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Southern baptist and alcohol

ALCOHOL BAN IN SOUTHERN BAPTISTERY CHURCHES AND ITS IMPLICATION ON THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS INTRODUCTION Baptist theology is rooted in the deep conviction that men and women of faith have access to their God, through the Holy Spirit. These believers have an individual relationship with God. This vision, known as the priesthood of believers, is a fundamental issue for the Baptist faith. Since the beginning of Baptist thought, this individual freedom has been a basis of doctrine. Because of this insistence on individual consciousness, Baptists have always rejected formal and binding faiths. By refusing to hold such beliefs as infallible, Baptists have been persecuted. Bans, torture and even executions fill Baptist history. However, despite enormous opposition from church and state authorities, Baptists held their beliefs. Unfortunately, the accumulation of this historical freedom of conscience, legalism and credalism have become part of Southern Baptist thought. One example is the ban on alcohol. Many church leaders expect the conscience of each individual to conform to the collective conscience. Individuals who do not adapt to collective consciousness face excommunication (Hailey, 1992). Biblical exegesis shows that the choice of drinking or not is a matter of conscience. Despite this, Southern Baptists in the United States, almost universally, have strict rules that require abstinence. Individual freedom is limited to the choice between church membership or not. Southern Baptists have dressed their legalism in the title of alliances. However, this insistence on abstinence is a direct contradiction to the individual freedom that Baptists have always advocated. The creation of extrabibious rules violates individual consciousness. HISTORY In the history of Christianity, alcohol prohibition is a relatively new idea. In fact, alcohol was a normal part of life. In colonial America, Puritans expected Christians to drink (Hearn, 1943). In 1700, a Baptist minister created the formula for bourbon whiskey (Hailey, 1992). During the 1800s, many southern ministers operated alai and sold alcohol (Hearn, 1943). Parishioners who owned alai would decimate their alcohol; and preachers' salaries often included whiskey. All this began to change, however, when the Temperance movement took shape (Hailey, 1992). The idea that alcohol was dangerous wasn't new, though. In 600 A. C. Pathagoras noted: Drunkenness is an expression identical to ruin. In 44 .C., Cicero wrote: a sensual and intemperate youth delivers a worn-out body to old age, when he drinks in excess. Centuries later, Muhammed declared, there is a devil in every grape berry 1943). In fact, Islam has a total ban on alcohol, proclaiming to drink a sin (Parshall, 1989). Chaucer wrote in 1380 .C., character and shame leave when wine arrives. Clearly, for for years, men have known about the dangers of alcohol. However, knowledge of the dangers of alcohol prevented a few from drinking. Jesus not only drank, his first miracle was to turn water into wine; and used wine as a symbol of salvation through his blood (Hearn, 1943; Jn 2; Lk 22:20). Even for Southern Baptists, alcohol was part of life. This was until the Temperance movement began to infiltrate religious denominations in America. Finally, in 1896, the Southern Baptist Convention officially denounced alcohol and asked churches to excommunicate anyone who sold or drank alcohol. For the first time in the history of the Southern Baptist, drinking was considered immoral. The success of this measure is questionable. A study by the Southern Baptist showed that in the 1990s, 46% of members drank alcohol (Hailey, 1992). Surveys show that, although people knew about the danger in alcohol, throughout history Christian prohibition is a new, rather American phenomenon. The decisions of the churches to abstain came from the American temperance movement. David Hailey, while supporting the SBC resolution, admits that biblical support for abstinence was a post-thought. Christians had decided, for social reasons, that alcohol was wrong. Only then did they turn to the Bible for support (Hailey, 1992). THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CASE FOR ABSTINENCE Legitimate reasons There are legitimate reasons for Christians to abstain from alcohol. Many people, throughout history, have chosen to abstain. The reasons usually revolve around anecdotal observations, noted in the previous section. People have always seen the ruined lives of those who abused alcohol. However, as science and modern life grew, new reasons also appeared. In the past, the citizens of a city looked at drunks as a sin. However, drunks were little more than a nuisance to their community. This changed during the industrial era. Today, drunks pose a