



WINE
IN
THE BIBLE
&
THE CHURCH

by

G. I. Williamson

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ISBN: C-87552-547-4

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Dedicated to Harry Wilkey

Preface

Why write a book about wine in the Bible and the Church? The answer is simple: the cause of truth demands it. The writer believes the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. An implication of this is the sufficiency of the Bible. It does not need to be supplemented by the commandments and doctrines of men. Yet this is precisely the evil that is common in the visible Church today: the word of God is treated as if it was deficient and therefore needing to be supplemented (or even corrected) by the laws of men. The Scriptures, it is generally recognized, do not condemn the use of *wine per se*, but the wisdom of modern medical science does (so it is said). So, out of ostensible zeal for the wholesome and pure life, the teaching of the word of God is augmented by the present-day "wisdom" of men. The result is that the law of God, as the perfect and complete standard of obedience for Christians, is made of no effect.

In the chapters that follow this will be demonstrated. It will be shown that the doctrine of total abstinence did not arise from an exegesis of Scripture. To the contrary, the Bible teaches moderation (temperance in the true sense), and not total abstinence. The real source of this doctrine in the Church was the pressure of social reform movements in the world. It will be demonstrated that the Church in this lamentable deflection from Scripture was really following the world. And it will further be shown that when this false principle of mandatory abstinence was laid upon the consciences of God's people, it was far from being a wholesome (or even harmless) thing. Rather did it undermine the central verities of the gospel.

A special word is perhaps in order with respect to the orientation of historical material. In tracing the history of the Church's capitulation to the pressure of social movements, the writer has confined himself to the United States and the United Presbyterian Church of North America. It is the writer's opinion that this is the most viable option for several reasons. Being reared and ordained in the old United Presbyterian Church, the writer has an accurate knowledge of its history. He also has access to the documentary evidence so important in a study of this kind. Furthermore, it is his opinion that it is better to deal with one denomination thoroughly, than with many superficially. Since the old United Presbyterian Church ceased to exist in 1958, there can be nothing offensive as might be the case with a continuing denomination. The fact that this Church happened to have its entire history of exactly one century within the boundaries of the United States of America is thus a sufficient reason for limiting the context to this sphere. We hope that this

witness will be heard in all English speaking lands, and not least in New Zealand where the writer now lives. But we will not try to apply the lesson set forth here for those who may know their own country and church better than the author.

In any event one conviction is primary—the Bible is the only rule of practice for the people of God. The crying need in much of the visible Church today is to realize this again. Only when this is done can the Church begin to promote the true principle of temperance, and enjoy the blessing of God upon its instruction and discipline. If this discussion can help to attain this end, even in some small measure, it will not be in vain.

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Chapter One - The Problem

The great problem for many, in considering the subject of wine in the Bible, is what the writer would call "the weight of the past." It is difficult to admit that many godly people of recent generations—people to whom we are related by ties of faith as well as flesh—were in error. "Is it really possible" the often half-conscious question arises "that all these people were wrong?" This is acutely felt by those who have been born and nurtured in churches that have a history of militant devotion to the cause of prohibition.

Those who have this difficulty will do well to listen to Martin Luther. He experienced the same discomfort. "No one will believe" he writes "how great an ordeal it is and how severe a shock when a person first realizes that he must believe and teach contrary to the fathers, especially when he sees that so many excellent, intelligent, and learned men, yes, the best of them taught thus. . . holy men, like Saints Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. I, too, have often experienced this shock. But in spite of this, that one man, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, must have greater weight with me than all the holiest people on earth put together."¹ When we think of the false doctrine of priestly celibacy, for example, we see how true it is that virtually the whole visible Church (including the best people in it) can fall under the spell of error. What then, asks Luther, shall we "condemn these men? No, I do not intend to condemn Benedict and others" he says, "But I do propose to take their books and carry them to Christ and His Word as a criterion for comparison. . . If their doctrine agrees with the Gospel, I shall accept it; if not, I shall say 'You may be a holy man, but you will never subject me to your rule; for it is a human bauble. Therefore let the Devil adopt it! I do not want it.'" Strong words, these. But true also. As Luther said: "this should have been our policy long ago." How different the sad history of the Church would have been if it had followed this course. Yet, as the great reformer lamented: "everybody is hesitant about doing this and will not do it even today."²

The call of Luther was to go back to the Scriptures alone as the criterion of truth and righteousness. The Reformation was a response to that call. The whole Protestant Reformation was based on the premise that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. In the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith (I,x):

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we

are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures.

What do we find, then, as we subject the so-called "temperance" movement to this test? Did it arise out of careful study of the Bible? Or did this movement come from another source? Did it come with such power as to deflect the Church from strict adherence to the sole authority of Scripture? A brief look at the history of the movement will answer these questions.

The modern "temperance movement" (as it is inaccurately denoted) arose out of an atmosphere of confidence in human progress, and a determination to rid the world of its ills, which has often been called "the American dream."³ Contributing to this were also such American religious distinctives as revivalism, millennial expectation, and confidence in man's ability. Out of this general climate came other reform movements too, such as the antislavery crusade, the peace movement, and social gospel programs. There was an attitude of expectancy and optimism waiting for the spark which would ignite the flame. It came when Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813) wrote a strong essay on the evils of "Ardent Spirits."⁴ When certain prominent ministers of the day borrowed from this essay, and began to preach about the evils of "intemperance" the movement was well on its way. Temperance societies were organized in rapid succession. A vast literature began to stream forth, condemning the evils of alcoholic beverages, and the wickedness of selling them.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of the temperance movement as a product of Scripture. The Washingtonian Temperance Movement which began in Baltimore, for example, professed no religious foundation at all. Even more important is the fact that the Scripture was not the "proof" that was used to support the movement. A famous tract for the times, for instance, was the Rev. George B. Cheever's lurid account of Deacon Gile's Distillery. In this "horror story" demons were pictured as working in a distillery to manufacture "liquid damnation. . .murder. . .and suicide."⁵ It also became common, in something that reminds us of certain modern evangelistic methods, to use reformed drunkards as crowd-drawing attractions in the great mass meetings of the movement. This naturally attracted some opportunists who were not really reformed, and the ensuing scandals brought something of a setback to the cause. Another thing that temporarily hindered the movement was the Civil War. The energies of the American people were too exhausted by this ordeal to leave much zeal for the cause of temperance. When the war was over, however, it displayed a marked resurgence, and the tide kept rising from that time on into the 20th century. As is well known, it finally culminated in the passing of the 18th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which (from 1920 to 1933) prohibited "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating

liquors."

It is not our purpose to give more than a brief outline of this history. It is rather to ask the question: how is it that so many Protestant churches—and particularly those of the Reformed heritage—became such ardent supporters of this movement? In order to do this we will trace the development in one representative denomination. The United Presbyterian Church of North America became an ardent supporter of the cause of total abstinence. In the remainder of this chapter we will give a resume of the official acts of the General Assemblies in which this development is unfolded.⁶

(1) The first thing that will impress anyone who studies the pronouncements of the General Assemblies of the United Presbyterian Church on this subject, is the utter lack of scriptural proof for what it declares. The constitution of the church, at that time, acknowledged the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.⁷ It further stated categorically that Synods or Assemblies do not have any authority to make rules or laws additional to Scripture.⁸ According to the professed conviction of the United Presbyterian Church in this era one thing was needed. It was the duty of General Assemblies to show that their decisions were based upon the clear teaching of the Bible. Yet, amazing as it may seem, nothing of the sort was done. As a matter of fact there is scant reference to the text of Scripture in the mass of these decisions and declarations. When the Bible is quoted, moreover, it is hard to find the connection between the quotation and the decision. In 1859, for example, the General Assembly declared:

That the business of manufacturing and vending intoxicating drinks, for drinking purposes, is injurious to the best interest of society, and therefore inconsistent with the law of God, which requires "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

No attempt is made to prove from Scripture that the first part of this declaration is true. It is simply assumed to be true. Then, after this sweeping assumption is made, the Scripture text is quoted to reinforce it. When the Assembly of 1878 declared that "drunkenness is an evil of giant proportions" it was certainly in accord with the Bible (I Cor. 6: 10). But it by no means follows from this that "the use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage, and the manufacture and sale of them for this purpose, are evils dishonoring to God." This is precisely the thing the Assemblies ought to have demonstrated by careful analysis of the teaching of the Bible as a whole. This is exactly what was not done. True, the Assembly of 1886 did pronounce "the liquor traffic" to be "forbidden by the Word of God," citing Habbakuk 2:15 as proof! But this text does not say it is sinful to use, or even to manufacture

wine. What it says is this: "Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, who mix your venom even to make them drunk so as to look on their nakedness." This was, in effect, to 'prove' one thing wrong by quoting a text which condemns another. Again, when the Assembly of 1887 denounced the liquor traffic as "evil, and only evil, continually" (see Gen. 6:5) it applied to a material substance a Scripture text which, in fact, describes the sinful heart of man. This can hardly be called scriptural proof. The Assembly of 1886 even went so far as to denounce as idolaters any civil authorities who allowed the manufacture and- sale of wine. To allow it, they said, was "to bow before the Moloch of the liquor power!" Yet no biblical proof was offered to substantiate the assertion.

