

# **The Case for Alcohol:**

**A Response to Dr. Daniel L. Akin's *The Case for Alcohol Abstinence***

**by D. Matthew Brown**

Before I begin, allow me to preface this writing by saying that in writing publicly against the article which Dr. Akin wrote and the resolution against the use of alcohol that was passed at the 2006 Southern Baptist Convention that I am in no way claiming that my maturity or knowledge, be it theological, experiential, or spiritual, is on par with that of Dr. Akin or with that of many of those who voted in favor of said resolution. I am young both in age and spirituality, and I write both with fear and trembling before God and with adoration of godly men such as Dr. Akin who not only boldly profess what they believe but also walk accordingly. May I then also preface this writing by saying that I do not drink alcohol, though I would hardly say that I actively abstain from its use. Admittedly, I have often amiably entertained the thought of being a wine connoisseur, yet for lack of funds, among other reasons, I have not become one. Though I do not currently drink any form of alcohol, by no merit of my own, I stand in staunch opposition to the current wave of anti-alcohol resolutions that are being passed in local churches and now in the Southern Baptist Convention. Being that I do not currently use alcohol nor greatly desire to do so, I believe that I, as a dry proponent of the responsible use of alcohol, can address this issue with some form of objectivity, for I personally have nothing to lose.

While many address the use of alcohol as a matter of Christian liberty and argue thusly, I believe that this subject has a much weightier scope. In his article, Dr. Akin was kind and introspective enough to open it by admitting his personal bias against the use of alcohol. This personal bias stemmed, as he stated, from the "sorrow and heartache" that the abuse of alcohol has caused his wife and her family. While the misuse of alcohol in Dr. Akin's experience is indeed grievous, heart-renting, and deserves ample sympathy, I firmly believe that Dr. Akin would nevertheless affirm with me that Scripture, not personal experience, should be our chief guide in all matters, that when we find that our personal experiences conflict with Holy Scripture, it is the experience, not Scripture, that must be discredited. However, all too often when this very issue is addressed from the abstinence standpoint, it begins with reference to the tragedies that can and have come about by the misuse of alcohol rather than from a biblical mandate. Though it is indeed sad that so many people have been hurt through the misuse of alcohol, the pain experienced never becomes so great that it can legitimately trump the testimony of Scripture.

The reason I believe that most who argue for abstinence from alcohol argue from negative personal experiences rather than from Scripture is because there is no Scripture that forbids the drinking of alcohol. There are however numerous forbiddances of

drunkenness (i.e. the abuse of alcohol) that necessarily bring with them the assumption that people drink alcohol. Of course, the classic response to such a claim is that alcohol was necessary at that time to purify the rancid water that only John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) and the Pharisees who labeled Jesus a drunkard (Luke 7:34) were somehow able to drink. In his article, Dr. Akin cites Bob Stein as stating, "The term "wine" or *oinos* in the ancient world, then, did not mean wine as we understand it today but wine mixed with water." If this is the case, why then have accurate English translations of the Bible not reflected this supposed etymological truth? The reason being is that though *oinos* could theoretically refer to watered down wine, there is no reason, save a desire to condemn the use of alcohol, to force that connotation on the word. While Bob Stein might be so bold to make such a claim, there has yet to be a translation team on any credible English translation that has made that same claim.

Other than possibly stretching and bending the text of the Word of God, making such claims about the word "wine" used in the Bible has other negative consequences. One being it implicitly says to people, such as myself, who are not Greek scholars that they cannot trust their English translations of the Bible. If a word as common as "wine" is translated incorrectly, how are we to trust that other translated words, such as "redemption," "propitiation," "substitution," and "love," really mean what we think they mean? Could our "redemption" by Christ be watered down just as "wine" is? I say that somewhat facetiously, but when one claims that "wine" means something other than "wine" he claims that it is translated incorrectly and therefore not trustworthy.

Other than compromising the validity and accuracy of English translations, those who advocate abstinence from alcohol place into question the sinless nature of Jesus Christ. Dr. Akin writes, "Can I say it is always a sin to take a drink? No. Can I say it is almost always unwise? Yes." Interesting. Being that sin does not mean only to break a given commandment but also to miss the mark of perfection, and acting unwisely is tantamount to acting foolishly, I would have to think, by Dr. Akin's statement, that if drinking is almost always foolish, drinking is almost always sin, since to act foolishly is to miss the mark of perfection and thus sinning. Applying that statement to Luke 7:33, 34, which says:

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."

one must conclude that 1) John the Baptist did not drink alcohol, thus 2) Jesus, being the same age and living in the same country as John the Baptist, did not have to drink alcohol, therefore 3) Jesus possibly acted unwisely or foolishly, thus 4) Jesus possibly missed the mark thereby sinning and placing into question his divinity and his qualifications for bearing the sins of the Church. Though those who argue for abstinence from alcohol have no desire to make such a statement, they nevertheless must take such things into

consideration when the God of the Universe who could heal the lame and raise the dead chose to drink alcohol while a puny and weak man such as John the Baptist did not drink alcohol.

While I am concerned with Christian liberty and affirm that the drinking of alcohol falls into that realm, my chief concern is the negative light that is cast by those who passionately force their abstinence from alcohol on others by means of resolutions and by-laws. Those who do so and publicly condemn the use of alcohol must take said consequences into serious consideration, for much more is at stake than the temporal devastating effects of alcoholism, namely the Gospel itself. My wish is not that all Baptists will one day drink alcohol in moderation but that those who wish to abstain from alcohol will do so silently, understanding the gravity of the argument which they propound. May God be glorified, and may his Holy Scripture be found trustworthy and true with respect to every facet of our lives. Amen.