

**Research Article**

## **Water, Oil, and Alcohol: The Emulsification Principle as Reconciliation Model in Jesus' Table Fellowship Tradition**

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### **Abstract**

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Prolonged interpersonal conflicts are often described as being like water and oil that cannot unite. In chemistry, a third substance alcohol can unite both through the emulsification principle. This research proposes that the table fellowship pattern in Jesus' ministry, which historically included wine consumption, provides a biblical model for pastoral reconciliation that parallels this emulsification principle. Through exegetical analysis of key verses (Proverbs 31:6-7; Ecclesiastes 9:7, 10:19; Psalm 104:15) and theological examination of shared meal patterns in Jesus' ministry (John 2:1-11; Luke 5:27-32; 7:34; Matthew 26:26-29), this research demonstrates that wine functions as a social facilitator that reduces anxiety and opens communication, creating an environment conducive to God's grace working. Neuroscience research supports these findings by explaining how moderate alcohol consumption affects GABA, dopamine, and cortisol to reduce defensive barriers. However, this research emphasizes a critical distinction: wine is a contextual facilitator, not a substantive solution true reconciliation occurs through God's grace working within the space facilitated by shared fellowship. This model offers an innovative approach integrating scientific principles, biblical precedent, and practical pastoral application, while maintaining clear theological boundaries against drunkenness and providing contraindications for specific contexts. Its practical implications include implementation protocols for pastoral counseling and church leadership in facilitating grace-based reconciliation.

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### **Introduction**

When two individuals are locked in bitter conflict, their relationship often resembles what chemistry describes as immiscible substances: water and oil that stubbornly refuse to unite. Despite proximity, they remain segregated their fundamental "natures" incompatible, their defensive barriers impenetrable. Church conflicts present particularly tragic instances of this dynamic. Pastors and elders find themselves polarized over vision and methods. Long-time friends

become estranged over theological disagreements or personal offenses. Families fracture along generational or ideological fault lines. In each case, conventional mediation approaches while valuable in many contexts frequently fail when conflicts reach this depth of polarization and entrenchment.

The statistics paint a sobering picture. Research by the Alban Institute found that approximately 75% of clergy report having been involved in a major church conflict, with many resulting in pastoral transitions or

congregational splits.[1] Leadership Network studies indicate that unresolved interpersonal conflicts rank among the top three reasons pastors leave ministry.[2] Beyond the immediate parties involved, these conflicts damage Christian witness, impede ministry effectiveness, and wound entire communities. The need for effective, biblically grounded reconciliation approaches remains acute.

### 1) A Chemical Insight with Theological Parallels

Chemistry offers an unexpected insight into seemingly impossible unification. When water and oil two immiscible substances are mixed with alcohol, they form a stable emulsion. The alcohol molecule possesses amphiphilic properties: one end (the hydroxyl group) is polar and water-attracting, while the other end (the hydrocarbon chain) is non-polar and oil-attracting. This dual nature enables alcohol to interface with both substances simultaneously, reducing surface tension and creating conditions where water and oil can coexist in solution. Critically, the emulsion does not eliminate the distinct properties of water and oil; rather, it enables their functional unity while maintaining their differences.

This chemical principle suggests an intriguing question: might there exist a parallel mechanism for facilitating human reconciliation? Could there be a "social emulsifier" that, like alcohol in chemistry, creates conditions enabling deeply conflicted parties to move toward reconciliation while maintaining their distinct identities?

This article proposes that the biblical pattern of table fellowship specifically, Jesus' consistent and deliberate practice of sharing meals that included wine with tax collectors, sinners, and other conflicted or marginalized individuals provides precisely such a model. Wine, this study argues, functions as a social "emulsifier," physiologically reducing anxiety and defensiveness while symbolically creating shared vulnerability and equality. Most importantly, it establishes an environment where divine grace can work the transformation that human effort alone cannot accomplish.

### 2) Scholarly Context and Research Gap

Extensive scholarly literature addresses both biblical reconciliation theology and conflict resolution methodology. Works such as Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* provide profound theological frameworks for understanding reconciliation as participation in God's

reconciling work.[3] Sande's *The Peacemaker* offers practical biblical approaches to conflict resolution.[4] Augsburg's *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures* explores how cultural contexts shape reconciliation processes.[5]

Within biblical studies, scholarship on Jesus' table fellowship practices has illuminated their centrality to his ministry. Kenneth Bailey's work on Middle Eastern table customs reveals the profound social significance of shared meals in Jesus' cultural context.[6] Robert Karris famously observed that in Luke's Gospel, "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal." [7] Dennis Smith's research on Greco-Roman banquet practices provides crucial background for understanding New Testament meal scenes.[8] These studies establish that Jesus' table fellowship was neither incidental nor merely symbolic but constituted a primary ministry methodology.

However, despite this rich scholarly foundation, a significant gap remains: the specific role of wine within table fellowship as a mechanism for facilitating reconciliation has received minimal systematic attention in pastoral theology. While historical and cultural studies note wine's presence at ancient meals, and ethical discussions address alcohol consumption's propriety, few works integrate these observations with conflict resolution theory or neuroscience research on alcohol's social effects. The integration of biblical table fellowship patterns with chemical emulsification principles and neuroscience represents an entirely novel contribution bridging theology, science, and pastoral practice.

### 3) Research Questions and Objectives

This article addresses three interconnected research questions:

**Primary Question:** Does the biblical pattern of table fellowship, including moderate wine consumption, provide a theologically grounded and potentially effective model for facilitating pastoral reconciliation?

#### Secondary Questions:

1. What biblical warrant exists for wine's role in fellowship and reconciliation contexts, particularly in Jesus' ministry?
2. How does the chemical emulsification principle illuminate social reconciliation dynamics, and what are the neurological mechanisms supporting wine's facilitating role?

3. What theological and practical boundaries must govern this approach to ensure it remains grace-centered rather than technique-driven?

The article's objectives are fourfold: First, to establish robust biblical-theological foundations through careful exegesis of relevant Old Testament prescriptions and Jesus' table fellowship practices. Second, to explain the scientific mechanisms both chemical and neurological that support wine's potential facilitating role. Third, to develop a coherent theological framework that positions wine as contextual facilitator while maintaining grace as the substantive reconciling agent. Fourth, to provide practical implementation guidance including protocols, qualifications, and contraindications for pastoral application.

#### 4) *Methodological Approach*

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodology integrating three distinct but complementary approaches:

**Biblical-Theological Analysis:** The foundation of this study rests on careful exegetical work examining key Old Testament texts that prescribe wine for those in distress (Proverbs 31:6-7; Ecclesiastes 9:7, 10:19; Psalm 104:15) and comprehensive canonical synthesis of Jesus' table fellowship pattern across the Gospels (particularly Luke's Gospel, where the pattern appears most extensively). This analysis employs standard historical-grammatical exegesis while attending to ancient Near Eastern cultural contexts regarding hospitality, table customs, and wine's social functions. The study also examines biblical warnings against drunkenness to establish clear boundaries distinguishing appropriate use from abuse.

**Scientific Literature Review:** The study surveys relevant research from multiple scientific disciplines. From chemistry, it examines emulsification principles and amphiphilic molecular properties. From neuroscience, it reviews peer-reviewed research on alcohol's effects on key neurotransmitter systems (particularly GABA, dopamine, and cortisol) and their implications for social anxiety, communication, and conflict behavior. From social psychology, it considers research on disinhibition effects, shared physiological states, and interpersonal bonding mechanisms. This interdisciplinary scientific review aims not to reduce reconciliation to biological mechanisms but to understand how God's created order including human

neurobiology might support biblical patterns of peacemaking.

**Theological-Pastoral Integration:** The study develops a systematic theological framework ensuring that scientific insights serve rather than supplant theological convictions. It draws on doctrines of grace, creation, and incarnation to position wine as part of God's good creation appropriately used for facilitating (but not causing) reconciliation. Drawing on pastoral theology literature and consultation with experienced pastoral counselors, the study develops practical protocols for implementation while identifying necessary qualifications for practitioners and essential contraindications.

#### 5) *Scope and Delimitations*

This study focuses specifically on interpersonal relational conflicts between individuals or small groups within Christian communities where both parties demonstrate some willingness to pursue reconciliation. It does not address structural injustices requiring systemic change, conflicts involving unrepentant patterns of abuse where separation rather than reconciliation may be appropriate, legal disputes requiring formal adversarial processes, or conflicts where significant power imbalances create risks.

The study examines wine's role within the broader context of table fellowship, recognizing that the meal itself with its symbolism, shared experience, and time investment constitutes the primary reconciliation environment. Wine functions as one element within this larger framework, not as a standalone intervention.

Geographically and culturally, while the biblical and theological analysis aims for universal application, practical implementation guidance acknowledges that cultural contexts vary significantly regarding alcohol. The model requires contextualization for different cultural settings, with some contexts potentially requiring adaptation or alternative approaches.

#### 6) *Significance and Anticipated Contributions*

This research makes several anticipated contributions. Theologically, it recovers a neglected biblical pattern, demonstrating Jesus' deliberate and extensive use of table fellowship as primary ministry methodology. It provides fresh perspective on oft-neglected texts like Proverbs 31:6-7 and Ecclesiastes' affirmations of wine, showing their relevance for pastoral practice.

