

No less than Jesus; no more than Jesus

Why did you write this?

This paper was generated as a member of an elder board wrestling with whether to change an elder commitment several years ago. I was the youngest elder on the 7+ member board having never been an elder before. As a condition of eldership, I agreed to the referred to *commitment of alcohol abstention*, believing it more important for me to participate on the elder board than to argue for my true position on the matter. I humbly agreed and followed the commitment, having decided in my heart that I would not initiate new dialogue about the issue up unless it happened to be brought up by someone else for good reason.

As time went by, the church began to search for a new senior pastor. Throughout the interview process for the new pastor, it became clear that the commitment (which was shared at the end of the phone interview process) was out of touch with current Christian and Non-Christian culture. In short, we could not find a solidly qualified candidate who DID NOT have a problem with such a commitment even if they did not drink themselves. Eventually, the issue became an agenda item to discuss at the elder's meeting.

The 'commitment' item appeared on the agenda for several months. Every meeting, the item was tabled and tabled and tabled. Eventually, I inquired as to why the elder board ignored the item only to be rebuffed with, "Other business took precedence." It didn't help my desire that we had found a qualified candidate so that the urgency of the change was minimized. I suggested that the board refused to discuss the issue, not because we were overburdened with other business but because the issue would require a difficult and uncomfortable discussion. At that time, I offered to write a new commitment.

Although I fully intended to write a short commitment less than 500 words, but after beginning to write, the following response is what eventually emerged. Please approach the reading of this paper with the above context in mind and NOT as a comprehensive position paper on the use and abuse of alcohol.

I trust that none of you will interpret my persistent request to discuss this issue as a reflection of some sort of repressed alcoholism. The dangers of alcohol are very real to my family. Personally, before choosing to adhere to our current commitment, my use of alcohol was limited nearly to abstention. I have never purchased alcohol at a store and I have never had alcohol stored in my refrigerator. Since college, any use of alcohol has always been limited to a glass of wine when dining with my wife at a restaurant (maybe once a year) or perhaps a beer at a family gathering. In other words, my concerns regarding this issue are not sourced in a desire to indulge in alcohol as I sin in the name of Christian liberty.

I am convinced that the issues at hand are much deeper than the desire anyone to tip one back. As trivial an issue this may appear on the surface to some of us, I firmly believe that our position on this issue, and the principles used to decide this issue, speak to our basic understanding of Jesus, culture, and the Gospel itself.

So what is the point of all of this?

The Bible describes Eldership as an office filled by men, called by God, and possessing incredible responsibility. God charges us as shepherds to tend the flock; among other things this includes

helping them discern what is right, wrong, good, evil, primary, and secondary. Not based on man's judgment, our discernment must be sourced in God's revealed Word through continual illumination by God the Holy Spirit. In fact, it's not essential that our positions on doctrine or other issues need necessarily always be rationally or emotionally satisfying, as long our positions are unapologetically biblical. Knowing this, we must be able to distinguish between man's wisdom (foolishness) and God's wisdom (truth) and must not be led astray by what we *think* or *feel* as opposed to what God has clearly *said*. The congregation of the church will look to its leadership for an example of how to live, for clarity and instruction. Any stance we take or position we hold will communicate something about our values and ultimately our understanding of God.

The elder's commitment we currently ascribe to is largely unknown by the congregation let alone the specifics of that commitment. When asked about our stance on alcohol by a member of the congregation, if asked at all, I find it takes some time to explain our position and the rationale behind it. I spend an inordinate amount of energy justifying what amounts to an opinion of man clearly rooted in but not completely supported by total witness of Scripture. We must consider whether, when asked a cultural question such as this, if we naturally point to man or God first for the answer. Is our first inclination to steer the individual into Scripture and there, unapologetically proclaim what it says? Or is our first inclination to point to Scripture only to find we need to qualify what it says to make our position clear? Is it based on a simple, literal reading of the scriptures or something else?

