

## 10 Tasks Worth Doing!

Jim Lee

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.” (Eccl. 9:10)...so:

- 1) Study God’s word with a friend (Prov. 27:17).
- 2) Invite a stranger to worship with the church (Heb. 13:2).
- 3) Make a list of all that you have to be thankful for (Psa. 107:8).
- 4) Show a loved one how much you love them (1 John 3:18).
- 5) Tackle a challenging Bible subject (2 Tim. 2:15).
- 6) Be a “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:29-37).
- 7) Memorize twenty-five proverbs (Prov. 2:1-15).
- 8) Give something worth giving (Acts 20:35)
- 9) Make a real sacrifice for the Lord (2 Sam. 24:24).
- 10) Encourage someone who is truly discouraged (Heb. 12:12-13).