Interdisciplinarily, the study models faith-science dialogue by integrating biblical theology with chemistry and neuroscience in ways that respect each discipline's distinct contributions. It demonstrates how scientific understanding can illuminate (without reducing) theological concepts and practices.

Practically, the research offers pastoral counselors and church leaders a biblically grounded tool for addressing conflicts that resist conventional approaches. By providing clear protocols, qualifications, and contraindications, it equips practitioners for wise implementation while avoiding pitfalls.

Finally, the study addresses contemporary cultural conversations about alcohol in Christian communities. By carefully distinguishing biblical affirmation of moderate wine consumption from condemnation of drunkenness, it offers nuanced guidance moving beyond simplistic prohibition or permissiveness toward wise stewardship of God's gifts for kingdom purposes.

The following sections develop these contributions systematically, beginning with comprehensive biblical-theological foundations before proceeding to scientific analysis and practical integration.

## Materials and Methods

The proposal that wine functions as social facilitator in reconciliation contexts requires robust biblical warrant. This section establishes that foundation through careful exegesis of key Old Testament texts prescribing wine for distress, comprehensive analysis of Jesus' extensive table fellowship ministry, examination of broader biblical meal traditions, and acknowledgment of scriptural warnings against alcohol abuse. Together, these elements demonstrate that the model proposed here aligns with rather than contradicts biblical teaching and practice.

### A. Old Testament Prescriptions for Wine in Contexts of Distress

#### 1) Proverbs 31:6-7: Wine for the Bitter in Soul

The instruction in Proverbs 31:6-7 provides the most direct Old Testament prescription for wine's use in situations of suffering: "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress. Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their

misery no more" (WEB). This passage requires careful examination within its literary and theological context.

**Literary Context:** These verses appear within the instruction of Lemuel's mother, a queen teaching her royal son about leadership responsibilities (Prov 31:1-9). Immediately preceding verses 6-7, she warns: "It isn't for kings, Lemuel, it isn't for kings to drink wine, nor for princes to say, 'Where is strong drink?' lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the justice due to anyone who is afflicted" (vv. 4-5, WEB). The juxtaposition is deliberate: rulers must avoid wine lest it impair their judgment and cause injustice, but they should *provide* wine to those suffering extreme distress.

**Exegetical Analysis:** The Hebrew terminology illuminates the passage's intent. The phrase "those in bitter distress" translates *mar nephesh*, literally "bitter of soul." The root *mārar* describes intense bitterness; the same root appears when Naomi renames herself Marah, saying "the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20). This is not mild discomfort but profound anguish emotional, relational, and spiritual suffering that permeates one's entire being.

The verse distinguishes two groups: those "perishing" (*abad*, facing death or destruction) and those whose souls are bitter. While the first category clearly includes the terminally ill for whom wine provides palliative relief, the second category encompasses a broader range of suffering, including the emotional devastation characteristic of severe interpersonal conflict. The Hebrew *nephesh* (soul/person) indicates suffering that affects one's entire personhood, not merely physical pain.

The purpose clause "let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more" has sometimes been misinterpreted as advocating escapist intoxication. However, within wisdom literature's practical orientation, "forget" (*shākach*) and "remember no more" (*zākar*) more likely indicate relief that enables engagement rather than avoidance. Just as moderate pain relief enables a patient to participate in necessary activities, wine's anxiety-reducing effects can enable suffering individuals to engage in healing processes they might otherwise be too distressed to undertake. The passage advocates compassionate provision of relief, not encouraged drunkenness.

**Theological Principle:** This text establishes a principle of compassionate use of wine for legitimate

relief in extreme circumstances. Importantly, it does not prescribe wine for rulers or those bearing decision-making responsibilities during their functioning (v. 4-5), but rather for those whose suffering is so acute that basic functioning is impaired. Applied to conflict situations, parties experiencing the "bitter soul" of prolonged interpersonal strife constitute precisely those for whom this compassionate provision applies. Wine offers not escape from necessary reconciliation work but relief from anxiety levels that would otherwise prevent engagement in that work.

### 2) Ecclesiastes 9:7-8: Divine Approval for Joyful Consumption

Ecclesiastes 9:7 provides a dramatically different but complementary perspective: "Go your way eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do" (WEB). Unlike Proverbs 31:6-7's focus on suffering relief, this text affirms wine consumption as appropriate response to God's gifts, carrying explicit divine approval.

**Literary Context:** This verse appears within Ecclesiastes' *carpe diem* passages (9:7-10), which counsel enjoying life's legitimate pleasures while opportunity exists. The Teacher has just concluded that no one knows what comes after death (9:5-6), making present enjoyment of God's gifts all the more imperative. The passage continues: "Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love" (vv. 8-9). Wine consumption appears within a cluster of legitimate life enjoyments not as guilty indulgence but as proper stewardship of God's gifts.

**Exegetical Analysis:** The imperative "go" (*lēk*) followed by "eat...drink" creates urgency this is command, not mere permission. "With joy" (*simchāh*) and "with a merry heart" (*tōb lēb*) indicate emotional states of gladness and contentment that God desires for His people. These terms consistently carry positive connotations in Hebrew Scripture, describing appropriate responses to God's goodness.

The crucial phrase "God has already approved" uses the verb *rāṣāh*, indicating divine pleasure and acceptance. This is not grudging permission but God's positive delight in His people's enjoyment of His gifts. The perfect tense ("has already approved") suggests settled divine disposition rather than contingent approval. God's acceptance precedes and grounds human enjoyment; it is not earned through the act but presupposed within it.

**Theological Significance:** This text establishes that moderate wine consumption, far from being spiritually suspect, constitutes an appropriate response to God's creation gifts and receives His explicit approval. When understood alongside Proverbs 31:6-7, a balanced picture emerges: wine serves both as compassionate relief in suffering and as celebration of God's goodness in blessing. Both contexts suffering relief and joyful celebration prove relevant to reconciliation settings, where parties experience both distress over broken relationships and (potentially) joy in restoration.

The text's pairing of wine with other positive elements (food, clean garments, oil, marriage love) situates wine consumption within holistic human flourishing. Wine is neither elevated to supreme importance nor denigrated as necessary evil; it takes its place among God's good gifts meant for wise use and grateful enjoyment.

### 3) Ecclesiastes 10:19 and Psalm 104:15: Wine's Functional Design

Two additional texts affirm wine as functioning according to divine design. Ecclesiastes 10:19 states matter-of-factly: "A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry; and money is the answer to all things" (WEB). Despite the verse's concluding ironic comment on money, the first two clauses present straightforward observations: feasts serve social bonding through laughter, and wine serves its designed purpose of creating merriment (*śāmach*, gladness/joy).

Psalm 104:15 places wine within creation theology: God "causes the grass to grow for the livestock, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may produce food out of the earth, wine that makes the heart of man glad, oil to make his face to shine, and bread that strengthens man's heart" (WEB). Wine appears in parallel with bread (food staple) and oil (grooming/health) all presented as divine provisions for human need and flourishing.

**Theological Framework:** These texts establish that wine's joy-inducing properties are not accidental side effects but intentional divine design. God created wine to "gladden the heart" a purpose it fulfills when used appropriately. This design-based understanding prevents both demonization (wine as inherently evil) and idolatry (wine as ultimate source of joy). Wine functions as means, not end; it facilitates human gladness while pointing beyond itself to the Creator who provides all good gifts.

### B. Jesus' Table Fellowship Ministry

The Old Testament texts provide foundational principles, but Jesus' ministry practice demonstrates their application. Jesus' extensive use of table fellowship including wine consumption as primary ministry methodology proves central to understanding reconciliation processes.

### 1) *The Ministry Pattern Established: Wedding at Cana*

Jesus' inaugural miracle warrants careful attention: transforming water into wine at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11). This first sign's significance extends beyond demonstrating divine power; it establishes wine provision as foundational to Jesus' ministry identity and priorities.

**Narrative Analysis:** The steward's comment to the bridegroom reveals crucial details: "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now" (v. 10, WEB). This statement indicates that (1) the wine Jesus made was fermented wine of notable quality, not grape juice; (2) guests had already "drunk freely" (*methyō*, the same root meaning "be drunk" elsewhere, though here likely indicating generous consumption rather than drunkenness); and (3) Jesus provided approximately 120-180 gallons (six stone jars of 20-30 gallons each) far exceeding immediate need.

**Theological Significance:** That Jesus chose this as His first miracle signals wine's importance in His ministry conception. He could have inaugurated His ministry with healing, exorcism, or teaching all of which come later. Instead, He begins by ensuring a wedding celebration continues with abundant, high-quality wine. This choice reveals Jesus' values: He cares about human joy, social celebration, and community fellowship. Wine provision serves these goods, marking it as ministry tool rather than necessary evil.

The abundance theme proves significant. Jesus provides far more wine than needed, echoing Old Testament images of messianic abundance (Amos 9:13-14; Joel 3:18). This first sign points toward the kingdom's generous provision and joyful character a kingdom where wine flows freely at the messianic banquet.