Regardless of whether I agree with our position or not, I have committed to it. I still think it healthy and prudent to ask the tough questions to ensure we remain biblical in our position. With the risk of sounding ignorant, I must ask what the point of the commitment truly is. Who is the commitment for? Is the commitment there to set an example for the congregation? Is it intended to educate, to protect, or to guide? I assume we should answer with a resounding yes. It seems, however, that we consciously choose not talk or teach anything about our position, at least not with any sense of boldness or regularity. This is concerning when we consider this issue important enough to take a formal position on. It also leads me to wonder whether the commitment isn't in fact for the congregation but for the elders alone. I am forced to think this because we do not talk about it without being asked. I fear that we have unconsciously opened ourselves up to spiritual pride, a sense of feeling superior to the congregation and those outside the church who partake. I fear that we have unwittingly created our own version of a Mishna¹ where we build our own rules (don't drink) to ensure we never get close to breaking God's law (don't get drunk). If this is the case, if the ultimate end rests in the elder board itself, we must consider whether or not we are adding to the gospel. Statements like, "*As elders of this church, we have gone a step further...*" echo the practices by the "religious" people Jesus Himself spoke against. And even if our intentions are pure, I find any such commitment of abstention that lacks clear biblical support, in my opinion, pharisaical.

What does the Bible say about alcohol?

Our goal is to determine not what we think about alcohol but what God thinks. I want to reiterate that the position we take on alcohol is indicative of how we will respond to a multiplicity of cultural issues. It is not so important **WHAT** we decide but **HOW** we decide it. That being said, the Bible's position on alcohol is very clear. In summary it states:

1. Jesus made wine. John 2
2. Jesus drank wine. Matt. 11.19
3. Jesus will be drinking in heaven (with us?) Matt. 26.29, Luke 22.17,30

¹ **Jewish law:** the primary body of Jewish civil and religious law, forming the first part of the Talmud. These laws were handed down orally until written down around AD 200; the **Jewish oral law:** Jewish law from the oral tradition, as distinguished from law derived from the scriptures

4. Liberty must not be abused. 1Cor 8.9, Gal 5.12, 1Peter 2.16
5. Drunkenness is sin. Proverbs 23.20-21, 29-35, Romans 13.13, Gal 5.19-21, Eph 5.18
6. We are free to drink alcohol in moderation (self control). 1Cor 6.12
7. God can be glorified in drinking. 1Cor 10.31

Clearly, alcohol is in itself clean (Romans 14.14), part of Christian liberty, and could even be considered a gift from God just as food or sex.

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. Genesis 14.18²

He causes the grass to grow for cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's hearts. Psalm 104.14-15

You shall truly tithe...you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: oxen or sheep, for wine or strong drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. Deut. 14.22a, 26

It is equally clear that alcohol, like food or sex, can be and is abused by many. Furthermore, God warns of its dangers (Prov. 23.31-32, Isaiah 28.7-8) and explicitly prohibits drunkenness (Eph. 5.18). This does not, however, prevent Jesus (our perfect example) from using it. Jesus' own use of alcohol is evident and can serve as an example for all of us to learn from.

Is it possible to in fact hate drunkenness yet glory in the gift of drink? Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of preaches thought so. He wrote:

*My soul might be perpetually dropping showers of tears, if it might know the doom and destruction brought on by that one demon, and by that one demon only! Though I am not total abstainer, I hate drunkenness as much as any man breathing, and have been the means of bringing many poor creatures to relinquish this bestial indulgence. We believe drunkenness to be an awful crime and a horrid sin. We stand prepared to go to war with it. – **Charles Spurgeon***

Was Jesus above reproach?

Once we accept the Bible's approval of alcohol (and condemnation of drunkenness), the discussion invariably falls back to the position of being "above reproach" as an elder qualification and sign of spiritual maturity. I think this phrase has been misinterpreted to mean something other than what Paul or God intended. Consider the fact that in the Greek, the word for "reproach" means -- blameless; *not to be called into account*. If we define the term to mean *blameless*, or as the English dictionaries indicate, *above criticism*, then we could understand above reproach to mean that your behavior is godly enough to be free of accusation from anyone either in or outside the church.