In our brief summary, we have given virtually all of the biblical texts cited by the Assemblies of the United Presbyterian Church in decisions, on this subject, over a period of nearly half a century. Is it not abundantly clear that the concern of the United Presbyterian Church in those days was not to prove from Scripture that alcoholic beverages are evil? Is it not perfectly evident that the Church simply assumed that the "evil" was too notorious to require any proof?

(2) What then was the basis of the Church's assumption? The record will show that it was the influence of the temperance movement then sweeping over the American society. When the Assembly spoke of "the signs of the times in which we live. . .that the liquor traffic is the next great evil which the Lord of hosts. . .has arisen to destroy" (1886) it clearly witnessed to this fact. The "signs of the times" were evidently the events taking place in the society. They became a kind of direct revelation as to the will and purpose of God. If the temperance movement was of God, then of course it was the duty of the Church to become a part of it. Thus the Assembly of 1873 declared "that the Church is essentially a temperance society." It became the duty of the Church, then, not only to commend "those engaged in recent movements" (1877) but also to declare it, 'the duty of the Christian Church to sympathize with and earnestly promote' such causes (1878). After all, if God was revealing His will through these movements, it certainly behoved the Church to listen to what He was saying! If this movement in particular was of God, then what could be more obvious than the fact that the Church was obliged to join with it? Thus the call of the Assembly came for "a united front" (1886), in which Christians were to learn to work together with others "regardless of previous party affiliations." The call did not come from the Bible as the only rule for faith and life. It came from the mighty movement then sweeping American society. "Recent developments" as the Assembly itself expressed it, "in the war against the saloon call loudly to our church to occupy even more advanced ground in her hostility to every form of license or taxation" of the liquor traffic (1890). It would be difficult to

think of a way to say more clearly that, on this issue at least, the Bible was not the only criterion.

(3) Another thing that stands out in this record, is what we can only call the sheer intemperance of the so-called temperance movement in the Church. It not only denounced drunkenness, for example, but biblical moderation too. "The moderate use of intoxicants as a beverage," said the Assembly of 1881, is "the source of all these evils." The Church was not satisfied, in other words, to denounce drunkards. It rather denounced as most wicked of all those who were moderate users. Nor was the Church satisfied to strike at those within (by imposing a man-made law of total abstinence for Church members). It also struck at those outside (by seeking to deny them, if at all possible, even a place to live). Yes, the Church began to denounce even the selling of materials to people engaged in the making of wine (1881). It was supposedly wrong to so much as rent houses to them. Incredible as it may seem, this was all done in the name of love for one's neighbors. Evidently a neighbor, in 1881—for United Presbyterians—had to be someone who had nothing to do with wine!

(4) The movement finally swept the Church so far away from the authority of Scripture that wine was considered an evil thing even at the communion table (1881,1884,1887). People were more and more strongly under pressure to join "the movement." The Women's Christian Temperance Society was endorsed as "the movement of the whole Church" (1874). Its work was praised as "patient, persistent, heroic and prayerful" (1884). "We bid them God speed" it was declared, and we join "their great battle cry "The Saloon must go." (1884). As a later Assembly would deplore gambling "as unChristian and un-American" (1938), so earlier declarations said "friends of God and humanity" would naturally recognize the righteousness of this cause (1875). After all "the Son of God was manifested to destroy, not to regulate, the works of the devil" (1891). Who, with eyes to see the signs of the times, could fail to discern the fact that wine and strong drink were of the devil? Who could doubt that it was the duty of Christians "to avoid the use of intoxicants of any kind, and in any quantity" (1881).

It is clear, then, that the United Presbyterian Church of North America was carried away by this great movement that swept American society. It was carried away from the most basic principle of its own professed faith. The Church should have been careful to search the Scriptures first, in order to judge the movement. The fact is that the movement eclipsed the authority of the Bible. There were, indeed, some in that period who recognized this fact. A notable example was Dr. Charles Hodge of Princeton. He could have been thinking of the United Presbyte-

rian Church too, when he wrote, in 1843:

As it is a fact, just as clear as any other fact contained in the Scripture, that God and Christ did not prohibit, but allowed the use of such drinks, we cannot hesitate to say that the above resolution (Hodge here refers to a resolution denouncing the manufacture, sale, and use of intoxicating drinks) is infidel in its spirit and tendency, however many good men may have been cajoled or driven into the sin of giving it their sanction.⁹

This kind of Church declaration, as Hodge put it, "has led to a disregard of the authority of the Word of God, to a shameful perversion of its meaning, to shocking irreverence in the manner of speaking of our blessed Redeemer."¹⁰ But the trouble was (as Dr. Hodge learned from bitter experience) that those who opposed this false teaching were often accused of seeking to promote intemperance. "They are said to take part with the drunkard," Hodge lamented, "and to stand in the way of all that is good." So it was too, in the United Presbyterian Church of North America, as all opposition was crushed under the juggernaut of the so-called Temperance Movement.

It would be interesting to trace the parallel between the movement for enforced celibacy in the medieval Church, and the total abstinence movement in the modern Church. There are many similarities, but two stand out. In neither instance did the Church prove that the movement had the sanction of Scripture; and in both many eminent and godly men were led astray.

1 Ian Murray, *The Reformation of the Church*, (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 31.

2 Op. cit. p. 33

3 K.S. Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, Vol. 3. (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970), pp. 210-215 (and the whole of chapter 8 for the context of the abstinence movement).

4 McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 10. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 245.

6 "Digest of the Principles, Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of The United Presbyterian Church of North America from 1859 to 1902. (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1903) (and the updated volume by the same publisher, 1942).

7 Westminster Larger Catechism. Q. 3.

8 Westminster Confession of Faith, XX, ii; and XXX, iv.

9 *The Presbyterian Church of America*, "The Presbyterian Guardian. Vol. IV, No. 6 (June 26, 1937) p. 87.

10 *Ibid.*

Chapter Two - The Biblical Teaching

The problem of the abuse of wine and strong drink is not new. It was well known to the inspired writers of the Old Testament. They tell us that in their day too there were those who drank until they were "merry" (2 Sam. 13 :28; Est. 1:10), then "boisterous" (Zech. 9:15), and finally even violent (Pr. 4:17). They vividly describe the drunken man "overcome with wine" (Ps. 78:65). He reels, staggers, is confused, totters, and finally vomits (Isa. 28:7). He sees "strange things" and utters "perverse things" (Pr. 23:33). He becomes "like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast" (Pr. 23:34). In his drunken condition a man may strike him and he will not even feel it (Pr. 23 :35), and then, as soon as he is sober he will seek another drink (23:35). The "skid-row" derelict is evidently nothing new under the sun. The inspired writers also knew about the "woe. . .sorrow. . .contentions. . .wounds. . .(and) redness of eyes" (Pr. 23:39) suffered by the man "sick with the heat of wine" (Hos. 7:5). They knew what it could do to human behavior, when a man drank too much—how he would sell a girl for wine (Joel 3:3)—lose all sense of modesty (Gen. 9:21)—or even commit incest (Gen. 19:32-35). They didn't hesitate to compare the powerful effects of wine and strong drink to the "venom of serpents and the deadly poison of cobras" (Deut. 32:32). The Scripture confirms the testimony that the drunkard himself makes in his sober moments: "it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper" (Pr. 23:32).

Yet, strange as it may seem, the Bible does not condemn wine and strong drink. It does not say that these are inherently evil. It does not forbid the people of God to use them. To the contrary, it explicitly states that God himself provides "wine which makes man's heart glad" just as He gives "food which sustains man's heart" (Ps. 104:14,15). He promises His people that, if they will obey Him, He will bless them with an abundance of wine (Deut 7:13, 11:14, Prov. 3: 10, etc.). He threatens to withdraw this blessing from them if they disobey His law (Deut. 28:39, 51; Isa. 62:8). The Scriptures clearly teach that God permits His people to enjoy wine and strong drink as a gift from Him. "You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or what ever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household" (Deut. 14:26). Under certain circumstances it is even commanded of God that wine and strong drink be given (Pr. 31:6,7). And since wine was used in the worship of God (Ex. 29:40, Lev. 23:13; Nu. 15:5,7,10; 28:14) the Bible says wine is something that cheers God as well as man (dud. 9:13).

Attempts have been made to draw a distinction between wine and grape juice

in the Bible, or in other words between fermented and unfermented wine. A careful study of the Hebrew and Greek terms reveal no such distinction in Scripture. The same wine (Hebrew Yayin) that made Noah (Gen. 9:21), Lot (Gen. 19:32-35), Nabal (I Sa. 25:37), Ahasuerus (Est. I :7,10) and others (Isa. 28:1,7; Jer. 23:9 etc.) drunk, was also given to Abraham by Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18), kept in the storehouses of the Kings of Israel (I Chron. 27:27; 11 Chron 11:11, Neh. 5:18) and permitted to all God's people (Deut. 14:26). The warnings against the danger of drinking too much wine are so numerous in Scripture that one can only conclude that the term itself means an intoxicating beverage. Out of the 140 occurrences of the Hebrew word, in no instance can it be demonstrated that the word means unfermented grape juice. In the vast majority it is perfectly apparent that fermented wine is the meaning.