**Implications for Reconciliation:** If Jesus viewed wine negatively or problematically, this miracle becomes inexplicable. The text shows no hint of concern about alcohol's presence or quantity. Rather, Jesus ensures that celebration continues and

relationships flourish through shared festivity. This same principle using wine within fellowship contexts to facilitate relationship applies to reconciliation settings where restoration itself becomes cause for celebration.

### 2) *The Reputation: "Eating and Drinking" as Ministry Strategy*

Jesus' critics provide unwitting testimony to His ministry pattern: "For John the Baptizer came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (Luke 7:33-34, WEB). This accusation, though slanderous in calling Jesus a drunkard, reflects observable behavioral patterns.

**Comparative Analysis:** The explicit comparison with John the Baptist highlights Jesus' deliberate methodological choice. John practiced asceticism, avoiding festive meals and wine. Jesus did the opposite regularly participating in meals with wine. Both choices were intentional ministry strategies suited to their respective callings. John came calling for repentance in the wilderness; Jesus came proclaiming kingdom arrival through fellowship at tables.

**The "Eating and Drinking" Characterization:** The phrase "eating and drinking" (*esthiōn kai pinōn*) functions as summary descriptor of Jesus' ministry approach. It parallels other characterizations: John came "in the way of righteousness" (Matt 21:32); Jesus came "eating and drinking." This is not incidental behavior but primary methodology.

Significantly, Jesus neither defended Himself against the "eating and drinking" characterization nor modified His behavior in response to criticism. He owned this aspect of His ministry, suggesting He viewed shared meals including wine as integral to His reconciling mission.

**The "Friend of Tax Collectors and Sinners":** This designation connects directly with eating and drinking. Jesus' reputation as "friend" (*philos*) to social outcasts derived primarily from His willingness to share meals with them an act carrying profound social significance in His cultural context. Table fellowship signaled acceptance, equality, and intimate relationship. By eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus demonstrated radical inclusion that scandalized religious authorities but embodied His mission to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

### 3) *Multiple Meal Accounts: Consistent Pattern of Table Fellowship for Reconciliation*

The Gospels, particularly Luke, document numerous instances where Jesus used shared meals as contexts for reconciliation, teaching, and transformation. Several accounts merit detailed attention.

**Levi's Feast (Luke 5:27-32):** Immediately following Matthew/Levi's call, Jesus attended a great feast where "there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining with them" (v. 29, WEB). The Pharisees and scribes complained: "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (v. 30). Jesus' response reveals His theological framework: "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (vv. 31-32).

This exchange establishes several principles: First, the meal setting is not incidental to Jesus' mission but central to it. Second, eating and drinking with outcasts constitutes the primary means by which Jesus calls them to repentance. Third, Jesus views such fellowship as spiritually therapeutic like medicine for sickness. The meal creates conditions where transformation becomes possible.

**Zacchaeus's Home (Luke 19:1-10):** Jesus' self-invitation to dine with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, provoked crowd grumbling: "He has gone in to lodge with a man who is a sinner" (v. 7). Yet this meal became the context for Zacchaeus's dramatic repentance and restitution. Jesus declared, "Today, salvation has come to this house" (v. 9) with "today" marking the day they shared a meal.

The narrative structure reveals the meal's mediating role: Jesus invites Himself to dinner → meal occurs (implied) → Zacchaeus announces restitution → Jesus pronounces salvation. The shared meal provided relational space where grace could penetrate Zacchaeus's defenses, enabling transformation impossible through public preaching or formal rebuke.

**Simon the Pharisee's House (Luke 7:36-50):** Even when dining with a Pharisee, Jesus transformed the meal into grace demonstration. An uninvited woman (likely a prostitute) entered, weeping, and anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. Simon's internal criticism of Jesus' acceptance of her touch prompted Jesus' parable contrasting shallow and deep love responses to forgiveness.

This account demonstrates Jesus' use of table fellowship for teaching, reconciliation, and boundary-

breaking. The meal setting provided opportunity for confronting self-righteousness while extending radical welcome to the excluded. Jesus used the social dynamics of the meal who's invited, who's honored, who's excluded to communicate kingdom values.

**The Sinful Woman (Luke 7:36-50):** Building on the previous account, this passage shows Jesus using a meal at a Pharisee's house to demonstrate grace toward a woman known as a sinner. Despite Simon's criticism, Jesus defended her actions and pronounced her sins forgiven. The meal context enabled this grace demonstration in ways public ministry could not.

**Eating with Tax Collectors (Matthew 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17):** Multiple accounts emphasize Jesus' practice of reclining at meals with tax collectors. Mark notes "many tax collectors and sinners sat down with Jesus and his disciples" (Mark 2:15). The repeated pattern across Synoptic Gospels confirms this was not occasional but characteristic.

### 4) *The Last Supper: Wine and Covenant Reconciliation*

Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper establishes wine's ultimate theological significance for reconciliation. At the Passover meal, Jesus took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins. But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's Kingdom" (Matt 26:28-29, WEB).

**Theological Framework:** Jesus chose wine to symbolize His blood the means of covenant establishment and reconciliation between God and humanity. If wine were inherently problematic or spiritually suspect, Jesus would not have selected it for this supremely significant ritual. Instead, He elevated wine to sacramental status, making it the ongoing symbol of redemption throughout church history.

**Eschatological Dimension:** Jesus' promise to drink wine "anew" in the Father's Kingdom (v. 29) projects wine consumption into the eschatological future. The kingdom banquet will include wine reinforcing that wine is not temporary concession to fallen world but enduring element of God's created order appropriately enjoyed in redeemed creation.

**Implications for Human Reconciliation:** If wine appropriately symbolizes divine-human reconciliation at its deepest level, it surely can serve human-human reconciliation as well. The pattern Jesus established—

using wine within covenant meal contexts for reconciliation applies analogously to interpersonal conflicts. Just as Christ's blood enables God-human peace, wine-accompanied meals can facilitate environments where grace enables human-human peace.

### C. Table Fellowship in Broader Biblical Tradition

Jesus' table fellowship practice builds on established Old Testament patterns, suggesting continuity with God's longstanding use of shared meals for relationship building and covenant establishment.

#### 1) Old Testament Precedents

**Abraham's Hospitality (Genesis 18:1-8):** Abraham's elaborate meal for three visitors (later revealed as divine messengers) establishes hospitality and shared meals as means of encountering God. The narrative emphasizes food preparation details, suggesting meal significance transcends mere physical nourishment.

**Covenant Meal at Sinai (Exodus 24:9-11):** Perhaps the most remarkable Old Testament meal scene occurs when Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders "saw the God of Israel" and then "ate and drank" (v. 11). The most intimate covenant moment in Israel's history includes eating and drinking in God's presence. This establishes shared meals as appropriate contexts for the most sacred divine-human interactions.

**Fellowship Offering (Leviticus 3):** The *shelamim* (peace/fellowship offering) uniquely included eating meat from the sacrifice in God's presence. Worshiper, priests, and symbolically God all "shared" the meal. This sacrificial system component institutionalized the principle that fellowship meals appropriately express and deepen covenant relationships.

**The Nazirite Exception (Numbers 6:1-21):** The Nazirite vow's prohibition of wine and grapes (vv. 3-4) proves the rule by exception. The vow required temporary abstention precisely because wine consumption was normal practice. The vow concluded with permission to drink wine again (v. 20), suggesting wine abstention was extraordinary measure for specific purposes, not general spiritual ideal.

#### 2) Prophetic Vision of Eschatological Banquet

The prophets consistently employ banquet imagery including wine for depicting eschatological restoration and God's ultimate triumph.

**Isaiah 25:6:** "In this mountain, Yahweh of Armies will make all peoples a feast of choice meat, a feast of

choice wines, of choice meat full of marrow, of well refined choice wines" (WEB). The repeated emphasis on "choice" wines underscores quality and abundance. Ultimate divine victory is celebrated with wine feast.

**Isaiah 55:1:** "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters! Come, he who has no money, buy and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost" (WEB). This invitation to free wine parallels gospel invitation both offered as grace gifts.

**Amos 9:13-14:** The restoration promise includes: "the mountains will drop sweet wine...I will bring my people Israel back from captivity, and they will rebuild the ruined cities...plant vineyards, and drink their wine" (WEB). Wine production and consumption characterize restored relationship with God.

These prophetic texts establish wine as appropriate symbol and substance for celebrating reconciliation and restoration. If Scripture consistently employs wine imagery for God's ultimate redemptive purposes, its use in facilitating human reconciliation aligns with rather than contradicts biblical trajectory.

### D. Biblical Boundaries: Warnings Against Drunkenness

The biblical affirmation of wine requires balancing with equally clear warnings against abuse. Scripture's tension affirming wine while condemning drunkenness establishes boundaries for appropriate use.

#### 1) New Testament Warnings

Paul commands: "Don't be drunken with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18, WEB). The contrast indicates mutual exclusivity: drunkenness and Spirit-filling oppose each other. "Dissipation" (*asōtia*, reckless living) characterizes drunkenness's effect, contrasting with Spirit-filled self-control.

Paul lists drunkards among those excluded from God's kingdom: "Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's Kingdom?...nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortionists, will inherit God's Kingdom" (1 Cor 6:9-10, WEB). This places alcohol abuse in same category as theft and extortion serious sin with eternal consequences.

