

# Personal Position Paper: *The Consumption of Alcohol & Issues of Conscience*

## The Biblical Perspective

The Word of God is our authority on all matters of faith and practice. It is my understanding that the teachings of the Scriptures on the issue of the consumption of alcohol is as follows:

### 1. Consumption of Alcohol is not a defacto sin

#### a. Jesus Himself made and drank real wine

- The kind of wine that is called “fine wine”, which indicates a high level of expert fermentation (John 2:10)
- The kind of wine which breaks wineskins during the fermentation process (Mk. 2:22)
- The kind of wine which dulls the palate of the tongue because of its alcohol content (John 2:1-11)

#### b. The OT names wine as a blessing of God’s creation

- The kind of wine that gladdens the heart (Ps 104:15)
- The fermented kind of wine that causes us to rejoice in the Lord’s presence (Deut 14:26)
- The kind of wine that overflows in our cup (Psalm 23:5)

#### c. Ordained church leaders are allowed to drink wine

- Elders and Deacons are told not to be “*given to much*” wine. This implies permission to drink wine with a warning against drunkenness and addiction.

#### d. Paul advised Timothy to drink wine for medicinal purposes (I Tim 5:23)

### 2. Consumption can lead to sin:

- a. Drunkenness (Gal 5:21)
- b. Sensuality (Hosea 4:18 / Eph 5:18)
- c. Strife (Prov 20:1, 23:29-35)
- d. Loss of Love (I Cor. 8/ I Cor. 10)
- e. Violation of the civil authority (Rom 13)

### 3. Biblical v. “Extra-Biblical

As much as some might wish that all consumption of alcohol be considered a sin, we cannot go beyond what the Word of God itself teaches. While we might individually choose not to consume, by conscience or by fear of addiction, we cannot mandate a behavior upon this issue, which God Himself has chosen not to do. To do so is pharisaism.

## Guidelines for Pastors and Church Leaders

The improper consumption of alcohol is the source of deep serious societal problems today. Improper consumption has destroyed families, destroyed lives, and has threatened to destroy our society as a whole. People drink excessively. People drink to escape. People become addicted without ever intending to do so. People who drink and drive take the lives of the innocent. Alcohol consumption has left a trail of bodies -- the dead and the wounded. As a remedy, Christians should take care in the way that they consume alcohol.

### 1. Moderate consumption is Allowed

- a. With sensitivity to the conscience of others, the Christian Liberty to enjoy the fruits of creation is biblically extended to the consumption of alcohol. (Romans 14)

### 2. Drunkenness is Forbidden

- a. Pastors and church leaders should never be drunk with alcohol or engage in drinking in a setting that is not glorifying to God. (I Timothy 3:3)

### 3. Causing others to Stumble

- a. The pastor or church leader who chooses moderate consumption should ***never*** tempt or try to persuade those who abstain to violate their conscience, nor should they “lord” their freedom over them. *This could lead to tragic damage in the hearts and lives of those who choose to abstain.* (Romans 14:20-23)

### 4. Binding the Conscience

- a. On the other hand, the pastor or church leader who abstains, should ***never*** seek to bind the conscience of another by passing judgment on their freedom. *This could lead to tragic judgmentalism and pharisaism that moves away from the gospel and toward self-righteousness.* (Colossians 2:16)

### 5. Living Above Reproach

- a. **Meaning:** The scripture teaches that that pastors and church leaders should be “above reproach” in the way that they live their lives. This means that should live above any accusation, contempt, or charge of biblically defined sin. (1 Timothy 3:2)
- b. **Application:** Yet, in the same passage of scripture where this is mandated, the Christian leader is instructed not to “be a drunkard.” This plainly allows the consumption of alcohol while prohibiting drunkenness. Therefore, drinking does not violate the mandate, but drunkenness does. (1 Timothy 3:3)

### 6. Christ Lived Perfectly above Reproach

- a. **Christ’s Example:** Certainly no pastor or church leader is able, even in the slightest regard, attain to the perfect example of Christ. Yet, it is helpful to glean from Christ’s life the way in which we are to live out our lives in the world around us.
- b. **Christ perfectly obeyed God’s Law:** If we take seriously the perfection of Christ, then we must understand that the way he lived his life was without reproach. In other words, if anyone has ever been above reproach, it is Christ. He never sinned in anything that he did or said.
- c. **Christ purposefully broke socio-religious Law:** Yet, Christ did not live under the tyranny of extra Biblical or socio-religious laws. He did not allow the conscience or restrictions of others bind him. In public, he drank wine with unbelievers and was therefore called a “winebibber.” In public, he ate in a way that was displeasing to rabbinical leaders and was called a “glutton.” In public, he befriended, hosted, and looked approvingly on rebels and was called a “friend of sinners” (Luke 7:34). In public, he broke the heads off of wheat and ate on the Sabbath and was called a “Sabbath breaker” (Mark 2:23-24).

7. In all these things, we can safely conclude that Jesus ***never*** sinned, ***nor did he cause anyone to stumble***, even though he was accused of doing so.

In conclusion, along with all Christians, pastors and church leaders may moderately engage in consuming alcohol for the glory of God. In accordance with the principles we find in scripture, the choice to consume alcohol should be done in a manner that is:

- Sensitive to the conscience of others
- Is moderate in amount
- Is in submission to civil authorities
- Is aware of the impact that consumption might have on their witness to the grace and glory of God