Strangely, in the gospels, Jesus doesn't appear to be overly concerned with being above reproach according to that definition, at least not in front of those who *accuse him without cause*—an accusation

² All scripture passages are taken from NIV unless otherwise indicated.

not based in truth but motivated by sin. In fact, throughout the gospels Pharisees, Sadducees, and others accuse Jesus of:

- Keeping Bad Company – Matt 9.11
- Gluttony and Drunkenness – Matt 11.19
- Blasphemy – Matt 26.65
- Insanity – Mark 3.21
- Being Possessed by a Demon – Jn 7.20
- Breaking the Sabbath – Jn 9.16
- Treason – Jn 19.12

Why wasn't Jesus worried about these accusations? A cursory examination of his life of ministry reveals how foolishly he fellowshiped with sinners, going so far as to eat and drink with them! He never even told His disciples to be careful of how things might appear! Isn't He our best example of being "above reproach?" Being above reproach then must have less to do with appearances and more to do with the truth concerning the accused and the context in which the accusation comes. Relative to alcohol, it is reasonable therefore to deduce that one does not have to abstain in order to ensure they are above reproach (I would hope that if anyone could be described as above reproach, Jesus, our sinless Lord, is such a man).

Without question, I aim to set a godly example, but to presume that I can do that to the extent of controlling every opinion of every eye that spies me is foolish and unnecessary. It is just as foolish to believe that choosing to take a position of abstinence will free us from accusations. Instead of drunkenness or gluttony (which Jesus himself stood accused) we'll find ourselves accused of legalism, moral-ism, stuffiness, and the like. We'll be called Pharisees, the ones who Jesus described as those who loved religion but not God himself. Either way we won't be above reproach defined this way. One may argue that legalism is not sinful and to be accused of such a thing is meaningless. I humbly offer that such an accusation is a complete affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ and one of the very problems with "religion" that Jesus himself campaigned against.

Without question, we want to take steps to avoid and protect ourselves from sin. But Paul writes in Colossians 2.20-23 how taking steps like this in fact projects a false appearance and does little to solve the root problem:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations---Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (ESV)

What about the weaker brothers?

Cultural decision-making should always include a discussion about the weaker brother. This is an important consideration as presumably immature Christians wondering what it means to be "mature" are watching us. Paul plainly discusses this concern when he writes in 1 Cor 8.9-10:

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

He further discusses the issue in Romans 14 where he explains the importance of letting love compel all of your cultural decisions. Obviously, Paul is concerned with being a “stumbling-block” for other weaker Christians. The concern I have is that many take the charge to protect the weaknesses of a fellow brother in a *particular situation and generalize to all situations*. Believers with pure intentions adopt a “better safe than sorry” mentality where, driven by pure motives, they declare a list of things forbidden and take a step closer to works-based justification. This perspective is one that expects every eye is watching them drink their beer or sip their wine (even at their own house) and such behavior will invariably open the floodgates into a life of sin for the person partaking and anyone else who may see, hear, or simply sense it.

A position like this that applies the particular to the general assumes three things: (1) That drinking is always wrong (2) It is impossible, if only unlikely, that one can exercise self-control and (3) Jesus must have been, at the very least, insensitive to the sinners He drank with and those around Him. Additional questions are raised as to whether or not having a beer or glass of wine does in fact always impair the witness for the gospel and/or abstinence always helps it (*At this point some will argue that what Christ drank was some sort of “Hebrew Juice” and not wine. Of course, if he were being accused as a drunk, one would think he is drinking something fermented that may lend itself to intoxication if indulged. It seems the Scriptures have to be twisted in order to fit such an idea*).