Leadership qualifications explicitly address alcohol: overseers must not be "given to wine" (1 Tim 3:3), and deacons "not given to much wine" (1 Tim

3:8). These requirements acknowledge legitimate use while warning against excess.

## 2) Old Testament Warnings

Proverbs provides extensive warnings: "Wine is a mocker and beer is a brawler. Whoever is led astray by them is not wise" (Prov 20:1, WEB). The personification suggests wine can deceive and mislead when misused.

Proverbs 23:29-35 offers graphic description of drunkenness's effects, concluding: "Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will imagine confusing things" (v. 33). This extended warning demonstrates Scripture's awareness of alcohol's dangers when abused.

Isaiah pronounces woe on drunkards: "Woe to those who rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; who stay late into the night, until wine inflames them!...Woe to those who are mighty to drink wine, and champions at mixing strong drink" (Isa 5:11, 22, WEB). These woes target those prioritizing drinking over proper responsibilities.

## 3) Theological Balance

These warnings establish clear parameters: Scripture forbids drunkenness and alcohol abuse while permitting even commending moderate wine consumption. The distinction parallels other created goods: food is blessed, gluttony condemned; marriage celebrated, adultery forbidden; rest appropriate, sloth sinful. The pattern remains consistent: good gifts require stewardship; abuse violates God's design.

This biblical tension requires careful pastoral application. The reconciliation model proposed here operates strictly within moderation boundaries, using wine as social facilitator while maintaining sobriety necessary for genuine conflict resolution. Wine serves as means toward reconciliation, never as an end in itself.

## SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS: THE EMULSIFICATION PRINCIPLE

The biblical pattern examined above invites scientific investigation into mechanisms that might explain wine's facilitating role in reconciliation contexts. This section explores three interconnected scientific domains: chemistry's emulsification principle, neuroscience research on alcohol's effects on social behavior, and social psychology's understanding of disinhibition and bonding. Together, these perspectives illuminate how God's created order

including human neurobiology supports the biblical patterns identified earlier.

## A. Chemistry: The Emulsification Principle

### 1) 3.1.1 The Fundamental Problem: Water and Oil Immiscibility

At molecular level, water and oil remain separated due to fundamental differences in polarity. Water molecules ( $H_2O$ ) possess bent molecular geometry creating unequal charge distribution. The oxygen atom's higher electronegativity pulls electron density toward itself, creating partial negative charge, while hydrogen atoms carry partial positive charge. This polarity enables water molecules to form hydrogen bonds with each other relatively strong intermolecular attractions that give water its unique properties.

Oil, conversely, consists primarily of long-chain hydrocarbons molecules composed of carbon and hydrogen atoms sharing electrons relatively equally. This equal sharing produces no charge separation; oil molecules are non-polar. Without charged regions, oil molecules cannot form hydrogen bonds with water. Instead, they interact through weak London dispersion forces temporary, induced dipole attractions far weaker than hydrogen bonding.

When water and oil are mixed, the fundamental principle "like dissolves like" governs behavior. Water molecules preferentially interact with other water molecules through hydrogen bonding. Oil molecules, unable to participate in hydrogen bonding, cluster together through dispersion forces. The interface between water and oil possesses high surface tension the system's attempt to minimize energetically unfavorable contact between incompatible substances. The result: separation into distinct phases, with oil typically floating above denser water.

This chemical reality provides apt metaphor for interpersonal conflict. Conflicted parties, like water and oil, possess incompatible "natures" different values, communication styles, worldviews, or interests that prevent natural unity. Surface tension the energy required to maintain separation remains lower than the energy required for mixing. Attempts to force mixing through external pressure may produce temporary dispersion, but absent some intervening factor, the system reverts to separation once pressure releases.

## 2) *The Solution: Alcohol as Amphiphilic Emulsifier*

Alcohol molecules, particularly ethanol ( $C_2H_5OH$ ), possess unique dual character enabling them to function as emulsifiers. Each ethanol molecule contains two distinct regions: a polar hydroxyl group ( $-OH$ ) and a non-polar ethyl group ( $C_2H_5$ ). The hydroxyl group, with oxygen's high electronegativity, creates charge separation similar to water, enabling hydrogen bonding. The ethyl group's hydrocarbon chain resembles oil's non-polar character, interacting through dispersion forces.

This amphiphilic ("both-loving") property enables ethanol to interface simultaneously with both water and oil. The hydroxyl end orients toward water, forming hydrogen bonds, while the hydrocarbon end orients toward oil, interacting through dispersion forces. When sufficient ethanol is added to a water-oil mixture, ethanol molecules position themselves at interfaces, reducing surface tension the energetic penalty for water-oil contact.

With reduced surface tension, oil can disperse throughout water as small droplets stabilized by surrounding ethanol molecules. Each droplet's surface features ethanol's hydrocarbon ends facing inward (toward oil) and hydroxyl ends facing outward (toward water). This orientation creates stable emulsion where previously immiscible substances coexist in single phase. Critically, the emulsion does not eliminate water and oil's distinct properties water remains water, oil remains oil but enables their functional unity within shared system.

The process requires appropriate ethanol concentration. Too little produces unstable emulsion quickly separating. Too much shifts system toward different problems potentially dissolving one phase into the other or creating new instabilities. An optimal window exists where ethanol sufficiently reduces surface tension without introducing other complications.

## 3) *Social Analogy and Its Limits*

This chemical model illuminates conflict dynamics while respecting analogy's limits. Conflicted parties possess incompatible relational "chemistries" patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that maintain separation. The "surface tension" manifests as defensive barriers, hostile attributions, and communication breakdowns that make reconciliation energetically unfavorable. Traditional mediation

attempts often function like external pressure temporarily forcing contact that reverts to separation once pressure releases.

Wine, functioning as social emulsifier, possesses properties interfacing with both parties' psychological states. Its physiological effects (examined below) reduce anxiety and defensiveness lowering relational "surface tension." Within appropriate concentration range (moderate consumption), wine creates conditions enabling previously impossible dialogue and connection. Like chemical emulsifiers, wine doesn't eliminate parties' distinct identities but enables their functional unity reconciliation that honors rather than erases differences.

The analogy's limits require acknowledgment. Unlike passive chemical molecules, humans possess agency, volition, and capacity for grace-empowered transformation. Wine's role remains purely facilitative creating favorable conditions without determining outcomes. Chemical emulsification proceeds mechanistically; social reconciliation requires willing participation and divine grace. The analogy illuminates without reducing; it explains mechanisms without claiming sufficiency.

## *B. Neuroscience: Alcohol's Effects on Social Behavior*

Modern neuroscience research illuminates neurobiological mechanisms through which moderate alcohol consumption affects social interaction, anxiety, and communication. Three neurotransmitter systems prove particularly relevant: GABA, dopamine, and cortisol.

### 1) *GABA System Enhancement*

Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) serves as the central nervous system's primary inhibitory neurotransmitter. While excitatory neurotransmitters like glutamate increase neuronal firing, GABA reduces it, functioning as the brain's "brake pedal." GABA receptors, distributed throughout the brain but concentrated in areas governing emotion and social behavior, respond to GABA binding by opening chloride channels. Chloride influx hyperpolarizes neurons, making them less likely to fire. This inhibitory activity proves essential for preventing neural overexcitation and maintaining balanced brain function.

Alcohol enhances GABA's effects through multiple mechanisms. It increases GABA release from

presynaptic neurons, extends GABA's time in synaptic clefts by inhibiting reuptake, and directly enhances GABA receptor sensitivity particularly GABA-A receptors. These combined effects amplify inhibitory signaling throughout neural circuits governing anxiety, fear responses, and social behavior.

Research demonstrates dose-dependent relationships between alcohol consumption and GABA-mediated anxiolysis. At blood alcohol concentrations (BAC) of 0.02-0.04%, corresponding to one standard drink, subtle anxiety reduction occurs without significant cognitive impairment.[9] BAC of 0.04-0.06% (two drinks) produces more pronounced anxiolytic effects while maintaining judgment and decision-making capacity.[10] Above 0.08%, impairment becomes significant, with judgment, memory, and motor control deteriorating the threshold defining legal intoxication in most jurisdictions.

For conflict resolution contexts, GABA enhancement's implications prove significant. Social anxiety fear of negative evaluation, concern about saying wrong things, worry about conflict escalation activates neural circuits that GABA modulates. Moderate alcohol consumption, by enhancing GABA activity, reduces this anxiety without eliminating appropriate social awareness. Parties experiencing intense defensive anxiety may find moderate alcohol enables engagement in difficult conversations they would otherwise avoid.

Importantly, GABA's effects differ qualitatively from anxiolytic medications. Benzodiazepines (Valium, Xanax) also enhance GABA activity but typically produce more sedation and greater cognitive impairment at anxiolytic doses. Alcohol's effects, at moderate levels, reduce social anxiety while maintaining alertness and cognitive function necessary for meaningful dialogue. This distinct profile makes moderate alcohol consumption potentially suitable for time-limited reconciliation sessions in ways that anxiolytic medications would not be.