serious threat to all of them. Estimates indicate that half of all car victims are alcohol-related. In addition, there are about 18 million Americans suffering from alcohol abuse (Koop, 1996). Of these 18 million, experts consider 10 million alcoholics. Alcohol is a cause in 30% of all birth defects, 67% of all homicides, and a significant factor in most other types of crime (Hailey, 1992). Clearly, alcohol is having many negative effects on American society. One possible reason alcohol abuse is so prevalent in America is the use of the mass media by the alcohol industry. A study found that it was not only in 1980 that alcohol producers spent \$300 million for advertising. In 1991, the Anheuser-Busch Company spent \$144,540,000 on advertising during television sports alone. This almost unimaginable advertising budget can only be justified if advertising is creating more product sales. Evidently Evidently advertising is successful, not only because manufacturers continue to spend this money, but also because Americans now spend more on alcohol than on domestic electricity. Every year, Americans spend \$70 billion on alcohol. That's \$17 billion more than electricity, and \$28 billion more than private education (Hailey, 1992). For some Christians, the sense of love and justice leads them to abstain from alcohol. Seeing the devastating effects of alcohol on society, these Christians feel obliged to act. Taking a strong stand against alcohol and its consequences is a tangible way in which they can prove their faith. These Christians believe that abstaining from alcohol is the best, perhaps the only, solution to this social problem. In addition, abstaining from alcohol ensures that you will never fall prey to alcoholism (Hancock, 1999). Illegitimate reasons As noted above, biblical support for abstinence came after the public request for abstinence. Once Christians decided to abstain, they looked to the Bible to support their views. This, of course, is a bad method of biblical exegesis, and usually leads to poor interpretation. Unfortunately, while Christians sought abstinence in the Bible, they often took the verses out of context, or otherwise misled to support their opinions. First, when examining the text, you will notice that the Bible mentions alcohol quite often. In fact, the Bible mentions alcohol 240 times (Hailey, 1992). Many of these references are in favour of wine. Verses like Neh 2:1; East 5:6; Job 1:13; Mt 9:17; 21:33; and 1 Tim 5:23 are all random references to wine, showing it as a normal part of Jewish life. Also, Dt 14:26; Ps 4:7; 104:15; Hos 2:8; Pro 3:10; SS 1:2; 4:10; 7:9; and it's 25:6 are all positive aspects of wine. Wine is a symbol of joy (Ps 104:15), of God's blessings (Pro 9:2,5) and of an offering of worship to God (Ex 29:40). Hailey goes on to note that considering Jesus drank, (Lk 7:33,34; Mt 26:26-29) and that he created the wine (Nti 2:1-11), we can draw no other conclusion than that our Lord has assigned positive qualities to wine (Hailey, 1992). However, some Baptists have tried to assert that the Bible requires abstinence. Some even dispute whether Jesus created alcohol in Cana. Aubrey Hearn writes: the opinion that Jesus provided supernaturally a large amount of intoxicating wine for the guests of the wedding has against it the general character and spirit of Jesus ... (Hearn, 1943). However, Hearn does not consider verse ten. Everyone pulls out first the favorite wine and then the cheapest wine after the guests have drunk too much; but you've saved the best so far. The Master talk only of alcohol. If wine wasn't alcoholic, it doesn't matter how much people had to drink. They would still be able to detect the cheapest wine. However, if the wine were alcoholic, early wine their senses, so that later, they would not notice the cheapest wine. A Baptist writer, Glenn Knight, admits that Jesus created alcohol, but states that the goal of the miracle was to show his power as the divine son of God (verse 12) [sic, verse 11] (Knight, 1955). Unfortunately, even Knight doesn't consider the whole story. Verse eleven states: this, the first of its miraculous signs, Jesus performed... So he revealed his glory. If it is true that this miracle showed its glory, that was not the purpose. Verses three and four state: When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him: 'They no longer have wine.' 'Dear woman, why do I get involved?' Jesus answered. 