

# Abstinence

Many people who agree with us on the foregoing matters yet disagree with our standard of abstinence from the nonmedicinal drinking of alcohol. They argue that wine was used by God's people throughout Biblical history and that it is therefore wrong to impose a standard of abstinence on our church members.

Impose is the wrong word. We are a fellowship of people who voluntarily abstain from alcoholic drink. Those who wish to be communicant members with the right to vote and, in the case of men, be voted into office obviously must agree to voluntary abstinence.

**We abstain for testimony's sake.** Leaving aside the considerable exegetical controversy as to whether the Bible does in fact sanction the use of alcoholic drink, there is good reason for a temperance stand. This is a case where our abstinence is a step to protect our testimony and enlarge our usefulness in gospel witness.

Our country is sinking in an ocean of alcohol. This is the major form of drug addiction in the land. Alcohol is killing its millions. To seek to bear an effective witness to this drink-sodden generation while we ourselves indulge is akin to preaching to a drug addict while we use marijuana, "in moderation" of course! After all, it is nowhere specifically prohibited in Scripture!

**We abstain out of love for the brethren.** Many people in our churches have been saved out of alcoholism. We take Paul's words very seriously: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. 14:21). We believe that Christians' indulgence in alcohol is very definitely a source of stumbling and offense to those whom the Lord has saved out of utter bondage to drink--as well as to the many who are still enslaved by it.

**Paul lays down the same rule.** There are things that we may personally and narrowly consider lawful to us but that are not expedient and are not for the edification of others (1 Cor. 10:23). With that in mind Paul lays down this rule for God's people: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth," or welfare (v. 24). That is a command. It is an ordained rule or standard. We believe it makes it incumbent on us, faced with the utterly incalculable devastation caused by alcohol, to separate ourselves totally from it unto the Lord. And it is unto the Lord that we do this. This is no bitter legalism. It is an expression of our love for the Lord, for His testimony, and for the welfare of others.

**God commended abstainers.** It has become popular--for everyone from secular writers to Roman Catholics to some Calvinists--to belittle and vigorously condemn those who take our position. That does not concern us in the slightest. When Jonadab the son of Rechab entered into a covenant to abstain from drinking wine and commanded it to his sons, he was not condemned by God, but commended. His sons were not mocked as a bunch of embondaged legalists, but were held forth as a good example by the Lord (Jer. 35:5-14). We believe abstinence for the reasons we have cited still has His commendation.

**By abstaining we express our liberty, purity, testimony, and community.** We enjoy life. We are not afraid to see the world in which we live as God's world, to be used though not abused. We rejoice in the truth of what is called "common grace" and can therefore happily receive all the relative good that has come to us through unsaved men as the provision of our loving God. Our standards are not standards of bondage but expressions of our liberty, purity, testimony, and community--because they tell the weakest saint among us that we care enough for him to banish even the possibility of our causing him to stumble.