## 2) Dopamine Release and Social Reward

Alcohol stimulates dopamine release in the brain's mesolimbic reward pathway, particularly the nucleus accumbens a region central to motivation, pleasure, and reinforcement learning. This dopamine release creates positive subjective experiences and reinforces behaviors associated with alcohol consumption.

The mechanism involves alcohol's effects on ventral tegmental area (VTA) neurons. Alcohol

inhibits inhibitory interneurons that normally constrain VTA dopaminergic neurons. This disinhibition increases dopaminergic neuron firing rates, elevating dopamine levels in projection areas including nucleus accumbens, prefrontal cortex, and amygdala.[11] Peak dopamine elevation occurs at BAC levels of 0.04-0.08%, corresponding to moderate consumption ranges.[12]

Dopamine's role in social behavior extends beyond simple pleasure. It signals reward prediction, motivates approach behavior, and facilitates social bonding. When dopamine release accompanies social interaction as occurs during alcohol-accompanied conversations the brain associates that interaction with reward, increasing motivation to maintain engagement despite difficulty. In conflict resolution contexts where parties typically experience social interaction as punishing (associating conversation with stress and negativity), alcohol-stimulated dopamine release can shift valence toward more positive associations.

Research on social drinking demonstrates that shared alcohol consumption enhances perceived similarity and social bonding between individuals. Studies using fMRI show that moderate alcohol increases activity in brain regions associated with social reward processing when individuals engage in cooperative tasks.[13] This neurobiological effect complements the social-cultural meanings of shared drinking, creating multi-level bonding mechanisms.

For reconciliation purposes, dopamine's effects offer potential benefits. Parties more willing to persist through difficult conversations, more motivated to find common ground, and more likely to experience moments of connection amid conflict may find pathways toward resolution that pure willpower alone cannot sustain. The reward system's engagement creates positive feedback loops reinforcing reconciliation efforts.

## 3) Cortisol Reduction and Stress Response Modulation

Cortisol, the primary glucocorticoid stress hormone, elevates during psychological stress, mobilizing energy resources and preparing organisms for threat response. While adaptive for acute physical threats, chronic cortisol elevation typical in prolonged interpersonal conflicts impairs cognitive functions crucial for reconciliation.

Elevated cortisol negatively affects prefrontal cortex function, reducing capacity for: (1) perspective-

taking and theory of mind understanding others' mental states; (2) emotional regulation managing one's own emotional responses; (3) cognitive flexibility considering alternative interpretations and solutions; (4) working memory maintaining multiple considerations simultaneously. These impairments make productive conflict resolution extremely difficult.

Research demonstrates that moderate alcohol consumption reduces cortisol levels, particularly in stressful social situations.[14] Studies measuring salivary cortisol before and after moderate alcohol consumption show 20-30% reductions at BAC levels of 0.04-0.06%.[15] This effect appears mediated through alcohol's impact on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which governs stress hormone release.

The cortisol reduction's functional significance for conflict resolution cannot be overstated. Lower cortisol correlates with improved prefrontal cortex function, enabling better emotional regulation, enhanced perspective-taking, and increased cognitive flexibility precisely the capacities that chronic conflict impairs and reconciliation requires. By temporarily reducing stress hormone levels, moderate alcohol may restore cognitive and emotional capabilities that parties possess when not under stress but struggle to access during conflict-induced anxiety.

However, this effect shows inverted-U relationship: moderate alcohol reduces cortisol beneficially, while excessive alcohol elevates cortisol (particularly during hangover/withdrawal), compounding rather than relieving stress. This underscores the critical importance of moderation.

#### **4) The Optimal Window: Moderation Versus Intoxication**

The neurobiological research reviewed above reveals a crucial pattern: alcohol's effects on social behavior follow dose-dependent curves with optimal ranges for facilitating communication while avoiding impairment. This "optimal window" concept proves essential for responsible application.

#### **Low Dose (BAC 0.02-0.04%, approximately 1 drink):**

- Minimal GABA enhancement → slight anxiety reduction
- Mild dopamine release → modest mood elevation

- Minimal cortisol reduction
- No significant cognitive impairment
- Subjective effects: mild relaxation, slight talkativeness

#### **Moderate Dose (BAC 0.04-0.06%, approximately 2-3 drinks over 2 hours):**

- Significant GABA enhancement → pronounced anxiety reduction
- Peak dopamine release → positive mood, increased social motivation
- Meaningful cortisol reduction → improved stress management
- Cognitive function largely preserved
- Subjective effects: relaxation, increased sociability, reduced inhibition
- **OPTIMAL RANGE FOR FACILITATION**

#### **Approaching Intoxication (BAC 0.06-0.08%):**

- Strong GABA effects → risk of excessive disinhibition
- Sustained dopamine elevation
- Beginning cognitive impairment → judgment affected
- Motor coordination beginning to decline
- **UPPER BOUNDARY—AVOID EXCEEDING**

#### **Intoxication (BAC >0.08%):**

- Excessive disinhibition → inappropriate behavior
- Impaired judgment → poor decision-making
- Memory formation impaired → difficulty recalling agreements
- Emotional lability → risk of conflict escalation
- Motor impairment
- **CLEARLY CONTRAINDICATED**

This dose-response relationship establishes clear parameters for responsible implementation. The goal is reaching the moderate dose range where neurobiological benefits maximize while impairment

remains minimal not achieving intoxication, which undermines rather than facilitates reconciliation.

Practical implementation requires attention to individual differences affecting BAC. Factors including body weight, sex, food consumption, drinking speed, and alcohol tolerance influence BAC for given consumption. Guidelines suggesting 1-3 standard drinks over 2-3 hours with substantial food provide reasonable framework, but monitoring subjective effects and maintaining conservative approach proves essential.

### ***C. Social Psychology: Disinhibition and Interpersonal Connection***

Beyond neurobiology, social psychology research illuminates alcohol's effects on social interaction, self-disclosure, and interpersonal bonding.

#### ***1) Alcohol Myopia and Reduced Self-Monitoring***

Steele and Josephs's "alcohol myopia" theory proposes that alcohol narrows attentional focus, making individuals less able to process multiple stimuli simultaneously and more focused on immediate, salient cues.[16] In social contexts, this produces reduced self-monitoring decreased attention to how one is being perceived and whether one's behavior meets social norms.

Research demonstrates that moderate alcohol consumption reduces activity in brain regions associated with self-referential processing and social anxiety.[17] This neurobiological change manifests behaviorally as decreased self-consciousness and increased willingness to express authentic thoughts and feelings. The ancient maxim "in vino veritas" (in wine, truth) reflects millennia of observation that alcohol facilitates truthfulness not by compelling honesty but by reducing cognitive resources devoted to impression management and self-censorship.

For conflict resolution, this effect offers double-edged potential. Reduced self-monitoring enables more authentic expression parties more readily voice genuine concerns, feelings, and needs rather than maintaining careful facades. This authenticity can facilitate breakthrough when conflicts involve unexpressed grievances or masked underlying issues. However, excessive disinhibition risks inappropriate expression lacking necessary social awareness. The distinction between helpful authenticity and harmful lack of filter depends on remaining within moderate

consumption ranges where self-awareness diminishes but does not disappear.

#### ***2) Shared Physiological State and Social Bonding***

When individuals consume alcohol together, they experience shared physiological state similar neurological effects, comparable emotional shifts, and synchronized timing of these changes. Research on interpersonal synchrony demonstrates that shared physiological states increase feelings of connection, similarity, and trust between individuals.[18]

This bonding mechanism operates through multiple pathways. First, perceived similarity increases both parties experience alcohol's effects, creating common ground transcending conflict content. Second, temporal synchrony emerges mood shifts, energy changes, and attentional focus evolve on similar trajectories. Third, mutual vulnerability develops both parties experience some reduction in control and defensive capacity, creating equality that power imbalances might otherwise prevent.

Studies examining alcohol consumption in social contexts show that shared drinking increases self-disclosure, enhances perceived intimacy, and strengthens group cohesion compared to individual drinking or abstinence.[19] These effects prove particularly pronounced when alcohol consumption occurs in contexts emphasizing communal experience precisely the character of shared meals.

#### ***3) The Context Dependency of Alcohol's Social Effects***

Crucially, alcohol's social effects depend heavily on context. Alcohol consumed alone, in hostile environments, or in purely recreational settings produces different outcomes than alcohol consumed in intentional fellowship contexts with shared purpose. The reconciliation model proposed here emphasizes this context dependency: wine functions as facilitator specifically within carefully structured table fellowship settings emphasizing grace, forgiveness, and restoration not in casual drinking settings lacking these frameworks.

Research distinguishes "social facilitation" effects of alcohol enhanced communication, increased bonding, reduced tension from "social disruption" effects conflict escalation, aggression, inappropriate behavior. The key difference lies not in alcohol itself but in social context, consumption patterns, and cultural meanings. Moderate consumption in

supportive, structured settings produces facilitation; excessive consumption or hostile contexts produce disruption.

This context-dependency explains why the model requires careful implementation protocols, appropriate mediator qualifications, and clear boundaries. Wine's neurobiological effects remain constant, but their social-behavioral manifestations vary dramatically depending on context. The table fellowship framework with its theological grounding, intentional structure, and grace-centered purpose creates contexts where wine's facilitating potential can be realized while risks are minimized.