'My time hasn't come.' Jesus' purpose in carrying out this miracle was to satisfy his mother's request. Jesus had no desire to show his divine nature. He made it clear that it was not yet time to reveal himself. Knight keeps upsetting the Bible. He writes: the parable of faithful and infidel servants (Luke 12:25-49) illustrates exactly how the drink destroys mental and moral vigilance (Knight, 1955). Knight seems to reverse the order of events here. In this parable, moral failure comes first. Then, the unfaithful servant commits various sins, including drunkenness. Drunkenness was the result of the moral failure of the servant, not failure due to drunkenness. Knight makes the same mistake in writing, already in the time of Moses, it was foreseen that the total abstentions would be separated from the Lord (Numbers 6:1-22) (Knight, 1955). However, the Nazarite vote, mentioned here, states that those who are separated must abstain, not that abstainers have been separated. You could abstain and not be separated. Knight simply doesn't pay attention to the text. Knight further misrepresents the scriptures by claiming: almost all prophets... Isaiah (5:11,12,13), Jeremiah, Hoseah and Amos... he asked for abstinence... (Knight, 1955). The truth is that the prophets had warned of alcohol, but did not ask for abstinence. Isaiah wrote in 25:6, on this mountain the Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best meats and the best wines. Amos declared that God would rescue Israel and that the new wine would drip from the mountains and flow from the hills... They will plant vineyards and drink their wine ... (Amos 9:13-14 NIV). Jeremiah and Haesa wrote that the lack of wine was a sign of judgment on the part of God (Jer. 48:33; Hos 2:9), not a blessing. Hosea also wrote that having wine is a blessing from God (Hos 2:9). Knight is wrong when he claims that the prophets asked for abstinence. As if these failures weren't enough, Knight continues: wine is not specifically in the New Testament as a drink in relation to the Lord's Supper. The drink is referred to as the fruit of the vine. By stretching our imagination we can this drink as wine in its fermented form. If the drink of the Lord's Supper was the same as the Easter drink, it cannot be argued that fermented wine was used by our Lord as an element in the Lord's Supper. In fact, according to Exodus 12:15 nothing fermented had to be consumed from the moment the Easter meal was eaten until the end of the Easter week.... Therefore, we conclude that the Lord's Supper neither requires nor allows the use of fermented wine for the ordination nor for other occasions. (Knight, 1995) Firstly, assuming that it was true that this drink was not fermented, there is no plausible reason why this would not allow the use of fermented wine ... for any other occasion. There would simply be no relationship between the Easter drink and other occasions. However, Knight's entire statement is completely wrong. Rabbi Abraham Bloch writes that there is a rabbinical teaching, dating back to the 1st century before Christ, that requires Jews to have four glasses of fermented wine as part of the Seder for Easter (Bloch, 1978). Traditionally, Kosher for Pasqua wine is used for Seder. Only in recent decades have some Jews started using Kosher grape juice for Easter, because they do not want to feel tipsy during Easter (Strassfeld, 1985). In fact, the verse Knight cites, Ex 12:15, makes no mention of fermentation. The verse forbids bread with yeast, known as 'hametz' (Holidays on the Net). Secondly, the ban on hametz does not apply to cereal alcohols, such as whisky (Jacobs, 1987). In addition to all this, Knight is mistaken when he states that wine is never mentioned in relation to the Lord's Supper. Knight never read 1 Cor 11:20-22, where Paul specifically mentions that some were getting drunk at the Lord's Supper? Paige Patterson, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, says the Nazarite vote is proof that abstinence is God's ideal. He says the vote was the holiest vote an Israelite could take. Since the vote required abstinence, Patterson believes abstinence should be the holiest state (Patterson, 1999). However, Patterson's point of view is ill-motivated. Daniel Wallace writes: If anyone today wants to say that believers do not have the right to drink alcohol on the analogy of a Nazarite vow (as some today like to do), they should also say that believers should not eat Raisin Bran (Wallace). After all, Nazarite also vowed to abstain from raisins (Numbers 6:3). Moreover, if anyone believes that Christians should live up to the Nazarite vow, then Christians should also refrain from cutting their hair (Numbers 6:5) (Hailey, 1992). Since Patterson cuts his hair, you can who does not believe that long hair is more holy than eat. Patterson also affirms the proverb: wine is a mockery; strong drink a fighter, and who is led off the road by it is unwise wife (Pro 20:1). He thinks this proverb says all alcohol isn't wise. He writes: I don't read anything 'drunkenness' in the song (Patterson, 1999). Does that mean Patterson thinks Jesus wasn't wise, because Jesus drank? Of course, most Christians would not accept such an interpretation. The logical interpretation is to realize that the term guided bewilderment implies drunkenness. This tendency