New wine (Hebrew Tirosh) is the second term with respect to frequency. The firstfruits of the vineyard were called new wine, and are usually mentioned favorably (Gen. 27:28,37, Nu. 18:12, Deut 7:13; 11:14 etc.). It was regarded as the Lord's portion because it was the first and the best. "Honor the Lord with your wealth and from the firstfruits of all your produce; so that your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Pr. 3:9,10). Yet new wine did not mean unfermented grape juice. Hosea clearly speaks of its intoxicating properties (Host 4:11). But this too was permitted to the people of God (Deut. 14:23).

Other biblical terms yield the same result. Strong drink (Hebrew Shekar) was certainly intoxicating (I Sa. 1:15; and in the verbal form Gen. 9:21; 43:34; Isa. 49:26). Eli falsely imagined that Hannah was drunk from this beverage. If wine is a mocker, then strong drink is a brawler (Pr. 20:1). It was forbidden to priests while on duty (Lev. 10:9) and to Nazarites during the time of their vow (Nu. 6:3). Yet it too was sanctioned for use by God's people (Deut. 14:26). The wine mentioned in Daniel 5 (Chaldean Chamar) was obviously intoxicating. Yet this was also numbered with the blessings God gives His people (Deut. 32:14). Sweet wine (Hebrew Asis) too had alcoholic content (Isa. 49:26). Yet the prophets speak of it as a blessing of God (Joel 3:17,18; Amos 9:13). Liquor (Hebrew Sobe) was probably a potent intoxicant. In the verbal form it is rendered drunkard (Deut. 21:20) and heavy drinker (Pr. 23:20). The mixed wine (Hebrew Mesek) was probably wine mixed with spices (Pr. 23:30; Isa. 65:11). The lees or dregs (Hebrew Shemarim) evidently meant the solid residue together with the wine in which they were soaked (Isa. 25:6; Jer. 48:11). None of these terms can be shown to mean unfermented grape juice. Those that can be proved to mean fermented wine, even in its strongest form, are explicitly said to be lawful to the people of God in Scripture.

The Old Testament does, of course, speak of grapes and of the blood of grapes

(Gen. 40:10,11; Lev. 25:5 etc.). This is the closest thing that we can discover to grape juice. Such terms are found fourteen times in the Old Testament, usually in reference to the initial part of the process of making wine (Neh. 13:15), such as harvesting (Nu. 13:20) or treading the grapes (Amos 9:13). The only mention of the drinking of the blood of grapes immediately after the grapes were crushed is in the vision of Pharaoh (Gen. 40:10,11), but it is probable that even here it is to be understood as fermented wine. (Cf. Deut. 32:14). In any event, the Scripture does not make a distinction between the blood of the grape and fermented wine and strong drink, as if the one were permitted to God's people and the other not. To the contrary, it is precisely wine and strong drink that is expressly permitted (Deut. 14:26). The only exception (apart from the priests while on duty) was that an Israelite was forbidden to use anything that came from the grape during the time of a Nazarite vow (Nu. 6:3).

It is probably for this reason that the Greek Septuagint (abbreviated LXX) used the common word wine (Greek Oinos) to translate various Hebrew words. Since virtually all of the Hebrew terms (as shown above) referred to various kinds of fermented wine, it was natural that the Greek translators should employ the common Greek term for fermented grape juice. It must be remembered, furthermore, that this Greek version was the Bible of the Gentile Church in the Apostolic Period. If the writers of the New Testament had wished to speak of unfermented grape juice the one word that they never could have used in their writings was the term Oinos. That they did use this term is therefore very significant. A member of the Apostolic Church who searched the Scriptures (Acts 17:11- that is the LXX) could only reach one conclusion. The Bible in his hands gave conclusive proof of the intoxicating nature of wine. He would read in his Bible that wine (Oinos) made Noah and Lot drunk (Gen. 9:21; 19:33-35). He would learn that the priests were forbidden, under the law of Moses, to drink this wine while on duty (Lev. 10:9). He would learn that a Nazarite was not to use it during the time of a vow (Nu. 6:3). He would also find examples of (I Sa. 25:37) and warnings against drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35). But he would also read that wine (the same oinos) is a blessing from God (Ps. 104:15 (103:15 in LXX)), and a wholesome aspect of life (Eccles. 9:7, Deut. 32:14 Prov. 3:9,10), even though it was the strongest kind of wine (Deut 14:26; Jud. 9:13; Isa. 25:6, 49:26).

When Christians heard the apostolic account of John the Baptist who drank no wine (Lk. 7:33) they would understand, on the background of the Nazarite regulations (Nu. 6:14; Lk. 1:15) his mode of life. But when they heard that Jesus, in contrast to John came both "eating and drinking" (Lk. 7:34) it would not offend them. Though our Lord was accused of being "a gluttonous man and a drunkard" (Lk.

7:34) they knew, from the teaching of the Old Testament, that one could lawfully eat without being a glutton and drink without being a drunkard. It would not offend them to hear that their Lord made wine for a wedding feast (John 2:1 - 11) because they already knew from Scripture that wine is a blessing that God provides for His people (Deut. 14:26). They did not attempt to rewrite Scripture so as to make the word wine stand for grape juice, since they knew from Scripture that even strong drink was permitted.

It came as no surprise to them, of course, that the inspired Apostles too condemned all drunkenness and debauchery (I Cor. 5:11; 6:10; Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:21, etc.). This was in full accord with the Old Testament (Deut. 21:20,21; Prov. 23:19-21, etc.) But despite the danger involved in the use of wine, they did not expect the Apostles to denounce wine per se. It is recorded, in I Corinthians 11:21, that some in the Apostolic Church even went so far as to get drunk at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Yet Paul did not say what present-day advocates of total abstinence might wish: that drinking wine IS evil. What he does say is this: "What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink?" (v. 22). It is clear, then, that fermented wine was used at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is equally clear that a moderate use of wine was never forbidden in the Apostolic Church. Even elders and deacons were not required to practice total abstinence (I Tim. 5:23; 3:3). They were only required to be men who were truly temperate in their use of wine.

There were in the Apostolic Church, as there are today, those who desired to impose man-made laws of abstinence upon the Church. So far were the Apostles from being in sympathy with them that we find some of their sternest words used to denounce them (I Tim. 4:1-4). So important was this, in fact, that the Holy Spirit granted Paul a special prophetic revelation concerning it. To Timothy he wrote:

The Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer (I Tim. 4:15).

And again, to the Colossians he said:

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world,

why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence (Col. 2:20-33).

Wine is one of the things created by God to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. Those who desire to impose a law of total abstinence upon Christians are departing from the truth of God and following the doctrine of demons. It is demonic to locate evil in any material thing. The true believer may not submit to such man-made decrees. He is to submit to the law of the Lord, and to that alone. However pious such rules may be in appearance, moreover, they are really of no value in restraining the lusts of the flesh. No, the one real safeguard against fleshly indulgence is the power of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of believers. The truly regenerate man is the man who has "laid aside the old self with its evil practices" and who has "put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Col. 3:9,10). For such a man the law of the Lord is sufficient. He has no need whatever of a man-made fence to keep him safe.

It was Paul who said "all things are lawful for me" (I Cor. 6:12 10:23). True, they are not always expedient, and Paul emphasizes the fact that he will not be mastered by anything. Yet the fact remains that "nothing is unclean of itself" (Ro. 14:14). For, as our Lord stated so clearly: "there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man" (Mk. 7:15). Wine is not the cause of drunkenness exactly as food is not the cause of gluttony. The truth is that all sin proceeds from the sinful heart of man. To treat wine as the cause of sin—in any way shape or form—is to deny the real teaching of Scripture concerning the depravity of man. It is, in effect, to say that there is fault in the handiwork of God. There is no greater need in the Church today than to reject this doctrine of devils.

The result of our survey is this: wine is clearly shown to be an intoxicating drink in the Bible. It is a thing that man can easily abuse to his own destruction. Yet Scripture says it is also a blessing when it is properly used by those who understand and believe the truth.

Chapter Three - Abstinence in the Old Testament

Proponents of the doctrine of total abstinence often rely heavily on three passages of the Bible. These passages deal, respectively, with (1) the priests during the performance of their duties in the tabernacle (Lev. 10:9), (2) the Nazarites during the time of their vow (Nu. 6:3,4); and (3) the Rechabites who were under a perpetual ancestral commandment (Jer. 35). We will here examine each of these passages.

The Lord then spoke to Aaron, saying, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you may not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations—and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses" (Lev. 10:8-11).

This, it will be recalled, follows closely upon the incident wherein Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord. It is at least conceivable that these sons of Aaron acted under the influence of wine. It could therefore be thought that this law was designed to prevent a recurrence of such iniquity. We do not say that this is so, but many proponents of total abstinence appear to believe this. But, even if this is granted, two things are worthy of note. First, the judgment of God upon Nadab and Abihu clearly shows that they are blamed for the evil thing that happened. The Lord did not condemn the wine, but the men who abused it (i.e., of course, this is what happened). In the second place, the prohibition against the use of wine and strong drink is limited. It was only when the priests came to the tent of meeting to perform their duties that they were forbidden to use alcoholic beverages. So, even on this interpretation of the passage there is no support for a universal or absolute law of abstinence.

