

CONSIDERATIONS re: Inclusion of a Reference to ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES in a CHURCH COVENANT

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First Consideration

It may be assumed that a substantial majority of the members of a “fundamental”, evangelistic church subscribe to the basic principle of total abstention from the use of alcoholic beverages, and expect their pastor to preach against the evils of alcohol.

This being the case, it should be a simple matter to persuade the majority of members to vote into the Covenant a promise to abstain from the use, sale manufacture or serving of alcoholic beverages.

Second Consideration

Although alcohol and other drug abuses are a pressing social issue, and there are many compelling reasons to teach and preach abstinence, many students of the Bible would find it difficult to find a BIBLICAL basis for total abstinence. Though some insist the Bible condemns all use of beverage alcohol, a study of pertinent scripture texts persuades many Christians that Jesus’ first recorded miracle resulted in “aged” wine; that Jesus regularly partook of wine, and even included it in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, as it has served throughout the Church Age; and that, except in special religious rites and vows of self-denial and while carrying out grave responsibilities, the temperate use of mildly alcoholic beverages has enjoyed God’s permission, if not provision.

To have a Covenant, we must have agreement.....and we do not have sufficient agreement on this matter. If the Church were a private club, we could properly set our own arbitrary qualifications....but if it is our Lord’s body, mustn’t we submit to His wisdom and priorities?

Third Consideration

We may further assume that a significant majority of church members are, or wish to appear to be total abstainers....for one or more of the following reasons:

1. They believe biblical doctrine demands it;
2. They believe that consumption of beverage alcohol is foolish in America today, with the availability of many alternative beverages and drugs which do not degrade, debilitate and destroy.
3. They wish to avoid offending those who oppose alcohol on religious grounds and/or those whose families have been devastated by alcoholism.

Fourth Consideration

Any attempt to apply conditions to the proscription in our Covenant (such as permitting participation in The Lord’s Supper with another congregation which employs “wine”; or the serving of alcoholic beverages as an incidental responsibility of one’s occupation; or employment in a container-manufacturing factory or a super-market; or a sip of champagne at a wedding toast; or wine with a meal at a home abroad or of another ethnic culture; or the use of alcoholic beverage as a sedative) would prove futile, as some would see this as condoning such practices, and would be more offended by the condition than by the alternative omission.

Fifth Consideration

If we were to undertake the compilation of a list of behaviors unacceptable to our Lord, we would be compelled to list many offenses with a higher priority than temperate alcohol consumption....which is clearly not on God's own MUST list.

Among those misbehaviors ahead in line would be inhospitality, the breaking of promises or covenants, unfairness and exploitation, stinginess and probably speeding and littering (law violations).

Sixth Consideration

In many churches, and particularly in a Baptist Church, each member supposedly has the opportunity to exercise "the priesthood of the believer", studying God's Word for his or her own edification, and following his or her own conscience.

In this setting, does the majority (right or wrong) have the right to impose a particular interpretation of scripture upon the minority? If such "tyranny of the majority" were exercised, those converts whom our Lord draws to our fellowship would have to be denied membership unless and until they were persuaded of our peculiar modern, North American interpretation of scripture, or were willing to subscribe to a Covenant they did not support and/or would not honor. Can we not be content, as in other areas of doctrinal growth and maturity, to embrace the new (or transferred) believer, and trust the teaching and preaching of the Word of God, and the indwelling Holy Spirit to accomplish God's purpose in that life, and in our Church?

Many fundamental, evangelistic churches have chosen, in fairness to the conscience of each member, to commit, in the Church Covenant, "to holiness, to walk worthy of our calling, and to be exemplary in our deportment".

Church leaders, on the other hand, are held to a different standard.

scripture references

Num. 6:2-4 Vow of Nazarite: Drink or eat nothing from the vine.

Num. 28:7 Strong wine offering to God.

Prov. 31:6 Give...wine to..heavy hearts.

Prov. 23:29-31 Who hath woe? They that *tarry long* at the wine.

Look not upon..wine when...red.

Note: This is in midst of a long list of practical advice, NOT in Covenant.

Luke 5:36-39 Jesus: No man having drunk old wine desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

Luke 7:33-34 Jesus: The Son of Man came eating and drinking.

John 2:10 First miracle: "Good" wine served last.

1 Cor. 11:20-22 Overindulgence at Lord's Supper, result: Drunken.

Ephes. 5:18 Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.

1 Tim. 3:8 Deacons...not given to *much* wine.

1 Tim. 5:23 Use a little wine for thy stomach..and..infirmities.

Titus 2:3 Aged women...not given to *much* wine.

1 Peter 4:3 When we walked in excess of wine, revelings.....

Romans 14:1-6, 10, 17-18 Receive those weak in the faith: vegetarians. Avoid doubtful disputations. Don't judge. For the kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Col. 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink.