**From Drinking to Drunkenness**

*by Harry Osborne*

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

In Galatians 5:19-21, the last work of the flesh given is "revellings" (ASV & KJV), "revelries" (NKJ), "orgies" (NIV & ESV) or "carousing" (NASB & NRSV). These are all translations of the Greek word *komos*. In order to understand the meaning of this word, it is good to consult several authorities on New Testament words. Thayer commented on 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). 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" (226-227).

In modern terms, this brings to mind the participants in Mardi Gras festivals or the social drinking party-goer. It describes the person who has not lost total control to the extent of *methe* (the previous word in Galatians 5:21) or *oinophlugia* (that *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 “tipsy,” "mellow" or "high." The effects of inebriation are present with such a person, though he may feel he is still in control. This is the person, when pulled over for drunken driving, claims to be unaffected by "just a couple of drinks." The *komos* man believes he is still able to function normally, yet in reality alcohol has diminished his degree of alertness and has altered his mental state.

A *komos* man is one who shows the folly of a liquor industry advising all to "drink responsibly." How is one to reach this conclusion? The use alcohol ***takes away*** the ability to make rational decisions and act responsibly. How does one use in a “responsible” way that which inherently diminishes rationality and dulls the sense of responsibility? With each sip, the one using alcohol is robbed of the ability to make clear judgments. In fact, intoxicating drinks begin to rob one of the ability to wisely discern 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, as the amount of alcohol consumed is the same. If the liquor industry admits 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 that can be proven “good” using the New Testament as was shown in last week's article.

The Greek word *komos* is used three times in the New Testament. In the context of **Galatians 5**, it is listed with sins described as the "works of the flesh." Verse 21 places *komos* in a list of evil deeds 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 he can get to it. 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 “passions and lusts” for intoxicants by continuing to imbibe of them at a level deemed "moderate" in contrast to total loss of control. **One will search the New Testament in vain for authority to *"moderately"* use 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*, say 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" that must be "cast off." A Christian seeking 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.

In **1 Peter 4:3**, we find a use of *komos* that is more pointed as to the use of intoxicants. There, *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 of these words describing sinful action.

The first word used is *oinophlugia*, translated in various English versions as "winebibbings," "excess of wine" or "drunkenness." Trench states this word "marks a step in advance of *methe,*" the **most** dissipated state described in Galatians 5:21 and Romans 13:13. The *oinophlugia* man has lost all control of his senses. It was the word used by Aristotle to portray a condition that may permanently harm the body (*Eth. Nic.* iii. 5. 15). Arrian used the word to describe the drunken debauch that 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," "carousings," etc.). 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). Kistemakers commentary 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 leading to *komos* and then *oinophlugia*. Simply put, the drinking of intoxicating beverages leads to 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 you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation*." Is that "dissipation" merely the *overuse* of the drink or might it refer to the *nature of the drink*? Ephesians 5:18 warns against being "drunk with wine, ***in which is dissipation***." Grammatically, the "dissipation" is said to be ***in*** **the wine**, not in the over drinking. In other words, there was a kind of wine "***wherein*** *is dissipation*" and a kind of wine **not** associated with excess. We detailed this fact last week showing the "wine" of New Testament time was cut with 4 to 6 parts water. This mixture was sufficient for purifying the water, but not a mixture that would produce "dissipation." There is no alcoholic beverage on the market today that would be equal to that use – all have much higher contents of alcohol.

Christians must be "lights," rejecting the use of intoxicants at any level, in 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*. That is the true end of the liquor, beer and wine industry! However, even if it did not, **we would still be involved in sin that condemns the soul *with our first step* in the process**. Be not deceived!