In all actuality, I think our position not only works against the same liberty Christ practiced, it communicates an inaccurate understanding of the cross as the source of our righteousness. The gospel freed us from such pursuits because there is nothing we can do or cannot do—it is all about Jesus. *While our position does not ask us to be less than Jesus, it certainly asks us to be more than Jesus*. If our reasoning amounts to, “I am living above reproach,” how can we then say, “because this is the position Jesus would take,” when clearly he who is the epitome of above reproach did not. Without question, we need to be sensitive to the weaknesses of the people around us, believer or not. But Paul does not say *if anyone sees you*, rather, those who are in a particular situation where you can determine that someone probably has a weak conscience. God will hold us accountable for our decisions in those contexts in the future while our consciences will hold us accountable in the present.

Is alcohol the only thing should we abstain from?

But what about all of the other “good things that have gone bad?” Should we concern ourselves with the other cultural issues and take similar stands? Are we to assume that alcohol is the only thing that might impact someone with a “weaker conscience?” What else must we take a position on? What else must we abstain from?

This leads us into a discussion of what we choose to take stands on and what we do not. If we are responsible to take stands on cultural decisions (as a means to inform our congregation), it seems that we are choosing to ignore a number of different cultural innovations that are quite probably equally damaging to men, women, marriages, and families.

Take the Internet for example. There are innumerable marriages falling apart today due to Internet Porn addictions, possibly even more than there are due to alcohol (Of course, both are problems). Yet, we do not inform our congregation that we are abstaining from Internet usage to set an example. We do not tell them “we have gone a step further” and choose not to use email because of all of the dangers spam mail can bring or the tempting links on every site I visit. It seems we have arbitrarily decided to pick and chose our moral stands versus accepting the fact that there are many GOOD things that have been perverted into BAD things. That in fact, the Internet and yes, even alcohol, can be redeemed and used to glorify God (1Cor 10.31) but very often is not.

How can our position harm the people we are trying to help?

Holding to a position like we do on alcohol, I believe has the potential of doing more harm than good. While at first glance it might appear like the “safe” position, safe defined as the one that would cause the least amount of conflict, it is my contention that the stance in fact (1) creates confusion with regard to Christian liberty, (2) fails to provide a guide to make more common cultural decisions, and (3) unintentionally encourages a false sense of righteousness (legalism).

My opinion of our position is colored by my own experiences as a Pharisee. As an immature Christian, I defined my Christianity by rules. As long as I didn’t drink alcohol or have sex outside of marriage then I considered myself “good.” I had little or no understanding of the true gospel of Jesus Christ but instead became my own savior working my way back to God. When I finally encountered the power of the gospel, it didn’t take long to see how my well-intentioned “rules” on cultural issues didn’t automatically develop spiritual maturity. In fact, even a cursory examination of my life would have revealed how full of sin I was—but, of course, I didn’t break the two BIG rules. I finally accepted what Paul Little himself came to realize:

“Your bad days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God’s grace and your good days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God’s grace.”³

How can our position cause harm the gospel we are trying to proclaim?

It sounds like circular reasoning as we find ourselves back where we started asking *what the point is*. I hope that our goal is far and above simply preventing people from drinking alcohol. I hope that our goal is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ultimately will fulfill our life purpose—bringing glory to God. Relative to cultural-decision making, I see we have only three options to make that happen. The question then is which of three options impedes the gospel least or, stated more positively, ensures the gospel is proclaimed most.

OPTION #1 – Abstain every time

Here the individual chooses to refrain at any and every opportunity to appear “above reproach” and protect the weak. This is an example of a “better safe than sorry” mentality. This position values avoiding conflict in an attempt to offend the least amount of people.

OPTION #2 – Partake every time

Here the individual chooses to indulge at any and every opportunity. This is an example of a “When in Rome...” mentality or the more spiritual-sounding “becoming all things to all men”. This position values engaging the world as an attempt to gain a hearing on common ground.

