

# WHY TEACH ABSTINENCE IN A CHRISTIAN CHURCH???

BIAP by Skip Elmore

A membership manual called *“Belonging”* published by the Wesleyan Publishing House includes the following statement: *Wesleyans do not claim that our primary case for abstinence is from the Bible. For that reason, we do not consider abstinence as a test of salvation or goodness as a person. We do not even believe a moderate use of alcohol violates clear Scripture on that issue. Our reasons are a combination of biblical principle and cultural wisdom.”*

We will always be able to know more about ourselves and others by contemplating and observing “motives” than by just taking note of actions or accomplishments. Why do we do what we do?

We live in a society where alcohol is often considered one of the finer things in life. Partaking may become a social ritual, and many use it to lubricate human relationships. Professional people are regularly presented with the invitation to partake.

Wine tasting is significant in segments of our culture and requires discriminating skills to judge palate, color and bouquet. Some argue that good food is cheated if not attended by the right wine. Wine has a long history and to speak of it knowledgeably has become a sign of sophistication.

Many times though, these social environments become influential in cultivating launch pads for dysfunctional destructive behavior for some when life’s challenges force them to look for an easy window of escape.

Did you know that chloroform and ether, both outdated anesthetics, are processed from ethyl alcohol? My daughter, Lynda, is a medical doctor, so I get to be exposed to her medical journals during my visits. I did not expect to find the following statement in one of the text: *“In Western society, alcohol has the unique distinction of being the only potent pharmacological agent with which self-induced intoxication is socially acceptable.”*

Although alcohol has the properties of an anesthetic it is not practical or safe for that purpose because it would require bringing the breathing rate dangerously near to death. Also, alcohol is metabolized almost completely through the liver, a process too slow to be advisable.

Ask any medical student who has spent time in hospital emergency rooms and they will tell you that almost all violence, shootings, stabbings, assaults and accidents are alcohol related. It becomes the catalyst that causes havoc and wrecks lives.

Is it just the inner-city low life that ends up in this emergency room violence? Some argue that the real culprit is social devastation characteristic to that element of our environment. Not so, surprisingly there are also desperate needs from very prominent visitors from the other side of town, some with great wealth - yet their lives are also ruined by, you guessed it, alcohol. When intoxicated, they react the same way the inner-city folks do.

Our church’s call for abstinence is not legalistic prohibition. No, it’s a loving safeguard for its people, developed out of wisdom garnered through many generations for the prudent guidance for all ages, young and older alike.

Some, and we never know who, during frail moments in life will be sucked into the vortex of alcoholism for an escape hatch. Every one of us will need an escape hatch from a frail moment sometime. We, as a church, know the right counsel. Alcohol is a form of Russian roulette. Abstain.

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