## Results and Discussion

### THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL INTEGRATION

The biblical pattern and scientific mechanisms examined in previous sections require careful theological integration to prevent reductionism and ensure grace-centered application. This section establishes the theological framework positioning wine as contextual facilitator while maintaining grace as the substantive reconciling agent, develops practical implementation protocols, articulates clear boundaries distinguishing appropriate use from abuse, and identifies essential contraindications and limitations.

#### *A. Wine as Facilitator, Grace as Agent: The Critical Distinction*

The neuroscience research demonstrating alcohol's effects on anxiety, social bonding, and communication might tempt toward therapeutic reductionism viewing wine itself as the solution to interpersonal conflict. Such reductionism betrays both theological convictions and experiential reality. This section establishes the proper relationship between wine's facilitating role and grace's transformative work.

##### *1) Wine's Legitimate but Limited Role*

Wine's contribution to reconciliation operates entirely at the level of environmental facilitation. Through the neurobiological mechanisms examined above, moderate wine consumption creates optimal conditions for difficult conversations by: (1) reducing physiological anxiety that otherwise triggers defensive responses; (2) lowering psychological barriers that prevent authentic communication; (3) creating shared vulnerability and equality between parties; (4) enhancing motivation to persist through difficult dialogue; and (5) symbolically expressing

commitment to reconciliation through shared covenant meal.

However, wine cannot and does not: (1) produce genuine conviction of sin or authentic repentance; (2) create capacity for forgiveness when hearts remain hardened by bitterness; (3) transform fundamental character patterns or relational dynamics; (4) generate grace, love, or spiritual renewal; or (5) guarantee reconciliation regardless of participants' willingness. These deeper transformations belong exclusively to God's grace operating through the Holy Spirit's ministry.

The distinction parallels other created goods' proper use in ministry. Music facilitates worship but does not replace the Spirit's work in adoration. Church architecture creates conducive environments for corporate gathering but does not substitute for genuine fellowship. Biblical translation makes Scripture accessible but does not replace illumination. Similarly, wine facilitates conditions for reconciliation but does not replace grace as the reconciling agent.

Augustine's distinction between "using" and "enjoying" proves helpful. We appropriately "use" created goods for God's purposes while "enjoying" only God himself as ultimate good. Wine serves as means toward the end of restored relationship and glorified God never as end in itself. When wine becomes object of ultimate concern rather than tool for kingdom purposes, it shifts from legitimate use to idolatry.

##### *2) Grace as the Indispensable Agent*

True reconciliation requires divine grace operating at multiple levels. First, prevenient grace initiates the reconciliation process, creating willingness in previously unwilling hearts. The very fact that conflicted parties agree to pursue reconciliation through table fellowship reflects grace at work, overcoming natural human tendencies toward bitterness and avoidance.

Second, convincing grace works through the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of sin recognition of one's own contributions to conflict rather than exclusive focus on the other's faults. This conviction cannot be manufactured through technique or facilitated through neurochemistry; it requires sovereign divine work penetrating defensive structures and illuminating truth about ourselves that we naturally resist.

Third, empowering grace enables what human will alone cannot accomplish: genuine forgiveness of deep wounds, release of just grievances, and reconciliation with those who have caused real harm. Paul's words apply directly: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13, WEB). The "working out" involves human cooperation; the fundamental "working in" remains God's prerogative.

Fourth, sustaining grace maintains reconciliation beyond initial resolution. Conflicts involving long-standing patterns require ongoing transformation that single conversations however facilitated cannot accomplish. Only grace sustains the long obedience in the same direction that lasting reconciliation requires.

The proper theological framework positions wine as creating optimal environmental conditions where grace can work removing impediments, lowering barriers, and establishing contexts conducive to the Spirit's ministry. Wine prepares soil; grace plants seeds. Wine opens doors; grace enters and transforms. Wine facilitates space; grace fills that space with divine presence and power.

### 3) Christ's Presence as Essential

Jesus' promise bears directly on the proposed model: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them" (Matt 18:20, WEB). This verse appears within Jesus' teaching on conflict resolution (Matt 18:15-20), establishing that Christ's presence constitutes the decisive factor in reconciliation processes.

The phrase "in my name" (*eis to emon onoma*) signifies more than casual invocation; it indicates gathering with Jesus' authority, for His purposes, and under His lordship. Table fellowship without Christ's presence however pleasant the meal or effective the wine's neurobiological effects remains merely social drinking. Table fellowship with Christ's presence, intentionally invoking His reconciling work and submitting to His lordship, becomes sacred space where divine power operates.

This theological conviction requires practical expression. Reconciliation sessions must include: (1) explicit prayer invoking Christ's presence and acknowledging dependence on His grace; (2) Scripture reading, particularly texts addressing forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace; (3) theological framing that

positions the entire process as participation in Christ's reconciling work rather than therapeutic technique; and (4) concluding prayer consecrating any agreements reached and requesting ongoing grace for implementation.

The table fellowship model's theological legitimacy rests on this Christocentric foundation. Wine facilitates; Christ reconciles. Wine lowers barriers; Christ's presence transforms. Wine creates environment; Christ fills that environment with grace. Remove Christ's presence and the model collapses into mere technique; maintain Christ's centrality and the model participates in His ongoing reconciling ministry.

### B. Implementation Protocol: Practical Framework for Application

Theoretical models require translation into practical protocols. This section provides structured guidance for implementing the table fellowship reconciliation model, recognizing that wise application requires both faithfulness to principles and flexibility regarding specifics.

#### 1) Pre-Session Preparation

**Spiritual Preparation:** Before convening conflicted parties, the pastoral mediator must engage in intensive spiritual preparation. This includes: (1) Prayer for both parties, interceding for softened hearts, genuine repentance, and grace to forgive; (2) Prayer for wisdom, discernment, and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading during the session; (3) Fasting, where appropriate and able, signaling dependence on God rather than technique; (4) Scripture meditation, particularly passages addressing reconciliation, forgiveness, and grace (Matt 5:23-24; 18:15-35; Rom 12:18; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13).

Conflicted parties should also be encouraged toward spiritual preparation, though the mediator cannot control this. Suggestions might include: personal prayer asking God to reveal one's own contributions to conflict; Scripture reading on forgiveness and reconciliation; journaling to clarify feelings and identify specific grievances; and prayer for the other party, asking God to bless them despite the conflict.

**Logistical Preparation:** Careful attention to practical details communicates care and intentionality. Location should be neutral territory neither party's home or preferred space to prevent territorial advantage. A private room in a restaurant, church facility, or

community center works well. The space should be comfortable, appropriately lit, and free from interruptions.

Food and wine quality matters symbolically. Substantial, well-prepared food (not merely appetizers) communicates that both parties and their relationship merit investment. Quality wine neither expensive enough to create embarrassment nor cheap enough to suggest low value signals appropriate honor. The meal itself, not just the conversation, becomes part of reconciliation ministry.

Time allocation requires generosity. Reconciliation cannot be rushed; sessions should allow minimum three hours, preferably without fixed endpoint. This temporal investment communicates priority and prevents artificial truncation of necessary processing.

**Initial Screening and Consent:** Before scheduling sessions, mediators must carefully screen for contraindications (detailed below) and obtain informed consent. Both parties should understand: (1) The approach's rationale, including biblical precedent and scientific mechanisms; (2) Wine's facilitating role and grace's indispensable work; (3) Expected session structure and approximate duration; (4) Confidentiality parameters and any reporting requirements; (5) Freedom to decline or request modifications; (6) Alternative approaches available if this model seems unsuitable.

## 2) Session Structure and Flow

Effective implementation follows intentional structure while remaining flexible to the Spirit's leading. The following four-phase model provides framework without imposing rigidity.

**Phase One: Fellowship Establishment (45-60 minutes):** Sessions begin with shared meal, initially focusing on neutral topics unrelated to conflict. This phase serves multiple purposes: allowing wine's neurobiological effects to develop gradually; establishing rapport and comfort; demonstrating that relationship transcends conflict; and creating positive emotional state before addressing difficult issues.

During this phase, parties consume first portions of food and wine (approximately one drink). Conversation might address: recent positive experiences; shared history before conflict emerged; common interests and values; broader life circumstances creating context for understanding current stress. The mediator guides conversation

toward connection while avoiding premature conflict discussion.

Neurobiologically, this phase allows GABA enhancement to reduce baseline anxiety, dopamine release to create positive association with the gathering, and cortisol reduction to begin restoring cognitive capacities that stress impairs. Psychologically, it establishes the session as fellowship rather than inquisition.

**Phase Two: Transitional Engagement (45-60 minutes):** As comfort increases, conversation gradually shifts toward peripheral conflict issues—not yet core grievances but related concerns that bridge from neutral ground toward conflict terrain. This phase allows testing of waters; gauging parties' readiness for deeper engagement, and addressing lower-stakes issues that might find easier resolution.

During this phase, parties consume additional food and wine (bringing total to approximately two drinks). The moderately enhanced neurobiological state reduced anxiety, maintained judgment, increased openness proves optimal for beginning authentic dialogue. The mediator begins drawing out each party's perspective, ensuring both feel heard, and identifying common ground or shared concerns.