OPTION #3 – Discern whether to abstain or partake every time

Here the individual chooses what to do based on the situation they find themselves in. This is an example of a “What would Jesus do...” mentality. This position values glorifying God and loving men while seeking every opportunity to proclaim the gospel. Additionally, it requires that the individual not take a position of convenience leading to legalism, rather, they wrestle with how they can best glorify God. (i.e. it may be more glorifying to God for an individual to abstain every time for purposes of conscience, witness, and/or personal protection).

³ Little, Paul [Transforming Grace](#)

We currently hold to option #1, which I believe is more hindering than helpful to the gospel. Only the immature and foolish would suggest adopting option #2. I firmly believe that option #3 is the only viable biblical option.

Anyone who has accepted the Elder's commitment has also chosen option #1. By choosing option #1, we have chosen to refrain in every situation with few exceptions. *I can only assume we feel that this option impedes the gospel the least.* This option, however, does not allow for the possibility that it would in fact ever be more beneficial to the proclamation of the gospel to partake in a given situation around particular person or people. I am not suggesting that you *must* partake in order to have an effective witness. I am not speaking to those who choose to abstain as a lifestyle due to weakness in themselves or because their conscience will not allow them to. But I do speak to those who would drink but do not because they hold to a commitment such as are believing that in every situation their abstinence will always project a positive image of Jesus and/or Christianity. The reality is that often the opposite effect takes place. We appear as foreigners from a different culture (the church culture), viewed as unfriendly, irrelevant, to good, intolerant, and ignorant of the true Jesus found in the gospels.

How can we really help our congregation?

I believe that a congregation is not helped by manmade rules they are helped by clear biblical answers. The only answer that our position provides is one that sounds very legalistic and appears out of touch with culture. Principles, on the other hand, are more universal and serve as a guide to discover answers for ALL questions. Instead of being restrained in some sort of modernistic mentality, the Christian is freed and empowered to make decisions in ALL things whether it be what they say, what they wear, what they watch, what they eat, or what they drink! Below are listed some example of *Biblical Principles for Cultural Decision-making* taken from Radical Reformation by Mark Driscoll:

- *Is it beneficial to me personally and to the gospel generally? 1Cor 6.12*
- *Will I lose self-control and be mastered by what I participate in? 1Cor 6.12*
- *Will I be doing this in the presence of someone who I know will fall into sin as a result? 1Cor 8.9-10*
- *Is it a violation of the laws of my city, state, or nation? Rom 13.1-7*
- *If I fail to do this, will I lose opportunities to share the gospel? 1Cor 10.27-30*
- *Can I do this with a clear conscience? Acts 24.16*
- *Will this cause me to sin by feeding sinful desires? Rom 13.13-14*
- *Am I convinced that this is what God desires for me to do? Rom 13.5*
- *Does my participation proceed from my faith in Jesus Christ? Rom 13.5*
- *Am I doing this to help other people, or am I just being selfish? 1Cor 10.24*
- *Can I do this in a way that glorifies God? 1Cor 10.31-33*
- *Am I following the example of Jesus Christ to help save sinners? 1Cor 10.33-11.1*

In the spirit of equipping the saints (Eph.4.12, 2Timothy 2.2) guidelines such as these should be published, posted, and preached.

Do we do nothing with the commitment, throw it out, change it, or rewrite it?

We have several options of how to deal with this issue.

We could do nothing and allow several men on our board to continue to commit to something they truly don't believe in but still commit to.

We could, in the spirit of consistency, make some modifications to the commitment by adding some other cultural dangers to the list including but not limited to:

- Committing to abstaining from use of the Internet to protect men, women, and children from the proliferation of pornography that infects it.
- Committing to abstaining from overindulgence in food so that we do not become part of the obesity epidemic and set an example of health.
- Committing to abstaining from a certain set of words so that we do not speak too harshly to someone. This list would have to be regularly updated with any new inappropriate slang and politically incorrect terms.
- Committing to abstaining from playing any sort of card games and some board games, including UNO, Bingo, and even Monopoly to prevent the appearance of gambling.
- You get the point...

