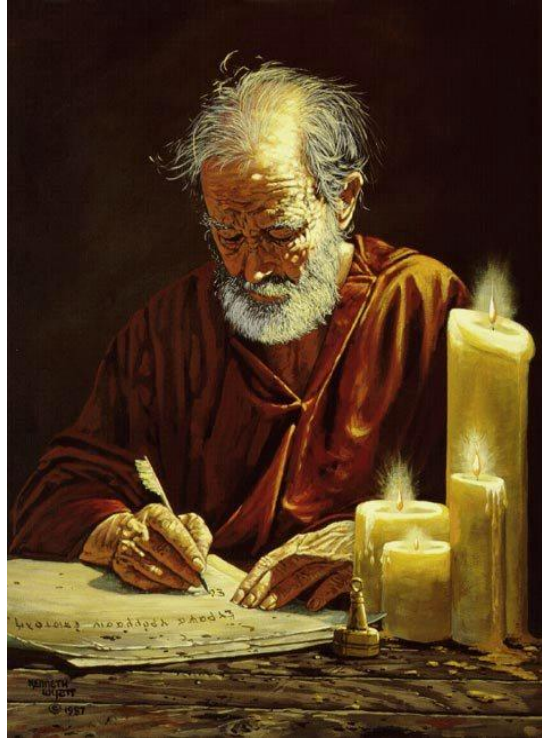


DEAR AEBI: "WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE STATEMENT IN 1 TIMOTHY 5:23 IN THE NIV TELLING TIMOTHY TO USE WINE INSTEAD OF WATER?"

Most versions say basically the same thing. I heard one fellow say that we should drink wine instead of "longerwater," because the KJV says, "Drink no longer water..."! The ASV says, "Be no longer a drinker of water, but . . ." The NASB says, "No longer drink water but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." The ESV says, "(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)" What does this mean?



This seems to be a piece of medical advice given to Timothy by Paul, perhaps suggested by Luke the beloved physician, but in any case approved by the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul. Wine was used for medicinal purposes by the good Samaritan in Luke 10:34, and it has often been used alone or in combination with other medicinal mixtures down through the centuries. In some places in the past it was necessary because water was polluted. In any case, it is obvious that this does not refer to social drinking but to a specific physical need because the water Timothy had access agitated his stomach problems, whatever they were.

People sometimes misuse this Scripture as an excuse for drinking alcohol socially. A good case can be made against the use of alcohol in our modern world simply because of the damage it does on our highways where thousands die every year from alcohol-related accidents. Alcohol causes murders, divorces, disasters in factories, and many other evils. It kills brain cells. It impoverishes families. It has been removed from many medicines today because of its effects. Christians would do well to avoid it like the plague. Read Proverbs 23:29-35 and related passages.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:11 that drunkards are to be shunned by the church. Using alcohol by prescription of a medical expert is one thing. Self-prescribed and social drinking are different matters.

-Charles J. Aebi.