With respect to the Nazarite we read:

When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazarite, to dedicate himself to the Lord, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh or dried grapes. All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin. All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the

days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord; he shall let the locks of his hair grow long. All the days of his separation to the Lord he shall not go near to a dead person." (Nu. 6:2-6)

Here again, the prohibition is clearly limited. It is only when an Israelite made a special vow that the abstinence was required observe, too, that it was not abstinence from wine alone that was required. No, it was abstinence from anything and everything that came from grapes. But this is not all; the same vow further required abstinence from cutting of the hair, and from any association with the dead. A person under this vow, in other words, would not be allowed to attend the funeral of a loved one, or to get a haircut. Here we see the utter inconsistency in the argument often advanced by proponents of total abstinence. *If* the Nazarite rule is a rule that applies to New Testament believers, then surely the rule must stand as a whole. Yet the common practice is to arbitrarily select one aspect only, while ignoring the rest. The hair may be cut, funerals may be attended, and grapes eaten and grape juice taken! But somehow it is argued that this passage of Scripture still teaches that wine is forbidden! Is this not a deceitful handling of the Word of God?

The case of the Rechabites is even more transparent. They received a purely human commandment by way of tradition from their ancestor. Jonadab had said:

You shall not drink wine, you or your sons, forever. And you shall not build a house, and you shall not sow seed, and you shall not plant a vineyard or own one; but in tents you shall dwell all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn (Jer. 35:6,7).

We cannot see any reason to say that Christians today are obligated to keep the commandments of Jonadab. But even if they are, the proponents of prohibition stand condemned.

To argue, as proponents of prohibition do, that this is intended as normative for Christian believers today, is also deceitful. For it is a well-known fact that the most ardent prohibitionists do not live in tents, do not refuse to build houses, and do not refrain from gardening! If the commandment of Jonadab has binding authority today, then by what method of interpretation can most of what he commanded be set aside? Is it not clear that this account is in Scripture, not to impose Jonadab's rule upon God's people, but for a very different reason? The purpose is to show the amazing contrast between the faithfulness of the Rechabites in keeping an unreasonable commandment of an earthly father, while the Israelites disregarded the reasonable law of their Father in heaven (Jer. 35:16-19).

If total abstinence from the use of wine is the spiritual panacea that prohibitionists say it is, then why is Deuteronomy 29:6 so often ignored? Moses, in reviewing the forty years wandering in the desert, reminds the Israelites that during the whole of that time they did not "drink wine or strong drink." If total abstinence is a mark of piety, then it would seem that this wilderness generation should rank among the best. Yet what does Scripture say? "For Forty years I loathed that generation and said, they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Therefore I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest" (Ps. 95:10,11). If alcoholic beverages are (as is frequently claimed) "the number one cause of so many evils in society," then how is it that this wilderness generation was so vile when all were total abstainers? Could it be that the real source of all these evils is really man's depraved heart? (Mk. 7:15)

Chapter Four - The Weaker Brother

"It is good" says the Apostle Paul "not to eat meat or to drink wine, or do anything by which your brother stumbles" (Rom. 14:21). This statement is often quoted by those who would make total abstinence a requirement for the Christian. They argue that it is the duty of the strong to abstain out of deference to the weak. They say, in other words, that even a careful and temperate use of wine contradicts this apostolic principle. It is to this argument that we now direct our attention. We do so by asking two important questions. What does Paul mean by the weaker brother in this passage? And what does he mean when he talks about causing this brother to stumble?

The fact is that Paul means something very different in this phrase "weaker brother" from what the proponents of total abstinence mean. When they speak of a weaker brother they mean someone who has a tendency to drink too much. A man who has been an alcoholic, for example, and is now seeking to remain sober, by practicing complete abstinence, would be a weaker brother as they use this phrase. But the weaker brother in Paul's terminology is not a man who tends to drink too much. To the contrary, he is a man who feels that it would be wrong to drink any wine at all. He is a man who has a certain scruple of conscience. *If* certain kinds of meat and wine were really evil per se, then it would not be necessary to speak of such people as weaker brothers. But the fact is that there is no meat or wine that is evil in itself. So the stronger brother is the one who recognizes that this is true. The weaker brother is weaker because he is mistaken in his conviction. If he eats, or drinks, he sins. The sin does not lie in the mere physical act of eating or drinking as such. It lies in the fact that the weaker brother in eating or drinking has violated his own conscience. For, as Paul says, "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Paul's definition of the weaker brother is therefore the exact opposite of that which is propounded by the advocates of the total abstinence position. To put it precisely: the weaker brother, in Paul's terminology, is someone who holds the total abstinence position. His weakness is that he erroneously believes that drinking wine is a sin.

From this it can readily be seen that when Paul speaks of causing a brother to stumble, he doesn't mean anything like the proponents of total abstinence. When they say that we must not cause our brother to stumble, they simply mean that we must not do anything that they do not like. We must not engage in any behavior that is offensive to other believers. Or in other words we must never do anything that other believers consider to be sin. Now this is not at all what Paul meant.

When he spoke of causing a brother to stumble, he meant an act on our part which induces our brother to sin—encourages him to act against this scruple that he has in his conscience. It may well be, of course, that what Paul is saying may—in certain circumstances—dictate that we must not do something that is intrinsically lawful. If a certain Christian has been an alcoholic, and now believes that any use of wine for him would be the path of ruin, then other Christians must certainly make this their concern. They must be careful that they do not act in such a way as to encourage him to go against conscience. This does not mean that they must adopt the rule of his conscience as law.

We can easily see this if we simply notice that Paul also speaks of the religious observance of days (Rom. 14:6). It is a well-known fact that no day was observed in the Apostolic Church, by divine commandment, except the Lord's Day (I Cor. 16:1,2; Gal. 4:9-11). When the Judaizers attempted to impose the observance of other (additional) days the Apostle strenuously objected (Gal. 4:9-11). Yet in this matter too Paul had compassion for those who were weaker brothers. The weaker brother in this instance was someone who felt obligated to observe these other days. (Think of the Jew who still felt bound by conscience to observe the traditional Jewish feast days!) The problem, again, was a misinformed conscience that went beyond the law of the Lord. Does anyone think that Paul demanded that the strong conform to the weak? No, the plain fact is that when the attempt was made to force such conformity the Apostle severely denounced them. For it is one thing to receive the weaker brother (Rom 14:1) and quite another to allow his weakness to be imposed upon others as law (v. 4).

It was exactly the same with food. In Paul's day—as in ours - some people had scruples of conscience against eating certain kinds of meat (pork, for example). Wrong as they were in having this scruple, they were still to be received as brothers (v. 3). The strong were not to try to induce them to eat against conviction of conscience. Who would argue that it was the duty of the strong to conform to the weak? Do the proponents of total abstinence themselves submit to such scruples? No, the fact is that the very people who attempt to use this argument to force other people to practice total abstinence, when it comes to wine, do not themselves practice it when it comes to pork. It is small wonder! If Christians were obliged to abstain—completely—from any food or drink that weaker brothers have, at one time or another, and at one place or another, considered to be sinful, they would have little to eat and drink. Why then should this passage be taken in this way with respect to wine? The passage, after all, does not say that it is evil to eat meat or to drink wine. It is only said that it is good not to eat meat or drink wine if it causes a brother to stumble. The one concern of the entire passage is to teach us to avoid

anything that would induce a weaker brother to act against his own conscience.

When Paul says "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" (I Cor. 7:1) he does not mean that sexual intercourse is inherently wrong. To the contrary, in order to avoid sexual immorality he recommends it—by telling us that each man is to have his own wife and each woman her own husband, if they do not have the gift of continency. The opposite of sexual immorality is not necessarily celibacy. To say that total (sexual) abstinence is good, is not at all the same as to say that lawful indulgence is evil. Quite the contrary: while complete abstinence may be best for some, a proper indulgence is better for others. Indeed, for most people the expedient thing is not abstinence but lawful use. Yet this is the distinction that the proponents of prohibition ignore. They condemn the use of wine, even in moderation, on the grounds that it could cause another person to stumble. It is interesting to observe that some people in the ancient Church did exactly the same thing with respect to marriage. Because the Scripture says "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" they began to require people to practice celibacy (I Tim. 4:3). Like present-day advocates of total abstinence, they sought to make a scruple of their own conscience binding on everyone else. But Paul, speaking prophetically, brands their teaching as coming from deceitful spirits, and as the devil's doctrine, not Christ's (v. 1). He does not praise their conviction of conscience, but rather describes their consciences as having been seared with a branding iron (v. 2). In forbidding marriage, and commanding abstinence from certain foods, they really impugned the handiwork of God (v. 3,4). For God has created all these things to be received with thanksgiving, by those who believe and know the truth.

It is the same with wine. Those who seek to impose their scruple of conscience on others usurp the authority of Christ. Paul teaches us to resist them. "The faith which you have" he says "have as your own conviction before God" (Rom. 14:22).

Chapter Five - Constitutional Alcoholics?

It is sometimes said that certain people are constitutional alcoholics. If such people are induced to drink even a little wine, it is said, they are virtually certain to become alcoholics. One could as safely strike a match near gasoline as to expose such persons to wine. Even the use of a small quantity at the Lord's Table is considered unthinkable because it could ignite the flame of intemperance. To this matter we here direct our attention.