We could change our commitment slightly, allowing us to secretly drink in our home and adopt a "don't ask don't tell" mentality.

We could throw it all out. Instead of an elder's commitment, we simply commit to living out the qualifications and requirements listed by 1 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter. If we need to add anything, we can simply state that our intent is to glorify God in all that we do, think, and say.

We could rewrite it. One version might be:

As Elders we commit to:

Living out the gospel of Jesus Christ in what we do, think, and say; fully exercising our Christian freedom afforded by that gospel while not becoming a stumbling-block to the weak; making wise cultural-decisions with a clear conscience before God and men always choosing the harder right over the easier wrong; in all things glorifying God as we follow the example of Jesus Christ set forth in the Scriptures.

Appendix 1: New Testament Verses

1Timothy 3:7

He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Titus 1.6

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Acts 24.16

So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

Romans 13.1,5

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God...Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

Romans 14.14-23

14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. 22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

1Corinthians 6.12

"Everything is permissible for me" --but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me" --but I will not be mastered by anything.

1Corinthians 8.9

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

1Corinthians 10.23

"Everything is permissible" --but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" --but not everything is constructive. 24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. 25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." 27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake-- 29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? 31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

1Corinthians 11.1

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Appendix 2: Quotations from godly men

In case there is any confusion as to my intent, I have added the following quotations below as a final clarification of how I feel. Please do not mistake these words as an immature desire to sin in the guise of Christian Liberty. I simply want to love what God wants us to love (which is possible even in abstention) and hate what God wants us to hate—nothing more, nothing less.

“An elder must be above reproach in his use of alcohol. Paul uses strong language here that means not preoccupied or overindulgent with wine. Drunkenness is a sin, and persistently drunken people require church discipline (see 1Cor 5.11, 6.9-10, Gal. 5.21, Eph. 5.18, 1Peter 4.3). So a person in a position of trust and authority over other people can’t have a drinking problem. The Bible contains many warnings against the potential dangers of wine and strong drink (Is.5.11,22, Prov 20.1, 23.30-35, Hos 4.11). It specifically warns leaders about the dangers of alcohol...Note, however, that Paul says, ‘Not addicted to wine.’ He is not presenting an absolute prohibition against drinking wine. He is prohibiting the abuse of wine (or any other substance) that would damage a man’s testimony and work for God. – A.Strauch, Biblical Eldership, pg. 195

My soul might be perpetually dropping showers of tears, if it might know the doom and destruction brought on by that one demon, and by that one demon only! Though I am not total abstainer, I hate drunkenness as much as any man breathing, and have been the means of bringing many poor creatures to relinquish this bestial indulgence. We believe drunkenness to be an awful crime and a horrid sin. We stand prepared to go to war with it. – Charles Spurgeon

They who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life (Gal 5.13, 1Peter 2.16, 2Peter 2.19, John 8.24, Luke 1.74-75) Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XX, Paragraph III

Temperance is, unfortunately, one of those words that has changed its meaning. It now usually means teetotalism. But in the days when the second Cardinal virtue was christened ‘Temperance’, it meant nothing of the sort. Temperance refereed not specially to drink, but to all pleasures; and it meant not abstaining, but going the right length and no further. It is a mistake to think that Christians ought all to be teetotalers; Mohammedanism, not Christianity, is the teetotal religion. Of course it may be the duty of a particular Christian, or of any Christian, at a particular time, to abstain from strong drink, either because he is the sort of man who cannot drink at all without drinking too much, or because he is with people who are inclined to drunkenness and must not encourage them by drinking himself. But the whole point is that he is abstaining, for a good reason, from something which he does not condemn and which he likes to see other people enjoying. One of the marks of a certain type of bad man is that he cannot give up a thing himself without wanting every one else to give it up. That is not the Christian way. An individual may see fit to give up all sorts of things for special reasons—marriage, or meat, or beer, or the cinema; but the moment he starts saying the things are bad in themselves, or looking down his nose at other people who do use them, he has taken the wrong turning. C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity