## Words Used for Intoxication in the N.T.

by Harry Osborne

Surely all who make a claim to follow Christ admit that drinking intoxicants to the loss of control is sinful. However, the Scripture includes lesser levels of effect in the same way.

In Galatians 5:19-21, the last specified work of the flesh is "revellings" (ASV and KJV), "revelries" (NKJ), "orgies" (NIV) or "carousing" (NASV and NRSV). These are all translations of the Greek word komos. In order to understand the definition and connotation of this word, it is good to consult several authorities regarding the meaning of New Testament words. Thayer commented on the meaning and use of the word as referring to "a nocturnal and riotous procession of half-drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Bacchus or some other deity" (367). Wuest said of the word that it at first referred to "a village merrymaking.... then it came to mean 'a carousal' such as a party of revellers parading the streets, or revels held in religious ceremonies, wild, furious, and ecstatic" (Vol. 2, p. 112). R.C. Trench in Synonyms of the New Testament said that the Greek word komos combines the notions "of riot and of revelry." and then noted,

"...komos is often used of the company of revellers themselves; always a festal company, but not of necessity riotous or drunken.... Still the word generally implies as much, being applied in a special sense to the troop of drunken revellers... with garlands on their heads, and torches in their hands, with shout and song, ...pass to the harlots' house, or otherwise wander through the streets" (226-227).

In modern terms, this brings to mind the participants in Mardi Gras festivals or the party-goer with a lampshade on his head. It describes the person who has not lost control to the extent of methe (the previous word in Galatians 5:21) or oinophlugia (which komos follows in 1 Peter 4:3). Instead, komos is descriptive of the state of one who retains control, but is merrily intoxicated due to the effects of alcohol. In the vernacular of drinkers, this is the person that has "a buzz," is "mellow" or "high." The effects of inebriation are present with such a person, though he may feel he is still in full control. This is the person, when pulled over for drunken driving, claims to be unaffected by "just two or three drinks." The komos man believes he is still in control, yet in reality alcohol has diminished his degree of alertness and has altered his mental state.

The komos man is one who shows the folly of the liquor industry which tells one "know when to say when." How is one to determine such? One is urged to use alcohol which takes away the ability to make rational judgments, but only up to the point that he judges acceptable. Who is to make that judgment? One using the alcohol which robs him of the ability to make clear judgments. The fact remains that intoxicating drinks begin to rob one of that judgment with the very first drink. Even the alcohol industry admits that one reaches the state of being "legally drunk" with just two drinks. Whether 2 beers, 2 glasses of wine or 2 mixed drinks, the effect is the same. If the liquor industry admits that two drinks get one legally drunk, have we no concern about the effect on rational judgment with the first drink? With the percentage of alcohol in beer, wine and liquor all being far higher than the strongest of wine used in Bible times, there is no level of drinking modern intoxicants which can be proven good using the New Testament as was shown in last week's bulletin.

#### Use of komos in New Testament

The Greek word komos is used three times in the New Testament. In the context of **Galatians 5**, the writer details a list of sins described as the "works of the flesh." Verse 21 places komos in that list of evils bearing the warning that those who "practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." That should cause one to make sure to avoid the action, not see how close to it he might approach. The broader context of Galatians 5:16-24 suggests the same point. Two directors of life are contrasted: "the Spirit" and "the flesh." The two are said to be "contrary the one to the other" or "against" each other. Those who are "of Christ Jesus" are led by the Spirit and "have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof." One does not crucify the evil of imbibing in intoxicants by continuing their use to a level deemed "moderate" in contrast to total loss of control. One will search in vain for New Testament authority to imbibe of "moderate" use of intoxicants.

In **Romans 13:13**, we find another use of komos. It is used together with the word methe there to express a cause and effect relationship. Arndt and Gingrich, in commenting on methe, note that its use in Galatians 5:21 and Romans 13:13 in close proximity to komos suggests that the revelry of komos led to the effect of the more dissipated state of drunkenness represented by methe. Trench notes that methe is "stronger, and expressing a worse excess" than the milder word. The broader context of Romans 13:11-14 shows both methe and komos are condemned as belonging to "the works of darkness" which must be "cast off." A Christian who seeks to "make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" certainly takes great caution to avoid either the greater or lesser state of effect from intoxicating drink.

However, in **1 Peter 4:3**, we find another use of komos which is more pointed as to the use of intoxicants. In that verse, komos is the middle word of a triplet dealing with the use of intoxicants. All three states involved participation in the "lusts of men" and "the desires of the Gentiles" and are condemned as "sin" (1 Peter 4:1-5). Let us explore the meaning and implications found in these words used to characterize this action associated with the sinful world.

The first word used is oinophlugia which is translated in various English versions with the words "winebibbings," "excess of wine" or "drunkenness." Trench noted that this word "marks a step in advance of methe" which was the more dissipated state described in Galatians 5:21 and Romans 13:13. One in the state of oinophlugia has lost all control of the senses. It was the word used by Aristotle to suggest a state which may permanently harm the body (Eth. Nic. iii. 5. 15). Arrian used the word to describe the drunken debauch which caused the death of Alexander the Great (vii. 24, 25).

The next word used is komos the meaning of which we have already examined. We must understand that komos does not describe the least level of using intoxicants, but the second condemned step with one lesser level still to come.

The third word in 1 Peter 4:3 is potos (translated "banquetings," "drinking parties" or "carousings"). R.C. Trench in Synonyms of the New Testament said that the word potos denotes drinking "not of necessity excessive, but giving opportunity for excess" (225). In his commentary, Kistemaker noted the same regarding the use of potos in this verse (160). The primary meaning given by lexicographers for potos is simply "a drinking." A drinking of what? Obviously, a drinking of that which leads to komos and then oinophlugia. The drinking of intoxicating beverages leads to the state of intoxication.

Ephesians 5:18 and 1 Peter 4:4 help to clarify the drink described in context. After condemning a use of various levels of intoxicants, Peter told the readers that the world would "think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot." Is that "excess" merely in the overuse of the drink or might it also involve the nature of the drink? Ephesians 5:18 warns against being "drunk with wine, ***wherein is excess***." Grammatically, the "excess" is said to be **in** the wine, not in the drinking. In other words, there was a kind of wine "wherein is excess" and a kind of wine which was not associated with excess. We detailed this fact last week showing the "wine" of New Testament time was cut with about 4 - 6 parts water. This mixture was sufficient for purifying the water, but not a mixture "wherein is excess."

Christians must serve as "lights" in rejecting the use of intoxicants at any level amidst a world of darkened users. We cannot compromise and begin to justify "just a little" drinking. If we do, our potos will become komos, our komos may increase to methe and our methe may end in oinophlugia. However, even if it does not, **we are still involved in sin which condemns the soul with our first step in the process**. Be not deceived!