This phase requires particular sensitivity. Premature pressure toward resolution can trigger defensiveness; excessive caution can waste momentum. The skilled mediator reads participants' verbal and nonverbal cues, adjusts pacing accordingly, and remains alert to the Spirit's prompting.

**Phase Three: Core Issue Engagement (45-75 minutes):** With foundation established and optimal neurobiological state achieved, conversation turns to core conflicts. This phase's structure depends entirely on conflict specifics but generally includes: each party articulating grievances and hurt; both acknowledging their contributions to conflict; expression of genuine emotions (anger, sadness, betrayal, fear); identification of underlying needs and values fueling positions; and exploration of paths toward mutual understanding and changed behavior.

Wine consumption ceases or continues only minimally during this phase (maximum three drinks total throughout session). The goal is maintaining the facilitating neurobiological state without progressing toward impairment. The mediator's role intensifies: ensuring equitable speaking time; preventing escalation into counterproductive conflict; reframing

accusations into needs and feelings; pointing toward grace and gospel when appropriate; and maintaining hope for resolution without forcing premature closure.

This phase often proves emotionally intense. The combination of reduced defenses (from wine), authentic engagement (from good faith effort), and painful honesty (about real harms) can produce tears, raised voices, or temporary despair. The mediator provides pastoral presence neither rescuing parties from necessary pain nor allowing destructive escalation, but holding space for Holy Spirit's convicting and comforting work.

**Phase Four: Resolution and Commitment (30-45 minutes):** As grace produces breakthrough genuine repentance, authentic forgiveness, or at minimum sincere commitment to reconciliation process the session moves toward closure. This phase includes: articulating specific commitments for changed behavior; establishing accountability structures for follow-through; scheduling follow-up sessions as needed; expressing gratitude to God for grace received; and concluding with prayer and possibly communion.

Concrete commitments matter. Vague promises of "trying harder" or "being better" rarely produce change. Instead, parties articulate specific, measurable, achievable actions: "I will [specific behavior] by [date]"; "When [triggering situation] occurs, I will [alternative response] instead of [problematic pattern]"; "We will check in weekly about [specific issue]." These commitments should be written, shared, and included in follow-up accountability.

The concluding prayer thanks God for grace already given while requesting ongoing grace for implementation. If both parties are Christians in good standing with no theological objections, the mediator might offer communion symbolically connecting this reconciliation to Christ's ultimate reconciling work and reminding parties that their relationship stands within larger story of divine-human reconciliation.

### 3) *Post-Session Follow-Up*

Reconciliation rarely concludes in single session. Sustainable resolution requires ongoing attention: (1) Follow-up meetings (1-2 weeks post-session) to assess progress, troubleshoot difficulties, and reinforce commitments; (2) Accountability partnerships where each party reports to trusted third party about commitment implementation; (3) Additional

reconciliation sessions as needed for complex conflicts requiring multiple conversations; (4) Long-term pastoral care addressing underlying patterns contributing to conflict.

### 4) *Mediator Qualifications and Limitations*

Not every pastor or counselor should attempt this approach. Effective implementation requires: (1) Mature faith and deep understanding of grace-based reconciliation theology; (2) Significant experience with conflict mediation using conventional approaches; (3) Clear personal understanding of alcohol's effects and commitment to moderation; (4) Cultural competence regarding alcohol's meanings in relevant contexts; (5) Wisdom to discern when this approach is appropriate versus when alternatives better serve; (6) Emotional intelligence and strong interpersonal skills; (7) Patience and comfort with long, emotionally intense sessions.

Mediators uncertain about their qualification should seek supervision from experienced practitioners or employ alternative reconciliation models. The approach's novelty and potential for misuse demand humility and care.

### C. *Theological Boundaries: Moderation Versus Drunkenness*

The biblical affirmation of moderate wine consumption requires clear boundaries distinguishing appropriate use from sinful abuse. Paul's command establishes the fundamental principle: "Don't be drunken with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18, WEB).

#### 1) *Biblical Imperatives Regarding Drunkenness*

Scripture consistently condemns drunkenness while permitting wine. This consistent pattern repeated across Old and New Testaments, wisdom literature and prophetic oracles, narrative and epistle establishes that the issue is not wine itself but its abuse. Proverbs warns: "Wine is a mocker and beer is a brawler. Whoever is led astray by them is not wise" (20:1, WEB). Isaiah pronounces woe on those who "rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; who stay late into the night, until wine inflames them" (5:11, WEB). Paul lists drunkards among those excluded from God's kingdom (1 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:21).

These warnings target not wine consumption per se but prioritizing alcohol over God, losing self-control through intoxication, and neglecting responsibilities for drinking's sake. The common thread is excess

consumption beyond moderation into impairment and dysfunction.

## 2) *Defining Moderation in Practice*

Moderation requires practical definition, not merely conceptual acknowledgment. The reconciliation model proposed here defines moderation as consumption maintaining judgment, emotional regulation, and appropriate behavior specifically: (1) Maximum three standard drinks per person during 2-3 hour session; (2) Always accompanied by substantial food; (3) Paced gradually throughout session, not rapidly consumed; (4) Never exceeding pleasant relaxation; (5) Immediate cessation if any impairment appears.

One standard drink equals approximately 12 oz. beer (5% alcohol), 5 oz. wine (12% alcohol), or 1.5 oz. spirits (40% alcohol) each containing roughly 0.6 oz. pure ethanol. Individual responses vary based on body weight, sex, food consumption, drinking rate, and tolerance. Guidelines provide framework, but monitoring subjective effects and erring toward conservatism remains essential.

## 3) *Red Lines That Must Never Be Crossed*

Certain boundaries admit no flexibility: (1) Never pressure anyone to drink or consume more than comfortable; (2) Never proceed if either party shows signs of intoxication; (3) Never allow driving while under any alcohol influence; (4) Never use alcohol to avoid dealing with real issues; (5) Never employ this model with someone in addiction recovery; (6) Never treat wine as solution rather than facilitator.

Violation of these boundaries transforms legitimate facilitation into dangerous or unethical practice.

## **D. Contraindications, Limitations, and Alternative Approaches**

Honest assessment of any model requires acknowledging when it should not be used and what it cannot accomplish.

### 1) *Absolute Contraindications*

This approach must never be employed when: (1) Either party has current or past alcohol use disorder, addiction, or substance abuse; (2) Either party is in recovery through programs like Alcoholics Anonymous; (3) Domestic violence or abuse characterizes the relationship; (4) Significant power imbalances exist (employer-employee, pastor-congregant, adult-minor); (5) Either party has medical

conditions contraindicated for alcohol (liver disease, certain medications); (6) Cultural or religious context makes alcohol unacceptable; (7) Either party expresses discomfort with alcohol use; (8) Legal proceedings require clear-headed decision-making and documentation; (9) Either party must drive immediately afterward without alternative transportation.

### 2) *Relative Contraindications Requiring Caution*

Exercise extreme care when: (1) Significant age differences exist between parties; (2) One party takes medications potentially interacting with alcohol; (3) Cultural backgrounds differ dramatically regarding alcohol norms; (4) Conflict involves financial disputes requiring detailed negotiation; (5) Either party has family history of alcoholism creating concern.

In these cases, careful consultation, explicit consent, and consideration of alternatives proves essential.

### 3) *Alternative Approaches When This Model Is Unsuitable*

When contraindications exist, the underlying principles remain applicable through alternative means: (1) Extended time in relaxed settings with non-alcoholic beverages (coffee, tea, shared meals without wine); (2) Structured mediation employing professional counselors; (3) Therapeutic interventions addressing underlying patterns; (4) Separation periods allowing cooling before reconciliation attempts; (5) Interventions focusing on justice and accountability where abuse occurred.

The emulsification principle requiring third element to enable unity applies regardless of specific facilitator. Prayer, fasting, worship, service projects, or counseling might serve as "social emulsifiers" in contexts where wine is inappropriate.

### 4) *Scope and Limitations: What This Model Cannot Address*

This model addresses specific conflict type: interpersonal relational conflicts between parties demonstrating some willingness toward reconciliation. It does not and cannot address: (1) Structural injustices requiring systemic change rather than interpersonal reconciliation; (2) Situations involving unrepentant abuse where separation, not reconciliation, may be appropriate; (3) Legal disputes requiring adversarial processes and formal documentation; (4) Conflicts

where one party completely refuses engagement; (5) Deep-seated personality disorders or mental health conditions requiring professional treatment.

Even within appropriate scope, success is not guaranteed. Grace works sovereignly; humans create conditions but cannot control outcomes. Some conflicts may require multiple sessions; others may not achieve resolution despite faithful efforts. Humility about limitations prevents false promises while maintaining hope rooted in God's reconciling power rather than human technique.

## Conclusion

This article has proposed and defended a novel approach to pastoral reconciliation grounded in biblical precedent, supported by scientific research, and carefully bounded by theological convictions. Like alcohol enabling water and oil to form stable emulsions, wine within intentional table fellowship can facilitate conditions where conflicted parties previously as incompatible as immiscible substances move toward grace-enabled reconciliation. This concluding section synthesizes key findings, explores theological and practical implications, and acknowledges limitations while suggesting directions for future research.

