

1 Timothy 5:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

Analysis

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities (Μηκέτι ὑδροπότηι, ἀλλὰ οἶνω ὀλίγω χρῶ διὰ τὸν στόμαχόν σου καὶ τὰς πυκνάς σου ἀσθενείας, Mēketi hydropotei, alla oinō oligō chrō dia ton stomachon sou kai tas pyknas sou astheneias)—'stop drinking only water, but use a little wine for your stomach and frequent ailments.' Hydropoteo means to drink water (only). Stomachos is stomach. Pyknos means frequent, often.

This verse seems out of place amid instructions on church discipline, but it reveals Paul's pastoral care for Timothy personally. Timothy apparently practiced strict abstinence from wine (perhaps to avoid any appearance of the excess Paul condemned in 3:3, 8), but this was harming his health. Ancient water was often contaminated; wine was safer and had medicinal value.

Paul's counsel: asceticism isn't virtue if it damages your health. Use a little wine medicinally. This isn't endorsing drunkenness but wise stewardship of the body. Timothy's rigorous self-discipline was admirable but misguided when it hurt his ability to serve. Take care of your body—it's the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Historical Context

In the ancient world, wine mixed with water was the standard beverage—safer than contaminated water and less intoxicating than pure wine. Paul isn't recommending drunkenness but appropriate use of wine for health. Timothy's

frequent stomach ailments and illnesses may have been exacerbated by drinking only water in a region where waterborne diseases were common.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does this verse balance between avoiding drunkenness and appropriate use of wine?
2. What does Paul's counsel teach about caring for physical health amid spiritual ministry?
3. How can Christians avoid both self-destructive asceticism and self-indulgent excess?

Interlinear Text

Μηκέτι	ὑδροπότει	ἀλλ'	οἶνω	ὀλίγω	χρῶ	διὰ	τὸν
no longer	Drink	but	wine	a little	use	for	G3588
G3371	G5202	G235	G3631	G3641	G5530	G1223	
στόμαχον	σοῦ	καὶ	τὰς	πυκνάς	σοῦ	ἀσθενείας	
stomach's sake	thine	and	G3588	often	thine	infirmities	
G4751	G4675	G2532		G4437	G4675	G769	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 104:15 (Parallel theme): And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.

1 Timothy 4:4 (Parallel theme): For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:

1 Timothy 3:8 (Parallel theme): Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

Ephesians 5:18 (Parallel theme): And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

1 Timothy 3:3 (Parallel theme): Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

Ezekiel 44:21 (Parallel theme): Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court.

Titus 2:3 (Parallel theme): The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

Titus 1:7 (Parallel theme): For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;