Is it scriptural to say that some persons are constitutional alcoholics? To this there can be but one answer. It is not scriptural to say some people are such. In Romans 5:19 the Greek text informs us that all men are constituted (*katestathesan*) sinners by virtue of the fact that they sinned in, and fell with Adam. If, by constitutional, we mean what Paul is saying in this text, we shall have to say that all men are born with a natural disposition to sin (and this includes the sin of intemperance). Taking the word "constitutional" in this sense the argument is therefore false, because it ascribes to only some men what is clearly true of all. It is doubtful, however, that this is what the advocates of total abstinence mean when they use the word "constitutional," with reference to alcoholics. It is rather more likely that they really have in mind some biological condition—something inherent in bodily and physical makeup—that makes a person vulnerable to the power of alcohol in such a way that he cannot be held responsible for it. In this sense there is no such thing as constitutional alcoholism. The Bible never permits us to think of the sin of drunkenness this way.

We may illustrate our point by referring to the sin of homosexuality. Paul says this "is against nature" (Ro. 1:26). He does not mean that it is against the sinful nature of fallen man to be homosexual. To the contrary, it is the burning desire of his depraved nature to do this vile thing (v. 27). It is against nature rather in the sense that those who do these things degrade and violate their human nature as God created it. If we take seriously the biblical teaching concerning man's inherited depravity, we shall have to say that all men are potentially homosexual sinners. But this most certainly does not mean that this wickedness is necessitated by man's created nature. To the contrary: it means that the sinner himself is responsible because, in "being that way," he sins against himself (his God-given nature) as well as against God. To argue that some people are biologically programmed to be homosexuals—or alcoholics—in advance, so that external causes bring about a course of development for which they cannot be held responsible, is really to make God the author of sin. It is one and the same as to say that such people are the helpless

victims of the (biological) nature that God has given them. The Bible, in sharpest contrast with this false modern view of man, and sin, says no drunkard shall inherit the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:10). In saying that it manifestly declares that they are responsible, and that, if they are lost, it is entirely their own fault. While this false teaching that we are considering really says that some men will be lost forever—and yet it isn't really their fault!

To say that wine should not be used even at the communion table, out of supposed concern for the alcoholic, is therefore not the pious and innocent thing that is often pretended. No, it is really a practical application of a false doctrine of man, and of sin. Sin does not reside in some defect in human biology that necessitates evil, nor does it reside in some created entity outside of man that causes him to do evil. It is not true that "one small glass of wine" can cause a chain reaction bringing the ruin of a human soul. The cause of any such chain reaction of iniquity is something that issues out of the depraved heart of man: it is the original sin that belongs to all because all sinned in Adam and fell with him. We are propagated as depraved people. The root of all wickedness is in us all. To act "as if" the danger of becoming alcoholics (or homosexuals) arises from something in my body, rather than my heart, or in a glass of wine, rather than in my depravity, is to utterly falsify the situation. The only source of danger is man's sinful heart.

It is no doubt true that for some who have been alcoholics, the path of complete abstinence may be expedient. If the right eye offends, it must indeed be cut out. Fellow-Christians should support converted alcoholics as they shun the occasion for temptation to fall back into old patterns of behavior. Does this mean that, for the converted alcoholic, even a little wine at the Lord's Table could well be the trigger that sets him off again? So it is often said. For the sake of even one such person, it is argued, the whole Christian Church should forever abolish the use of wine at the Lord's Table.

The trouble with this argument is that it really implies that Jesus .Himself did evil. Suppose that this argument was valid. Would not our Lord—who knows all things—have recognized it? Would He not also have taught it? Yet the fact is that our Lord Himself made wine, and gave it to other people (Jn. 2). The Bible also says that Jesus knew what was in man (Jn. 2:25). If even a little wine could cause the sin of drunkenness, then surely our Lord would never have done this thing. After all, people did get drunk in Jesus' day too. It is perfectly evident that Jesus, therefore, did not accept this argument.

But this is not all. The Scripture also teaches us that Christians (yes, even con-

verted drunkards) are new creatures, that the old man is put to death, and the new is put on. It says that He who dwells within the believer is greater than he that is in the world. Even if we grant, then, the argument that a little wine could "set a man off," it would only be the unconverted man of whom such a thing could be said. We might possibly argue that even a little wine should not be given to an unregenerate and unconverted person, but the wine that is given at the Lord's Table is only to be given to believers. It is given to those who make a credible profession of faith in Christ. And to say that "a little wine" can endanger them, is not only to make a false assumption about the nature of sin, but to add another concerning the work of God's Spirit. Those who argue that wine at the Lord's Table threatens the converted alcoholic virtually deny the power of the Holy Spirit. "They fail," as Prof. J. G. Vos puts it, "to take the power of the Holy Spirit into their reckoning." What the Church should do, in dealing with such persons, is not to educate them in falsehood—by making them think that there is more power in a little wine than there is in the third person of the God-head. No, it should teach them the truth. The truth is that there is not—and never was—any destructive power inherent in wine. The power of Satan is real, and so is the power of sin. But the very purpose of coming to the Lord's Table is to celebrate the victory of Christ over these powers. So, radical though it may seem to many in the Christian Church today, the best interests of the converted alcoholic are served by having wine in the communion service. Here, if ever, is the situation in which he can learn the difference between holy use and sinful abuse. Here too, he can find the support he needs to begin that new life of which Jesus Christ is Lord, and His Spirit the power. Does not the converted alcoholic most of all need this victory?

1 J. G. Vos, *The Separated Life*, (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications.) p. 27.

Chapter Six - The Tyranny of Experts

It is very difficult for some Christians to accept the fact that no material thing is evil in itself. But this is the teaching of Scripture. "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus," says Paul, "that nothing is unclean in itself" (Rot 14:14). "All things are lawful for me" (I Cor. 6: 12). Or, as our Lord expressed it, "there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him" (Mk. 7:15).

How then does it happen that Christians commonly think of some things as inherently evil? Is it not the failure to make an important ~distinction? If a certain material thing is dangerous, and potentially ~harmful, to man, then it is assumed that it must be sinful to use it. Hence the slogan of the proponents of total abstinence defining temperance as "a moderate use of things that are good and total abstinence from things that are harmful." If a thing is harmful or dangerous to man then it is thought of as evil. Yet the truth is that the ~two are quite distinct. The one does not automatically follow from the other. It is not true that it is always a sin to use something that may be harmful or dangerous. It is not the nature of a thing that ~determines whether or not its use is sinful, but the way in which it is 'used. The point has been expressed in a lucid way by Prof. J. G. Vos ~in his little classic entitled "The Separated Life."

Beyond doubt it is sinful to commit suicide by drinking carbolic acid. This, however, is not because the use of carbolic acid is sinful in itself, but because it is used with suicidal intent. In such a case, the sin committed is the sin of suicide, not the sin of drinking carbolic acid. Carbolic acid being a material thing cannot be sinful in itself. If its use were sinful in itself, that use would be sinful regardless of the quantity used. If one drop of carbolic acid were to be dissolved in a thousand gallons of water, and one drop of the resultant solution drunk, the drinking of that one drop would be a sin deserving the punishment of eternal death, provided the use of carbolic acid is sinful in itself.

Let no one say that this is simply a *reductio ad absurdum* and therefore not worthy of serious consideration. Scripture does teach that sin has an absolute character, and that any sin, even the least, is a violation of the whole moral law and therefore deserving of the judicial sentence of eternal death.'

We do not argue that Christians may ignore scientific evidence concerning the physiological effects of various substances. What we do insist is that there is no Scriptural basis for saying that any material thing is evil in itself, or that it is forbid-

den to the people of God.

In the judgment of the writer, as an example, it is a well established fact that carbon monoxide is dangerous to man. People sometimes commit suicide by breathing carbon monoxide from the exhaust of automobiles. There is little doubt that certain occupations are hazardous because of overexposure to this substance. In some of our larger cities it is even true that levels of concentration of this pollutant have reached alarming proportions. Perhaps some people even die because of this pollution. But who will argue from this that it is a sin for a Christian to breathe carbon monoxide? *If a thing is sinful whenever it is harmful, then the path of duty would be clear.* Christians would be obligated to leave any city in which harmful levels of pollution are known to occur. But, of course, it would be wrong for the Christian to leave by automobile because in doing so he would be responsible for causing others to sin! If it is a sin to breath something that is harmful, then it is surely sin to help produce what is harmful. But of course the argument is false. Carbon monoxide is not evil in itself. It does not become sinful merely because it is harmful.

It may be well, at this point, to stress an important point. We do not argue that the present levels of air-pollution, in some of our larger cities, are an indifferent matter. To the contrary, we would insist that this is indeed a moral issue. All human activity (including the pollution of the atmosphere) is moral and religious. Christian people should be the ones who are most concerned about these things. In certain specific cases the Christian may have to refuse to perform certain kinds of work (if he knows that in this work he will expose himself, or others, to unacceptable levels of carbon monoxide poison). But this is not because carbon monoxide is evil in itself. It is because the use of this substance is such that the Christian, in weighing the moral issues, is convinced that it is not legitimate. Here we come to the crux of the matter.