to choose parts of the Bible and ignore others is inevitable when trying to adapt the Bible with preconceptions. Another Baptist author, John Gillespie, quotes Rom 14:21: It's best not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that brings down your brother. Gillespie that this verse requires us to abstain. His reasoning is that some will be offended or alienated from the gospel if they see Christians engaged in the sensual act of drinking. Consequently, Christians must refrain from preventing this (Gillespie, 1955). However, Gillespie does not mention the need for Christians to become vegetarians to avoid offending. Many people are offended by eating meat. Some, such as members of the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals organization, directly ask Christians to stop eating meat (PETA, nd). However, the SBC has never called on Christians to abstain from the flesh. Perhaps the SBC would have taken note of it if there was a larger vegetarian movement, more like the temperance movement. Gillespie goes on to state: Included in who's who of the [condemned] are those who prono do, advertise, sell, buy and use intoxicating or alcoholic beverages. They range from moderate or limited users to excessive and unscrupulous abusers. Their distinction lies in the fact that they are enemies of God... (Gillespie, 1955) Unfortunately, this attack even on moderate drinkers is not limited to Gillespie. Barret Duke, director of confessional relations for the SBC's Ethics and Religious Freedom Commission (ERLC), wrote in a sermon: The issue of alcohol and other drugs is clear. We can succumb to fleshly lust and dishonor our heritage, afflict our souls and shame our God, or we can refrain from all just, including the use of alcohol and other drugs, and enjoy a life of god's realization, happiness, and approval. (Duke, 1997) Duke's sermon has become the official SBC-recommended sermon on alcohol. The SBC has taken the position that Christians who drink, even in moderation, are a disgrace to God and even enemies of God. The true enemies of God are those who are not content to accept the Word of God; but rather, they must add laws, distort the scriptures, and attack their brothers. When questioned by the author, however, Duke admitted that he cannot say that drinking alcohol is a sin, despite the strong rhetoric of his sermon. Because so many Baptists have been privately ignoring the ban on SBC, the started a new campaign to promote abstinence. At the 1999 Convention meeting in Atlanta, delegates were given commitment cards. These cards, which delegates were invited to sign, called for alcohol abstinence. Richard Land, president of the ERLC, said the purpose of the papers was to invite Southern Baptists to reaffirm their position that abstinence is the only acceptable Christian position. Land added that abstinence is one of the SBC's core beliefs. Terrestrial reasons that now more than ever, southern Baptists must demand abstinence (Hastings, 1999). It would be tragic if Battisti gave an uncertain sound on this issue at the very moment in the nation's history, when the trauma and human suffering caused by alcohol and other drugs prompted an increasing number of Americans to consider whether the baptists' historic position of total abstinence is not the wisest choice. Hastings (1999) While some may be convinced that alcohol abuse makes abstinence the best choice, medical research shows that moderation can actually be the best choice. The American Medical Association, the American Heart Association, Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health, Dr.C. Everett Koop, a former U.S. surgeon general, and numerous other researchers, have all stated that moderate drinkers live longer than abstainers. These drinkers live longer because alcohol helps significantly prevent both heart disease and stroke. The largest ever study of alcohol and heart disease found that moderate alcohol use could reduce the likelihood of sudden cardiac death (SCD) by up to 79%. A quarter of a million Americans die of SCD each year (Manson, et al, 1999). According to the American Heart Association, any alcohol ban would deny such people a potentially considerable health benefit (Pearson, 1996). Southern Baptists argue that Christian love and justice require abstinence and distort the Bible to support this vision. Does the SBC then show love for the thousands of men and women at risk of death, whose doctors advise them to dine on a glass of wine? Richard Land, and the SBC, started this new abstinence campaign because they lost ground with their radical prohibition position. Land admits that today, more Southern Baptists are social drinkers, but insists that most Baptists still find this behavior unacceptable (Hastings, 1999). Most southern Baptist abstinence claims are taken out of context, show scant scholarships, or are simply ad