

# **Bishop's Stortford Baptist Church (BSBC)**

## **Alcohol Policy**

The Church Meeting of BSBC has discussed the issue of allowing alcohol to be available or drunk on Church premises on 21st March 2013 and decided against this.

It is useful to look at the principles that were involved in reaching this decision.

### **The Bible's view on alcohol**

- The Bible has an expectation that people will drink wine. Not that they must, but that it is a normal part of everyday life. Hence references to wine – new wine especially as a superior beverage – are frequent. In Gen 27:28 Isaac blesses Jacob (whom Isaac believes to be Esau) and prays that Jacob may know the abundance of grain and new wine. In Deuteronomy 7:13 it is one of the blessings that God will give to His people in exchange for their obedience of His Law and a sign of His love for them.
- Wine was sacramental (Exodus 29:40, Leviticus 23:13, Numbers 15:5,7,10 etc). It was a regular part of the sacrifices and a part of the festivals: Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:3) and Passover (4 cups are traditionally drunk at Passover and we see reference to two during the Last Supper)
- Jesus drank wine. He turned water into wine (John 2:1-11), he was accused of being a drunkard (Luke 7:34). He used wine as an illustration of his teaching (Luke 5:37-39) and transformed its meaning at Passover to let it speak of His sacrifice on the cross.
- Jesus' disciples drank wine at the very least during Passover.
- Paul commends Timothy to drink wine for the sake of his stomach condition (1 Timothy 5:23). Wine was often safer to drink than water and that is probably Paul's meaning here.
- The Bible frequently warns about the dangers of drunkenness and condemns drunkenness without reservation, as a state in which sin and lack of judgement are likely to prevail. This is illustrated from Noah in Genesis 9 via Isaiah 28:7 and Jesus warnings in Luke 21:34 to Peter's list of pagan sins in 1 Peter 4.

### **Nazirites**

Nazirites took a special vow of devotion to the Lord usually for a specific period but sometimes for life. In Numbers 6 they are forbidden all alcohol and also any grape products including grape juice and raisins. This is clearly not intended as a normative state of discipleship. If so then communion would be impossible and fruit cake a dangerous temptation.

## **Communion**

Bread and wine were central to the Lord's Supper. There is no truth in the idea that Jesus used non-alcoholic wine; he used the real thing as do most churches. In our Communion, we use grape juice because we allow young people to take part and because we do not want to force alcohol on anyone that has objections to it or problems because of it.

## **Weaker brethren**

Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 speak to the issue of weaker members of the congregation who may be led astray by the freedoms that we enjoy in Christ. This relates especially to the problem that meat bought in a market was probably dedicated to a pagan god. An analogy today would be whether it is right to eat halal meat, or whether in doing so you are honouring a false idea about God. The fear was that in eating such meat there was a tacit acknowledgment of the power of the pagan gods over your life. Paul's argument was that since they don't exist they have no power and so you can eat what you like with a clear conscience, but if this might lead to others being led astray then it is better to abstain.

Romans 14:15-21

*<sup>15</sup> If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. <sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, <sup>18</sup> because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.*

*<sup>19</sup> Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. <sup>20</sup> Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. <sup>21</sup> It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.*

## **Conclusion**

1. God has given us all things for us to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17) although we would add the caveat: in their right context and with appropriate moderation. Drunkenness is expressly forbidden and we should be very wary of intoxication.
2. Romans 14 instructs us not to be involved in any activity that might lead others astray. Broadly this falls into two categories: those who have been damaged by alcohol through abuse and health issues and those whose opposition to alcohol might cause them to be deeply offended by its use. We must be very careful to recognise the needs of the first group and very sensitive to the needs of the second.

**This policy was reviewed by the Trustees on 9th September 2019 and will be reviewed again every three years.**