What authority is competent to determine the *harmfulness* and on that basis to infer the inherent *sinfulness* of the use of a particular material substance, withal making this inference binding on the consciences of the Lord's people? Are church judicatories qualified to issue authoritative pronouncements on such matters?²

This would be what Professor J. G. Machen called "the tyranny of the experts." It was from this tyranny that the Reformation delivered us. However novel it may sound in some ears today, the fact is that a true Protestant will never submit to this tyranny again. He will, of course, listen to the experts. He will not ignore "the latest scientific opinion." But neither will he regard it as an infallible oracle. Proponents

of total abstinence often talk as if modern medical and scientific opinion were (a) unified and (b) infallible. In truth it is neither. Not all doctors agree that wine is harmful. Even if they did, it would still be the right of the Christian to subject their expert opinion to the test of Scripture, for it is the only infallible rule.

It was at one time the opinion of the experts (medical doctors) that patients should be bled profusely. But this is not the view of today's experts. We can be thankful for that! We can be much more thankful for the fact that we have one source of information that is not subject to error. The Christian, then, must evaluate the experts. The ultimate criterion by which all must be judged is God's infallible Word. The true believer can, by the transforming of his mind by God's Word and Spirit, prove what God's will really is (Ro. 12:2). The one thing that he is not at liberty to do is to allow others to determine for him the path of his duty to God. No, says Paul, "it was for freedom that Christ has set us free," and therefore we must keep standing firm, and not again be subject "to the yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5: 1). This, after all, is what we do when we allow the proponents of total abstinence to impose their man-made rules on the Church. "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world" asks Paul, then "why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?" (Col. 2:20-22).

1 J. G. Vos, *The Separated Life*, (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications), pp. 12, 13.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Chapter Seven - The Counsel of Fear

Proponents of prohibition in the Church often defend their position by giving the counsel of fear. "If the Church relaxes its rule requiring total abstinence," they say, "then what is to prevent the evils of drunkenness from disturbing the Church?" It is with this argument that we deal in this chapter. We begin by observing the basic assumption that lies at the basis of this appeal. It is the notion that man-made rules are an effective barrier to sin.

Is it true that man-made rules help to prevent sin? The writer has served congregations that do, and congregations that do not, have such man-made rules. The worst case of abuse of wine that he ever had to deal with was in the Church having the man-made rule. The rule did not prevent abuse. To the contrary, it was of no value whatever in restraining "the flesh." But we do not make this assertion on the basis of experience. Experiences that we have are not the rule of faith and practice. The Bible alone is our standard. And it says: If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence (Col. 2:20-23).

Does not the man-made rule of total abstinence agree precisely with Paul's description? Is it not a decree? Is it not one of the commandments and teachings of men? Does it not also have the appearance of wisdom? Yet Paul says that such man-made rules are "of no value against fleshly indulgence." The argument is therefore false. It is not true that man-made laws can promote true godliness. It is not difficult to see why this is so.

The Bible says it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the believer (II Thess. 2:18). But the Holy Spirit sanctifies through the application of truth to the heart (Jn. 17:17). Among other things, then, the commandments that God Himself has given become the internal delight and conviction of the Christian. He strives to obey the commandments of God because they are the commandments of God. Knowing himself to be bought with a price, he cannot but feel that he ought to do that which is well-pleasing to his Lord. But for this very reason he cannot feel any comparable sense of obligation to anyone else. No man-made rule can ever come to the

believer's heart with the same power that belongs to the statutes of Christ. Nor can we expect the Holy Spirit to use such man-made rules in the sanctification of the Christian. After all, the Holy Spirit too is God. He is equal in power and glory with the Father and the Son. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot act as if His own commandments were deficient, needing supplementation by men. To do this would be to dishonor His own great name. Hence it follows that man-made rules are of no value—or power—to restrain the sinful nature of man. This is because they do not come from God, and do not enjoy the sanction of God.

We do not at all share the fear that disaster will ensue, then, if man-made rules are abolished. To the contrary, we believe the opposite. True sanctification will be promoted when the Church acknowledges that the commandments and doctrines of God are all that believers need. The writer, some years ago, participated in a youth camp attended by young people from different denominations. Some came from churches having man-made rules. Others came from churches that did not have such rules. It was interesting to see the practical difference that resulted. In those churches that did not have man-made rules, the emphasis was upon teaching the law of God as the rule of Christian living. Young people under this teaching were led to grasp the principles of God's law, and then encouraged to exercise their responsibility as renewed in the image of God by deciding for themselves what they ought to do. (One basic principle, of course, was due submission in the Lord to the authority of their parents!). Now the surprising thing to some was the fact that this approach to life worked out in a certain sense of "strictness" that was lacking in the other. Young people who came from churches, for example, having a rule against attending the cinema, confessed that they often attended the cinema anyway. But those who did not have the man-made rule stated that they seldom attended, and that when they did they felt a high degree of responsibility to be sure that the particular movie was acceptable for the Christian. Here again, the lesson was obvious: the man-made law was of little value against fleshly indulgence. The law of God, on the other hand, when applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit was a mighty power indeed.

Our thesis is this, then: the true source for the conquest of sin in the heart is the power of God's Spirit. It is not effected by having other people erect legalistic fences around the believer. It is not promoted by allowing other people to assume responsibility for him. No, it is really promoted when the Church relies upon God's Word and Spirit. It is promoted when the Church teaches the truth of God without addition or subtraction. It is effected as God's people learn to think out the implications of the inspired Scriptures, and then apply these to their own lives in the particular and unique situation in which they find themselves (Ro. 12:2). Those who fear this, in our humble judgment, fail to comprehend the purpose and power of God.

Chapter Eight - The Jerusalem Synod

Much of what has been said thus far is grudgingly admitted by some who continue to defend the total abstinence position. They admit that God does not command total abstinence in His infallible Word. Yet they wish to see the man-made rule continued in force in the Christian Church. It is for this reason that we more and more frequently encounter a line of argument that now merits our attention. It is to the effect that the Church, under certain circumstances, has the power to legislate for the people of God. And the attempt is made to support this position from the fifteenth chapter of the book of Acts.

A dispute had arisen in the Church of Antioch (Acts 14:26; 15:1,2). Central to the controversy was the question of whether or not the practice of circumcision should be made mandatory in the new covenant era. The sequel shows that the issue involved more than circumcision. The broader principle was the place of the ceremonial laws of Moses in the New Testament Church. When the problem proved impossible of solution in Antioch, a general synod was convened in Jerusalem (v. 6). After deliberation a decision was reached, and it was published in all the Churches (vv. 22,23). The council wrote to instruct the Gentiles to "abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood" (v. 20). Or, as the precise text of the decree expressed it: "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication: if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well~ (vv. 28,29). So the Gentile Churches, as well as the Jewish, were commanded to conform to this rule. The rule was issued in the name of the Holy Spirit as well as the synod. The argument is that the Church today may do what this synod did. In addition to declaring the commandments of God (as this first synod did, when it forbade fornication), it may also forbid other things that are not forbidden in Scripture.

At a later point we will seek to show why a sharp distinction must be drawn between that first synod, and all later synods of the Church. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that we ignore this distinction for the present. Even if it is granted that the Church today may do what the Apostolic Church did in this first synod, it does not follow by any means that the Church has the right to command total abstinence. It must be remembered that, temporary as it was, the ceremonial law did forbid the eating of blood (and consequently the meat of strangled animals). "Any man from the house of Israel or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats

any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people" (Lev. 17:10). If there was in the decision of the Jerusalem Synod a prohibition of the eating of blood or strangled animals, it was out of deference to the fact that this was originally commanded by God Himself. There is, of course, even in this decree no absolute prohibition of the eating of meat. Not all meat was either strangled or offered to idols. The very most that can be established from the example of this synod, then, is the power of the Church, under the New Testament, to require the continued observance of something that was part of the ceremonial law commanded by God under the Old Testament. There never was a general prohibition of the use of wine in that law.

It is important, moreover, to note that the decree of the Jerusalem Synod was evidently of a temporary nature. Paul's argument in I Corinthians 8 indicates this. When he says, in verse 8, "take care lest this liberty (or right) of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak," he evidently means that the stronger brother does have this right or liberty. Because he knows "that there is no such thing as an idol in the world" (v. 4), no such thing as a real god, other than the true and living God (v.6), he cannot possibly feel that meat is really made evil because someone with idolatrous ideas happens to believe in that idol. Now if the decree of the Jerusalem Synod was really equivalent to divine law—having the same universal and binding authority that God's commands have—it is impossible to account for what the apostle is saying. How could there be "liberty" or right to eat meat offered to idols, if the Jerusalem Synod had forever, and under all circumstances, made such a thing to be sin? Paul himself, in this passage, clearly teaches that circumstances will determine the use of the believers right or liberty. Hence it is evident that the Jerusalem Synod also had in mind certain circumstances. It did not make any universal rule. As far as we know, no one has ever disputed this fact. The prohibition of fornication has always remained in force in the Christian Church for the simple reason that God Himself forbids it in His moral law. But the eating of blood is no longer regarded as wrong because the particular situation in which this regulation was necessary no longer exists. The purpose of the Jerusalem decision, in other words, was "to meet in some measure the difficulties of the Jewish Christians, and to lead the Gentile Christians to shun whatever might prove offensive" to them, as otherwise "it would be impossible for them to associate together in a mixed community and Church without scandal."¹ "This necessity lay in the fact that wherever the Jews resided the law of Moses was read, and thus the ordinances in question were so deeply impressed upon the people's mind that they could not tolerate the neglect of them by the Gentile Christians."² Yet "in all this it was clearly indicated that the prohibitions were not absolute; once let the Jewish Christians be more thoroughly freed from the O.T. forms, and the end for which these regulations were

made would no longer exist."³

Even if we allow, then, that the Church today has the same power to make rules that the Church had in Apostolic times, there is still no precedent whatever for forbidding something that God has never forbidden. There is no precedent for a general rule of total abstinence for everyone, for God never gave such a rule.