hominem topics. The SBC, and some of its writers, show no shame in scriptures and in attacking moderate drinkers. While there are valid reasons for a Christian to choose not to drink, many Southern Baptists are not content to give Christians the choice. THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS The Definition and History History believers is the scriptural belief that all believers are priests able to deal directly with God. The Baptist theologian, J. L. Dagg, defined the priesthood as an individual responsibility, where every man feels that the cause of Christ is to some extent committed to Him. Dagg continues to write: The immense evil is the result of the ambition of the clergy ... To counter its influence, Christ commanded his disciples: Do not call rabbi, because one is your Master, even Christ, and all of you are brothers (Young, 1998). For Baptists, the priesthood of believers is the idea that every individual has the right and responsibility to read and interpret the Bible for himself. Walter T. Conner, one of the most respected Southern Baptist theologians, wrote: That no man dares come between the individual believer and his Lord. Each of us will give account of ourselves to the Lord (Romans 14:9-12), not to the pastor, priest, nor bishop. Before the judge of the whole earth, the men stand on a common plane (Young, 1998). This belief dates back to the beginnings of Baptist theology. Baptists in England wrote the First Confession of Faith in London. This confession stated that men should follow their conscience under God, not the human authorities... Later, the Standard Confession of 1660 affirmed this freedom of conscience. The Second London Confession of 1667 and 1668 contained the words that were later used in the Faith and Baptist message of the SBC. Only God is Lord of conscience, and he has freed her from the Doctrines and commandments of men who are contrary to his Word, or are not contained in it. The Philadelphia Confession of 1742 was the first Baptist confession in America. He reiterated the declaration on freedom found in the Second London Confession (Young, 1998). Baptist theologians have always believed that freedom of conscience was an individual right. William Tuck, in his book Our Baptist Heritage wrote that the priesthood is the right of every person to interpret the scriptures for himself. E. Y. Mullins believed that this individual interpretation was the greatest contribution Battisti had made in the world. George W. Truett said that this individual interpretation is the cardinal and fundamental principle from which all our Baptist principles emerge (Tuck, 1993). Truett wrote: The right to private judgment is the jewel in humanity's crown, and for every person or institution dare to come between the soul and God is blasphemous impudence and a defamation of the rights of the Son of God (Young, 1998). A founder of the Southern Baptist Convention, W.B. Johnson, defined the priesthood as the right of every individual to judge for himself in his opinions on the truth as taught in the scriptures (Shurden, 1993). One early Baptists in America, John Leland, fought for the right to individual interpretation of the Bible. Bible, wrote: Every individual must judge for himself, and be fully convinced in his own mind, and act accordingly, for each one must give an account of himself to God... Religion is at all times and place, a matter between God and individuals... God doesn't force everyone to believe the same way, nor should we tempt him... The churches of the New Testament were formed by the laws of Jesus, and only by the acts of the Apostles, and so it will be with us. (Greene, 1969) Herschel Hobbs wrote that the priesthood meant every individual... can read and interpret the scriptures while guided by the Holy Spirit (16:12-15) (Hobbs, 1964). However, Hobbs saw responsibility in this right. [Individualism in religion] should not be interpreted apart from the person's obligation to society. But he declares that mainly the religious relationship is one between God and the individual person... On the social side of religious life there is nothing that can adequately claim the right to destroy the freedom of direct access that all people have to God... This is true if the obstacle to direct access is a system of political government or an authoritative church. Hobbs (1964) J. Terry Young, wrote that every person has the right to personal interpretation of the scriptures ... The priesthood of believers means that the Bible is open to all people, not just a few who tell the rest what to believe (Young, 1998). Similarly, Walter Shurden wrote: Baptists do not have a formal or informal teaching office that translates a correct biblical interpretation. Freedom of interpretation by every single believer is fundamental to Baptist thought... If believers are to be guided by Sacred Scripture, believers