### A. Summary of Findings

The investigation began with a seemingly intractable problem: interpersonal conflicts so severe that parties resemble water and oil fundamentally incompatible, stubbornly separated, resistant to conventional reconciliation efforts. Chemistry offered an unexpected insight: alcohol's amphiphilic properties enable it to unite water and oil through emulsification. This chemical principle suggested the hypothesis that wine might function analogously in social contexts, facilitating reconciliation between seemingly irreconcilable parties.

Biblical examination validated this hypothesis by demonstrating extensive precedent for wine's role in fellowship and reconciliation contexts. Old Testament texts prescribe wine for those "bitter in soul" (Prov 31:6-7), command joyful wine consumption with divine approval (Eccl 9:7), and affirm wine as divinely designed to "gladden the heart" (Ps 104:15). More significantly, Jesus' ministry demonstrated consistent, deliberate use of table fellowship including wine as primary reconciliation

methodology. From inaugurating his ministry by providing abundant wine at Cana to earning the reputation of "eating and drinking" with tax collectors and sinners to instituting the Lord's Supper with wine symbolizing covenant blood, Jesus established table fellowship with wine as central to his reconciling mission. This pattern appears not incidentally but systematically across the Gospels, particularly Luke's account where Jesus perpetually either goes to, attends, or comes from meals.

Scientific analysis illuminated mechanisms supporting wine's facilitating role. Chemistry's emulsification principle provided conceptual framework, while neuroscience research explained specific mechanisms: alcohol enhances GABA activity, reducing social anxiety and defensive responses; stimulates dopamine release, increasing motivation for social engagement; and reduces cortisol, improving emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility. These neurobiological effects, occurring within moderate consumption ranges (BAC 0.04-0.06%), create optimal conditions for difficult conversations while preserving judgment necessary for authentic reconciliation. Social psychology research confirmed that moderate alcohol consumption reduces self-monitoring, facilitates authentic self-disclosure, and enhances interpersonal bonding through shared physiological states.

Theological-pastoral integration established critical framework preventing reductionism. Wine functions as environmental facilitator, creating conditions conducive to reconciliation, but cannot replace grace as the substantive reconciling agent. True reconciliation requires divine grace prevenient grace initiating willingness, convincing grace bringing conviction, empowering grace enabling forgiveness, and sustaining grace maintaining transformation. Christ's presence, not wine's effects, constitutes the decisive factor. The article developed detailed implementation protocols including four-phase session structure, clear moderation guidelines (maximum three drinks over 2-3 hours with substantial food), and essential mediator qualifications.

Finally, the study established clear boundaries and limitations. Absolute contraindications include alcohol addiction history, domestic violence contexts, significant power imbalances, and medical contraindications. The model addresses only interpersonal relational conflicts between willing parties, not structural injustices, unrepentant abuse

situations, or conflicts requiring legal processes. Even within appropriate scope, success depends on grace's sovereign work, not technique's efficacy.

### **B. Theological Implications**

This research carries significant implications for Christian theology and practice across multiple dimensions.

**Recovering a Neglected Biblical Pattern:** Modern Christianity, particularly within evangelical and conservative traditions, often views alcohol with suspicion or outright prohibition. This study demonstrates that such perspectives, while motivated by legitimate concerns about alcohol abuse, may inadvertently obscure biblical patterns that Jesus himself modeled extensively. The sheer frequency of table fellowship in Jesus' ministry to the point of defining his reputation suggests that contemporary Christianity may have lost something essential by neglecting or spiritualizing this practice. Recovering wine's appropriate role within fellowship contexts does not minimize warnings against drunkenness but honors the full biblical witness regarding creation's good gifts.

**Grace-Centered Reconciliation:** The theological framework developed here emphasizes grace's primacy while affirming creation's goodness. Wine serves reconciliation not by replacing grace but by removing impediments that hinder grace's reception. This model exemplifies how theological convictions and practical wisdom integrate: robust doctrine of grace prevents trusting technique, while appreciation for creation's design prevents spurious spiritualizing that disdains physical means. The result is holistic approach honoring both divine sovereignty and creaturely instrumentality.

**Incarnational Ministry:** Jesus' table fellowship practice reflects incarnational principle: God entering human experience, meeting people where they are, and using ordinary means for extraordinary purposes. The Incarnation itself demonstrates that spiritual realities engage rather than transcend physical existence. Wine, bread, water, oil common elements of material creation become vehicles for divine grace throughout Scripture. The reconciliation model proposed here continues this incarnational pattern, refusing false dichotomy between spiritual and physical, sacred and mundane.

**Holistic Theology:** Integration of biblical theology, scientific research, and pastoral practice models

theological method that the contemporary church needs. Rather than compartmentalizing faith and reason, theology and science, doctrine and practice, this study demonstrates how multiple disciplines contribute complementary insights. The result is richer understanding than any single discipline provides alone, suggesting broader potential for faith-science dialogue in practical theology.

### **C. Practical Implications and Applications**

The model developed here offers practical resources for multiple ministry contexts while requiring wise discernment regarding appropriate application.

**For Pastoral Ministry:** Pastors and counselors gain a tool for addressing conflicts that resist conventional approaches. When traditional mediation fails, when parties refuse to meet in formal counseling settings, or when relational barriers seem insurmountable, the table fellowship model offers alternative pathway grounded in biblical precedent. Implementation requires training, supervision, and humility, but pastoral practitioners attest that some conflicts truly do find resolution more readily in informal meal settings than formal counseling offices.

**For Church Leadership:** Church leaders addressing congregational conflicts, leadership team tensions, or interpersonal disputes among members can employ this model with appropriate adaptations. Rather than formal church discipline processes or organizational mediation, informal meals may provide contexts where grace breaks through more naturally. The model also equips churches to develop conflict resolution ministries that serve both congregants and broader communities.

**For Conflict Resolution Theory:** This research contributes to broader conflict resolution literature by demonstrating how cultural-religious resources inform practice. The model shows that faith communities possess distinctive resources theological convictions, ritual practices, communal disciplines that secular conflict resolution approaches cannot replicate. Rather than simply adopting therapeutic techniques, Christian conflict resolution can develop approaches organically connected to biblical patterns and theological convictions.

**For Cultural Engagement:** In contexts where alcohol remains controversial within Christian communities, this study models how to engage difficult topics with biblical fidelity, theological nuance, and pastoral wisdom. Rather than reflexive prohibition or uncritical

permissiveness, the approach demonstrates careful distinction between appropriate use and sinful abuse, honoring both Scripture's affirmations and warnings.

#### ***D. Limitations, Future Research, and Concluding Reflections***

This study's limitations must be acknowledged honestly. The research employed qualitative methodology focusing on biblical-theological analysis, scientific literature review, and theoretical framework development. It lacks empirical data measuring the model's effectiveness, quantitative studies comparing outcomes to conventional approaches, or systematic case study documentation. These gaps reflect the model's novelty empirical research requires implementation generating data, which requires first establishing theoretical foundations this article provides.

Future research should include: (1) Quantitative effectiveness studies comparing wine-facilitated table fellowship to conventional mediation across similar conflict types; (2) Longitudinal outcome research assessing reconciliation sustainability over months and years; (3) Cross-cultural implementation studies examining how different cultural contexts regarding alcohol affect model viability; (4) Phenomenological research capturing participants' experiences of the reconciliation process; (5) Comparative theology research examining how other faith traditions understand food, drink, and reconciliation relationships.

Additionally, empirical research should examine whether the model's effectiveness depends specifically on wine's neurobiological effects or whether other elements extended time, shared meals, intentional structure, theological framing prove sufficient. This would help determine whether the model succeeds in contexts where alcohol is contraindicated or culturally inappropriate.

Despite these limitations, the convergent evidence from biblical precedent, scientific mechanism, and theological framework suggests the model merits serious consideration and careful experimentation. Jesus' extensive table fellowship practice was neither accidental nor merely cultural accommodation but represented deliberate ministry strategy. The neuroscience research explaining moderate alcohol's effects on anxiety, bonding, and communication provides plausible mechanisms for Jesus' approach's effectiveness. The theological

framework ensuring grace's primacy while honoring creation's instrumentality prevents both reductionism and false spiritualization.

Ultimately, this research invites the church to reconsider both wine's role in Christian life and table fellowship's centrality in reconciliation ministry. The early church father Chrysostom observed that "nothing so characterizes a Christian as that he should be a worker for peace." If wine-accompanied meals can facilitate the peace-work that brings glory to God and restoration to broken relationships, then perhaps the church should follow Jesus more closely in being "friend of tax collectors and sinners" a friendship forged primarily not in formal settings but around tables where bread is broken, wine is shared, and grace transforms enemies into friends.

The ancient prayer remains fitting: "Bless, O Lord, this food and drink to our use, and us to your service, and make us ever mindful of the needs of others." May the church recover wisdom to use God's good gifts including wine for serving His reconciling purposes, remembering always that while wine may facilitate, only grace accomplishes the transformation of hearts, the healing of wounds, and the restoration of relationships that glorify the God who himself is reconciliation's ultimate source and model.

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