There is more to be said, however, and it has never been said more clearly and succinctly than it is in the Westminster Confession of Faith. "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men."⁴ The authors of the Jerusalem decree did not have the completed Scriptures. But they did have the inspired Apostles in their midst. Here lies the all-important distinction between the synod mentioned in Acts 15, and all subsequent synods. "All particular synods or councils,; since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err: and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help to both."⁵ If we did not have the complete Bible, and if we did have inspired Apostles at our synods, then we could enact rules and claim the Holy Spirit as their author. Even then, however, the rules would not be such as the proponents of total abstinence envision. But the point is that we do have the complete Word of God, and we do not have inspired Apostles with us. Therefore we must reject this subtle attempt to bring us back under the bondage of what is—after all is said and done—nothing more than a revived Romanism.

1 McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 723.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Westminster Confession of Faith, 1, vi.

5 Westminster Confession of Faith, XXXI, iv.

Chapter Nine - The Problem of Vows

In this chapter we deal with the problem of vows. We do this for two reasons. In the first place. It is a common practice in churches with a total abstinence rule to encourage people—even little children—to make pledges, or vows, to perpetually abstain from all use of wine as a beverage. We will deal with this first. In the second place, there is this question. What should be done by those who have taken such a vow, and then later come to the conclusion that total abstinence is not required by the law of God? Scripture speaks of the man who "swears to his own hurt, and does not change" (Ps. 15:4). Does this mean that one is bound by such a vow even though he may come to see that it was not required by the Lord? This we will deal with in the second part of this chapter.

The Westminster Confession of Faith says "a vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath."¹ Since an oath should never be taken unless we duly "consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein. . .avouch nothing but what. . .(we are) fully persuaded is the truth" it follows that a pledge or vow should be made with similar care.² The Confession says it should be made "out of faith, and conscience of duty" which clearly means that it is to be made when we conclude, upon mature reflection, that it is the will of God.³ But not only is it wrong to "vow to do anything forbidden in the Word of God" (and total abstinence is certainly not forbidden), it is also wrong to vow to do something that is not in our power to do, or "for the performance whereof" there is "no promise of ability from God."⁴ On all of these counts the common practice of exacting pledges of total abstinence is to be condemned, especially where children are the victims. Children are impressionable. Under strong pressure from a one-sided propaganda they can be induced to believe a thing to be wrong even when they are quite unable to give an account of their conviction. We do not mean to say that there is an arbitrary point in age at which children reach sufficient understanding to make vows. We only argue that the common practice of exacting vows from children violates the scriptural concept of this solemn act. A child is hardly ready to make a vow, when he does not yet understand the implications of Ecclesiastes 5:1-7!

But beyond this, it is hard to see that there is, in Scripture, any promise of ability from God to perform a vow of total abstinence. Many of the Reformers, before they became Reformers, had taken a vow of celibacy. As we have already seen in this study, celibacy as such is not evil. Nevertheless, as the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "popish monastical vows of perpetual single life. . .are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful

snare, in which no Christian may entangle himself."5 As a number of the Reformers discovered, they had vowed to do something for which they had no ability given to them by God. The gift of continency is not something that man can produce by taking a vow. It is something conferred by the Lord. So too with present-day vows of total abstinence. There is nothing whatever to be said against the practice of total abstinence. Not one word of this book is written to say such a thing. But there is something radically wrong with taking a vow for which there is no scriptural basis. They are, in the words of the Confession, "superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself."

What then should a person do who has taken such a vow, and then comes to realize that Scripture does not teach total abstinence as a requirement of the Lord? Is it necessary that such a person indulge in the use of wine just to prove that he realizes that his vow was an error? Not at all. Since the law of God does not require anyone to drink wine, then that is a sufficient answer. But it does not follow that a person is bound to keep the vow he has made. It is a well-known fact that Luther, and others, at the time of the Reformation "broke" their vows of celibacy. This meant, in effect, that it was their conviction that such vows are not binding. They did not, in other words, believe that they would be living in perpetual sin if they married. What they believed was this: that they had been wrong to take such vows in the first place. What they did, then, was to repent of the sin of taking such a vow, and then renouncing it they availed themselves of the liberty that Christ gave them under the Gospel. We see no reason why the same rule should not apply with respect to vows of total abstinence from wine. Everyone who has taken a vow of total abstinence—who has promised, that is, never, under any circumstances to use wine as a beverage—should renounce this vow. No one who has taken such a vow can possibly know in advance that they will, under any and all circumstances that God may appoint to them in this life, be able to totally abstain. They cannot know, for example, that a situation will never arise in which no liquid could be obtained to sustain life other than wine. It is conceivable that one could be placed, by God's providence, in a position where the cost of fidelity to such a vow would be virtual suicide. Let no one scoff at such a possibility. People have been placed in circumstances in which life itself depended on their use of wine. Would anyone argue that it would be the duty of a Christian in such circumstances to keep such a vow? Yet such is required in things commanded by God. It is the duty of the Christian to die rather than deny his pledge of allegiance to Jesus Christ. We believe that it would be right to suffer death rather than to bow to any pressure that would compel us to sin against God. (We are not boasting that we have the courage to do this. But we do revere those martyrs who have done this very thing). Thus we conclude that a man who has taken an unscriptural vow of perpetual and total abstinence should

renounce this vow, even if he has every intention of continuing the practice of total abstinence.

It should not be necessary to point out that the case is quite different for a man who believes that his vow of total abstinence is scriptural. The fact that he believes it to be scriptural does not make it so. But Scripture says it is always wrong to go against conscience. "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Ro. 14:23).

1 Westminster Confession of Faith, XXII, v.

2 Ibid., section iii.

3 Ibid., section vi.

4 Ibid.' Section vii.

5 Ibid.

Chapter Ten - Vitiating the System

The Bible teaches a system of truth. If one of the "doctrines of demons" is grafted on to that system, the result is bound to be evil (1 Tim. 4:1). False doctrine works like leaven: it tends to spread through the system, until the whole is vitiated. This is precisely what we see in Reformed denominations that have fallen under the spell of the man-made rule of total abstinence.

Nothing is so important to the well-being of the Church as to acknowledge the proper authority of the Word of God. If the Bible is revered as the only infallible and wholly sufficient rule of faith and practice, then all is well. But when the Church begins to bind the consciences of men with man-made rules it no longer treats the Bible as the one infallible and sufficient rule. The Bible does not command total abstinence, but rather temperance (or moderation). Thus the making of such a man-made rule is really the equivalent of accusing the Scripture of error. It is a practical denial of both the infallibility and sufficiency of Scripture. Let no one say that this is an exaggeration. The discerning reader will see this, often enough, in the literature produced by prohibitionists. The burden of the argumentation is often to this effect: by virtue of our superior modern scientific knowledge we can now say that the Bible is deficient in that it has no clear teaching commanding total abstinence. The writer has heard this thesis propounded in synodical debate. Those who have fallen under the spell of this false teaching will allege that the Bible is not clear—or that it needs to be supplemented—yes, even corrected by the superior "light" of mere human wisdom.

Then, the effects will be seen right through the system. To say, as the proponents of total abstinence often do, that wine is inherently evil, is really to deny the biblical doctrine of creation. The Scripture teaches that everything that God made is good, and that nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:3,4). To locate evil in a material thing is to make sin a metaphysical, rather than purely ethical problem. This, in turn, entails a wrong view of man. If man is what the Bible says he is, then he has fallen from "original righteousness" and "so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body." It is out of "this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indispensed, disabled, and made opposite to all good" by nature, "and wholly inclined to all evil" that "all actual transgressions" proceed.² When wine is treated as if it were the source of the evil of intemperance (as it often is in prohibitionist literature) the biblical teaching concerning man's fallen condition is no longer given its due. The impression is given, and even emphasized, that there is one

thing outside the man that, entering into his mouth, can corrupt him. While the teaching of Jesus Christ is that all corruption that we see in human life issues out of the heart of man (Mk. 7:18-23).

A pastor once related the following incident to the writer. He was discussing the biblical teaching concerning wine with a professing Christian. She was a devoted advocate of the false doctrine of mandatory total abstinence. In the heat of the moment (at least we hope that this was the case) she said something like this: "If it could ever be proved to me that Jesus Christ made, or used, fermented wine, then / would reject Jesus Christ as my savior!" Thus the doctrine of Christ too must yield to the influence of this error. Even lie must conform to this man-made rule. The Bible says "John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of / ax-gatherers and sinners.' " (Lk. 7:33,34). So even in Jesus' day there were those who did see Jesus drinking wine, and they were quite prepared to accuse Him of being a drunkard for it. The modern attitude is really not anything new under the sun.