must be free to interpret the Bible (Shurden, 1993). Baptists have done much more than write about freedom, though. Baptists fought for freedom. In 1612, Thomas Helwys' book The Mystery of Iniquity was the first English declaration of religious freedom. Helwys wrote this book to King James I, demanding freedom. Instead, King James sentenced Helwys to prison, where Helwys died (Woodfin, 1995). Two years later, in 1614, Leonard Busher wrote, Religious Peace: Or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience. This book was also a petition to James I; and busher also spent the rest of his life in prison (Handy, 1986). Roger Williams supported religious freedom in Massachusetts. In 1635, colony officers arrested Williams and planned to expel him. Don't blush, though. Williams fled and continued to found the state of Rhode Island where he founded the first Baptist church in America. Some time after Williams founded his church, the judge who convicted Williams, Governor Haines, reco in Rhode Island. Haines told Williams: I must confess that the Wise God has provided and cut off from this part of the world, for a refuge and a container for all kinds of Unfortunately, this intuition does not stop the Massachusetts colony from systematic persecution of Baptists (Greene, 1996). John Smyth, William Carey and Baptists around the world faced ridicule and persecution for their individual consciences (Young, 1998). Not only did persecution stop Baptists, but by 1800, Baptists had become the largest denomination in the United States (Handy, 1986). The perseverance and success of the Baptists demonstrate only the truth in Tertulian's observation: the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Gospel. The priesthood of believers is undoubtedly a foundation for Baptist theology. For more than three and a half centuries, Baptists have fought for the right of individual conscience. Baptists base their faith in the Bible. Verses like 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:4-6; 1 Tim 2:5; and Eph 3:11-12, everyone talks about our free access to God (Young, 1998). According to Robert Handy, there are 127 Baptist conventions, in 142 countries, and religious freedom is a declared principle of all (Handy, 1986). The contradiction with Prohibition Once you understand that the priesthood of believers gives every Christian the right to interpret the Bible for himself, that person must ask why southern Baptists ask for abstinence. All legitimate reasons for abstinence evolve from personal convictions and personal biblical application. The Bible never requires abstinence. Yet southern Baptists demand it. At the same time, they claim that they will not make any rule that is not contained in the Bible. Faith and the Baptist message affirm: Only God is Lord of conscience, and has left him free from the doctrines and commandments of men who are contrary to His Word or are not contained in it. (Religious freedom, 1998) An abstinence required by alcohol is not contained in the Word of God. In fact, the Bible directly gives Christians a choice. The Apostle Paul was very clear. Why should my freedom be judged by someone else's conscience? If I take part in the meal with gratitude, why am I denounced for something for which I thank God? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:29b-32 NIV) Therefore, do not let anyone judge you based on what you eat or drink, or regarding a religious feast, a celebration of the New Moon or a day on a Saturday. These are just a shadow of the things that were to come; reality, however, lies in Christ. (Col 2:16,17 NIV) Accept him whose faith is weak, without judging on questionable matters... The man who eats everything must not look down on those who do not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does it, because God has accepted it. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To master stands or falls, And he will stand, for the Lord will make him stand. (Ro 14:1-4 NIV) When Barret Duke calls call drinkers a disgrace to God, is he not judging the servants of God? When John Gillespie refers to moderate drinkers as the enemies of God, isn't he judging? Paul wrote that the abstainer should not condemn the drinker. Paul wrote that Christians should not judge each other on questionable matters. Aren't southern Baptists judging? There is clear hypocrisy when Southern Baptists claim to believe in individual interpretation, yet they ask for the excommunication of anyone who disagrees with their interpretation (Hailey). Paige Patterson states that Baptists do not violate anyone's conscience because Christians have the choice of whether or not to join the church (Patterson, 1999). However, by choosing to unite, Christians subscribe to the established rules of the Church. This is what Paul meant when he wrote: do not judge, or what does faith and the Baptist message mean in saying that churches will not make any rule not found in the Bible? Paul did not say to leave your freedom at the door of the church. The question is clear. Do Southern Baptists have the right to interpret the Bible on their own, or does their choice just decide whether or not to be Southern Baptists? Redefining priesthood Jeff Pool states that there is a contradiction generated in Baptist life by the clash between the almost fanatical Southern Baptist insistence on the principle of religious freedom and the corresponding inability to consistently observe and update the principle in practice (Pool, 1990). Many Baptists have begun to realize that the declared faith in the freedom and practice of SBC do not always agree. Contradiction poses a difficult dilemma for those who admit it. To address the issue, some have begun to redefine the priesthood. These Baptists maintain the traditional view of individualism is not biblical. Instead, they propose, the Christian church must interpret the Bible coven (Freeman, 1997). Many Baptists who subscribe to the congregational vision wrote a Manifesto for Baptists. This manifesto, entitled Re-imagining Baptist identity, states: We reject all accounts of following Jesus who interpret faith as a private matter between God and the individual or as an activity of competent souls who inherently enjoy an un mediated, unattainable and disembodied experience with God. We also reject all identifications of the priesthood of believers with autonomous individualism that says we can do and believe what we want regardless of the church's advice and confession. Freeman(1997) The Manifesto, denying the competence of the soul, is far from Baptist theology. According to Pool, the competence of the soul in religion is rightly understood as the distinctiveness of the Baptists. Pool writes that included in the competence of the soul is the notion of freedom of conscience and expression within baptistery communities faith themselves. Throughout history, Baptists have regarded their confessions as declarations of consent, but never as documents that fully or infallibly affirm the faith of Baptists. Of course, Baptists did not consider their confessions of faith as beliefs... (Pool, 1990). Those who accept the Manifesto abandon this story of Baptist thought. Manifesto writers try to use church confessions as beliefs. The Manifesto states that private interpretation is an accommodation to the individualism and rationalism of modernity [which] weakens the Church by transforming the living and embodied Christian faith into an abstract and mythical gnosis (1 Thyme 1:3-7). In addition, writers argue: Scripture wisely prohibits and we reject any form of private interpretation... (2 Pet 1:20-21) (Freeman, 1997). Of course, the biblical interpretations of the writers of the Manifesto are in question. However, there is a simpler and more definitive way to examine their case. If Christians, throughout history, had accepted the congregational vision, Baptists would still be Catholic. It was the individual interpretations of men, guided by the Holy Spirit, that brought most of the Church's progress. Would these writers of the Manifesto say that Martin Luther had no right to come to his conclusions and disagree with the confession of his Roman Church? Shouldn't Roger Williams have fought his congregational Church for the separation of church and state? Was William Tyndale really a heretic to translate the Holy Bible? Had it not been for individual interpretations of the Reformers, Protestant theology may never have developed. There are dangers in individualism. Individuals created many doctrines that were truly heresies. Anius used individual logic to deny the divinity of Jesus, and Peesagio denied original sin (Barry, nd; Mr Pohle, nd). However, a doctrine embraced by the majority is no less fallible. There was a time when virtually every Christian believed that the Bible supported slavery. The majority opinion did not correct their interpretation (Woodfin). According to J. Terry Young, the recent change of some to redefine the priesthood is the result of concern about the conformity of belief and practice among Baptists, and is partly due to the emerging question of pastor authority. The believer's priesthood is a threat, if not an obstacle, to forced conformity in faith and an authoritarian position for the pastor (Young). This idea of forced compliance is not new. John Leland noted that once people get freedom from forced compliance, it becomes obvious that many were always in with the creed of the church. The difference is that in the end they were free to disagree, whereas before they kept their disagreements private. According to Leland, forced compliance is useless. Leland wrote that conscience and truth will win, as well as established established in the following citation, Leland refers to any