The biblical doctrine of sanctification is also vitiated by the false doctrine of prohibition. In a regenerate man "the dominion of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified" so that he being "more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces" is enabled to practice "true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."³ This is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of truth. It is not effected by man-made rules which do not enjoy the sanction of the Spirit. "Good works" as the Westminster Confession truly says "are only such as God has commanded in His holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention."⁴ Is this not the very thing that we see in this man-made rule of total abstinence? Is it not a thing "devised by men" out of "pretense of good intention?" The scriptural view of the law of God—the moral law that we have in the ten commandments—is, that it is "a perfect rule of righteousness."⁵ There is no need of any kind of man-made supplement to it.

Another doctrine that is vitiated by the evil influence of this error is the doctrine of Christian liberty. According to the teaching of Scripture "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men."⁶ "So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands" as this man-made rule of total abstinence, "is to betray true liberty of conscience."⁷ It is quite true that this liberty may be abused.⁸ But the answer to this abuse is not man-made laws. It is rather a proper application of the censures of the Church.⁹ When the

"cure" for intemperance is a denial of the liberty that Christ has given His people, then the cure is worse than the disease.

We have shown, in another section of this book, that vows of the sort that are commonly demanded by churches having a total abstinence rule, are contrary to Scripture. We therefore simply mention it here, as another part of the system of doctrine affected by this basic error.

This Scripture teaches that "saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion" with each other, and that "this communion, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus."^o This doctrine is also undermined wherever the false man-made rule is maintained. A denomination adopts as binding law for members of the church the total abstinence commandment. It will not admit to its fellowship and communion anyone who will not submit. What then is a sincere believer to do, when he desires fellowship and communion in that church, but believes sincerely that this rule is not of God? Surely he must obey God rather than men. The consequence is that this church, in order to maintain a man-made rule, excludes a member of the body of Christ from its fellowship and communion. Surely this illustrates Paul's contention that this is a doctrine of demons.

The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches the scriptural doctrine of the power of synods and councils. "All synods or councils, since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err" it says, "and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both." ~ ~ They are a help only when they declare the whole counsel of God, adding nothing, and subtracting nothing. The sad thing is, in the Church today, that this is so often ignored—yes, even in Reformed churches that suffered much in past history to vindicate this principle!

The system of truth is taught in the Bible involves much more than the doctrines that we have listed. But we can see, from such as these, the vitiating effect of this teaching. It is not possible to maintain the true teaching of the Bible in connection with this error. They simply do not harmonize. The doctrine of demons cannot agree, at any point, with the doctrine of God.

It may not be amiss, before concluding this chapter, to observe the accuracy of the teaching of our Lord. He said, in his denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, that they made the law of God of no effect (Mk. 7:8-13). They were much more demanding when it came to their man-made rules, than they were with respect to

the commandments of God. The same is true of the proponents of total abstinence. No Church, so far as we know, has ever asked men to promise—to vow—to say an oath—that they will never sin! The most that any church requires is the promise to strive to fight against sin, and practice holiness. Though God himself commands us never to lie, in other words, the Church (knowing that there is no man who does not sin) only requires the professing Christian to promise to make a real attempt to overcome this evil within him. To require more would, of course, be wrong. For "if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8). How is it then that the same Church that recognizes this, when it comes to the commandments of God, does not recognize it when it comes to the commandments of men? How can that Church, in other words, even if it does believe that total abstinence is right, require a vow of perfection? Does it not say this in effect: "we realize that you will fall short when it comes to God's commandments, but you must promise that you will never do this when it comes to our man-made rule!?"

The more we study the ramifications of this unscriptural doctrine, the more clearly we see that it is not of God.

1 Westminster Confession of Faith, VI, ii.

2 Ibid, section iv.

3 Ibid, XIII, i.

4 Ibid, XVI, i.

5 Ibid, XIX, ii.

6 Ibid, XX, ii.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, XX, iii.

9 Ibid, XXX, iii.

10 Ibid, XXVI, ii.

11 Ibid, XXXI, iv.

Chapter Eleven - A More Excellent Way

If the principles defended in this book are correct, then one question naturally arises: "how should the Church deal with cases of intemperance?" It is all well and good, in other words, to show that a certain traditional position has been wrong. But this will only underline the need to show "a more excellent way!" This is our concern in this chapter.

How should the problem of the abuse of wine be dealt with in the Church? Our answer is that it should be dealt with in exactly the same way that any other form of abuse is dealt with. For example, the writer believes that abuse of television viewing is one of our greatest moral problems. It could be argued that it is a far greater danger to the people of God than alcoholic beverages. Think of the hours squandered by many Christian people in watching television. Think too, of the godless way of life that is usually set forth in television programs. How attractive this man-centered existence can be made to seem! What a danger that, by constant exposure to the influence of television, Christians will begin to lose their awareness that all of life is religious. Yet who would argue that television is sinful in itself? Who would say that the Church should impose man-made rules regulating the use of television? Who would agree that the Church should have the power to forbid members to own, rent, borrow, or even view a television set? No, the task of the Church is not to legislate for the people of God. Its sole task is to declare the whole counsel of God. This means that the Church must instruct its members to understand the law of God: so that they can see how the principles of God's Word apply to all of life. In doing this the Church can warn against the insidious dangers of many television programs. It can testify against much that is evil in the content of these programs, even though it be against a trend of popular acceptance among Christian people. If, after faithful instruction and admonition, certain members of the Church are addicted to much television—and even watch programs that glorify sin—if it becomes evident that they are being harmed by it, and that they even neglect the means of grace because of it—then the Church must follow the process of discipline. It must follow through, if necessary, even to the point of excommunication. But (and this is the important point) the sin for which this discipline will be exercised is not the use of television, but the abuse.

The Church has the right, and indeed the duty, to warn against the abuse of wine. It must instruct the people of God in the whole counsel of His word. It can recommend that they, in certain circumstances, refrain from using wine at all (just as, under certain circumstances, the Church could recommend total abstinence from

television viewing). Whenever there is evidence of intemperance the Church must exercise discipline. It can admonish, rebuke, suspend, and even excommunicate where abuse continues and there is no evidence of repentance. It can deal with the sin of intemperance in the use of wine just as it can deal with any other sin against the law of God.

One of the sad consequences of man-made rules is the inevitable decline of faithful discipline in the Church. By faithful discipline we mean a just and equal treatment of all members of the Church under the law of God. When a church adopts a man-made rule (such as the rule of total abstinence from the use of wine) the tendency is as follows. Whenever a member uses any wine, even in moderation, he is immediately subjected to strict discipline. But when another member of the same church is gluttonous, or addicted to television, the church is excessively lenient. As long as those who are guilty of intemperance in these other things strictly abide by the man-made rule, the church tends to evade its duty. The result is that members of such churches tend to equate godliness with a lopsided conformity to certain rules only, while other aspects of the law of God are virtually ignored. Or, to put the matter in a phrase, the church that forbids what God allows, will also tend to allow what God forbids.

It is certainly true that the scriptural way of discipline is more difficult. It is much easier to make a few rules, and then to enforce them strictly, than it is to apply the law of the Lord in the manifold realities of life. The latter requires diligent labor on the part of the elders. There must be patient discussion, instruction, admonition, and rebuke. The process will often be long drawn out and distressing. It is an arduous task for the pastor and elders. But is it the right way, the scriptural method. Thus it will enjoy the blessing of God as no invention of man can hope to secure.

Appendix: A Table of Comparison

(It may be helpful if we summarize the contrasting systems)

Scripture says:	Abolitionists say:
Wine is <i>not</i> evil	Wine <i>is</i> evil
Wine <i>is</i> lawful for the Christian. (1 Cor. 6:12, & 10:23)	Wine is <i>not</i> lawful for the Christian.
Wine does <i>not</i> defile anyone. (All defilement comes out of man's sinful heart.)	Wine defiles, even when it is used in moderation!
Wine <i>can</i> be used with thanks by those who know the truth (1 Tim. 4:4,5)	Wine may <i>not</i> be used with thanksgiving by the Christian
Christ <i>did</i> make and use wine (Jn. 2:1-11, Lk. 7:33,34)	It is unthinkable that Christ could ever make, or use, wine.
Man-made rules are <i>wrong</i> (Mk. 7:1-9; Col. 2:20,21).	Man-made rules <i>are</i> good and necessary.
God <i>alone</i> is Lord of the conscience (Jas. 4:12, Ro. 14:4).	The corporate body of the Church has the right to make laws for God's people.
It is <i>wrong</i> to exact a promise of total abstinence.	It is <i>right</i> to exact a promise of total abstinence.
The Church does <i>not</i> have the power to forbid the use of wine (1 Cor. 2:15; Col. 2:20-23)	The Church <i>does</i> have the power to forbid the use of wine.
The law of God <i>is</i> sufficient (Jas. 1:25; Ps. 19:7)	The law of God is <i>not</i> sufficient but needs to be supplemented by man-made rules.
The Bible is the <i>only</i> rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16,17)	The teachings of modern experts is in some things equal to, or even superior to the Bible.
The doctrine of mandatory total abstinence is <i>demonic</i> (1 Tim. 4:1,2)	The doctrine of mandatory total abstinence is <i>pious</i> .
Man-made rules are of <i>no</i> value in restraining sin (Col. 2:23).	Man made rules <i>are</i> of much value in restraining sin.