deviation from the established belief as an error (Greene). It is certain that the establishment of paganism, as truth, did not prevent the error of Christianity; neither the institution of Rome avoided the error of reform, in the 16th century, nor the late revolution in the papal countries, at the end of the 18th century. The establishment of the Church of England did not hinder the error of non-compliance, nor did the Massachusetts institution stop the increase in a series of errors and seven in the state. (Greene) Some have always believed that individualism was depraved and that the majority mentality was healthy. However, the story is led by those who dared to think for themselves. Leland proposed, the right to private judgment and free debate, and freedom of conscience, are inalienable. These are not delivered to the general will, by individuals, when they enter society; but everyone holds them in their own sovereign bosom (Greene). Each person can benefit from the knowledge of others; but everyone has a responsibility to decide for themselves, what is the Truth according to the scriptures. CONCLUSION Throughout the history of the Church, Christians are well aware of the potential dangers of alcohol. The Bible warns against alcohol abuse. Many famous people in the story have warned about the seduction of alcohol. Most people had observed the effects of drunkenness. Despite these facts, most Christians still saw alcohol as a pleasant part of life. The Bible, even if it warns about alcohol, also praises alcohol. It is a gift from God, given to man for our amusement. God bless men with an abundant harvest of grapes. Those whose vineyards were naked were judged. Alcohol was as an offering to God in the Old Testament and a symbol of salvation in the New Testament. Biblical writers recorded that wine brought joy, and it was used in celebrations. This was true in America, until the temperance social

movement gained power. During the 18th century, Americans were convinced that alcohol was a scourge on the earth. Surely, God was against this evil, people insisted. In the end, people tried to demonstrate their vision, using the Bible. Some found good reasons to abstain. The Bible was clear that alcohol could be dangerous. Some Biblical characters chose to abstain, or even received orders, from God to abstain. Finally, the consciences of the peoples led them to believe that abstinence was the best. Unfortunately, some others were not satisfied with these reasons on their own. These Christians took their exegesis further afield. Many insisted that the Bible abstinence, not only allowed it. Some teetotalers have made wild and unfounded claims, which their followers have gladly accepted. Within a while, the ban took control of the country. Many churches and denominations have led the way Ban. The Churches passed resolutions and signed alliances that required abstinence. Excommunicated churches, as sinners, those who dared not agree. So entrenched was the idea that alcohol was sinful, that it survived long after prohibition laws were repealed. In the Southern Baptist Convention, the frenzy over Prohibition became so powerful that it overwhelmed the doctrine of freedom. Churches no longer allowed men to interpret the Bible on their own. While Baptist churches still claimed individual freedom, in practice, members accepted church teachings, disobeyed in secret, or left their church. This situation pervaded for almost a century, with few questions. However, some began to question the church's right to ask for abstinence. They pointed to the inherent discrepancy between freedom and forced compliance. Thus, a controversy developed in the Southern Baptist Convention. Baptists have always been separated by their strong faith in the competence of the soul. Baptists are free to seek God's direction for their individual lives. Every believer, guided by the Holy Spirit, is capable and freed to seek God's will. However, in the last century, the Southern Baptist Convention violated this basic belief. The demand for abstinence is not only an intrusion into the competence of the soul, but is biblically wrong. The Bible gives Christians a responsibility to choose whether or not to drink. There is no legitimate claim that the Bible requires abstinence. The Bible gives the choice. It is time for the Southern Baptist Convention, and its churches, to disaed this choice to its members. William Barry, Arianism, [online article] (accessed 8 November 1999); available from Internet. Bloch, Abraham P. The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1978), 128-129. Barret Duke. Abstinence: The Biblical Choice, Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Sunday 1997 Sermon Suggested [Online Sermon] (consulted October 25, 1999); available from Sermons/97s-alcohol.htm; Internet. Curtis W. 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