

Biblical Church Leadership
Session #4 – Sincere and Sober

1 Timothy 3:8a – Servants likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine...

As we proceed through this study, please note that Paul is not suggesting that it would be good for deacons to be dignified and not double-tongued. Paul is insisting that deacons “must be.” These are not suggestions. These are requirements.

Deacons Must Not Be Insincere – “Not double-tongued”

This next phrase begins a series of three prohibitions that MUST characterize all deacons. Tonight, we will only cover the first prohibition.

The word, *dilogous*, which is translated as “double-tongued,” is a rare word. It refers to “insincerity of speech.” The image is of a man who is “saying one thing to one person and another thing to another. We typically describe this type of behavior as being “duplicitous.” In some languages, this concept is captured with the image of a person “speaking in two different directions” or by “covering one’s thoughts by means of one’s words.” Obviously, if the church were to have a deacon who conducted themselves in this manner, the trust and the stability of the community would be threatened.

Again, Alexander Strauch is insightful on the importance of this qualification: Duplicity of speech ruins trust and undermines a leader’s credibility. In contrast, truthful speech is the foundation of trust and promotes good working relationships among colleagues. Strauch goes on to ground the need for sincerity of speech in the particular function of the deacons in the context of the church. As we saw a few weeks ago, God gave deacons to the church to assist the overseers/elders/pastors with the work of ministry by relieving them of certain responsibility so as to free them up for the ministry of the Word and prayer. Given such an understanding of diaconal ministry in the church, Strauch believes that the need for sincerity of speech arises from the fact that “deacons are often placed between elders and the people they are helping on behalf of the elders.” Strauch continues, noting, “When people are under pressure, it may be tempting to reveal less than the full truth, or to conceal the truth when speaking to certain people, or to think that ‘little white lies’ are acceptable.” “And,” Strauch writes, “when there is disagreement or conflict, some people may try to please both parties by saying one thing to the elders and another thing to the people being helped.” Strauch concludes, “Inevitably, those who play loose with the truth, color the truth, or try to please everyone will be guilty of being ‘double-tongued.’ Such a person does not command respect and is a sad testimony to ‘the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation’ (Ephesians 1:3).”

As with the need to be dignified, Paul’s admonition for deacons to not be “double-tongued” reflects his concern for the glory of God in the church. As Proverbs 12:22 tells us, “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.” As Christians, we have been called to “speak the truth to one another, because we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25). And while all Christians are called to this standard, elders and deacons must exemplify this behavior in the church. We must hear the warning from Christ himself regarding the words that we speak: “Every careless word that we speak will someday be judged by God” (Matthew 12:36-37).

All Christians, but especially church leaders, will be held accountable by Christ for our speech. If a man’s words cannot be trusted, then “he is not worth of respect and is not qualified to assist the elders in the care of the church” as a deacon.

Deacons Must Not Be Addicted to Anything – “Not Addicted to Much Wine”

Regarding this statement, Alexander Strauch writes, “It is unacceptable for the elders or deacons of God’s household to be ‘addicted to much wine.’ This second prohibition is not an absolute ban on drinking, but a prohibition against excessive use of wine (and we might add, any other substance) that would damage any aspect of a person’s reputation or service for God.”

As for the specific prohibition against addiction and drunkenness, we find other places in scripture that teach similar truths. Proverbs 20:1 says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” Proverbs 23:29-30 says, “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine.” Similarly, we read in Titus 2:3 that older Christian women “must not become slaves to much wine. As 2 Peter 2:19 tells us, “For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.”

When a Christian is “enslaved to alcohol” that are not being controlled by the Holy Spirit. As Strauch noted, “A Christian with a drinking problem is controlled by the flesh, not by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-24), and as such is an appalling example of what a believer in Christ is to be like. Any addiction impairs one’s judgment and connection to reality.” As you probably remember from our study of Ephesians 5, Christians are called to be “filled with the Spirit” instead of “getting drunk with wine.” A person who is enslaved to alcohol, or any other substances, will not be living a life of dignity that is worthy of the respect that is necessary for qualification for church office.

As Christians, we must heed the warning of scripture regarding the danger of addiction to any substance, whether that substance be alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, prescription drugs, pornography, or even food. Any substance that we find our hope in rather than in Christ will ultimately lead to the destruction of our testimony, which, in turn, hurts the testimony of the church. Paul’s instructions regarding freedom from addiction must not be ignored.

So, how should we address this issue in the church? Should churches forbid their leaders and their members from any and all substances that could led to addiction? In the past, the basic approach to the issue has been to call for abstinence from addictive substances like alcohol and tobacco, but I believe that this approach leads us down the wrong road for meaningful and biblical approaches to the question of how to deal with addiction in the context of the church. Obviously, there are certain things that partaking in is forbidden. Christians must abstain from all illegal drug use because it is a violation of the laws of the state that God has ordained for our good. Furthermore, pornography, while not illegal, is in and of itself evil and contrary to God’s will for sexuality. Christians must abstain from pornography. But what about alcohol, tobacco, and certain prescription drugs? Are Christians required to abstain from these substances because of the potentiality of addiction?

My answer to this question is that abstinence, while popular, does not work to consistently address the issue of addiction to substances like alcohol, tobacco, and certain prescription drugs. Instead of advocating for abstinence, I believe we must deal with the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the heart. Instead of forbidding all leaders and church members from alcohol, tobacco, and certain prescription drugs, I believe the church must stress the importance of stress

the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit and then living a life of self-control. This means, for instance, that some people, knowing their own weakness and propensity to addiction, will choose not to drink alcohol, use tobacco, or ask their doctors for alternative approaches to pain management in order to avoid violating this biblical principle of being free from addiction. Others, however, who are not as inclined to addiction, may choose to enjoy a glass of wine with their spouse, a can of beer with their friends at the deer camp, or a glass of champagne at a wedding, smoke a celebratory cigar with a relative after the birth of child, or take a physician-prescribed narcotic at the discretion of their doctor without feeling guilty that they have violated some biblical prohibition.

We must be clear that while Christians are free to abstain completely from addictive substances and recognizing that drunkenness and addiction are unequivocally forbidden for the Christian, the Bible clearly does not forbid the moderate use of potentially addictive substances like alcohol. To state it again: The Bible does not condemn or forbid the moderate use of alcohol, and nor should we as people who claim to follow God's Word. If we are not careful in our thinking about this matter, we could put ourselves in a position of thinking that we morally superior to Christ himself.

Jesus not only "used alcoholic beverages himself" (Luke 7:33-34), but he even had the nerve to turn perfectly good water into wine for his first miracle. As one writer stated, "If performed today, the miracle at the Canaanite wedding would meet with frowns from Southern Baptist believers who are in 'total opposition to the manufacturing, advertising, distributing, and consuming of alcoholic beverages.'" As our current deacon covenant is written, Jesus nor the apostles could serve at our church due to their use of wine.

Now, to be sure, alcohol in the first century had a lower alcohol content than modern alcohol but most arguments for abstinence from alcohol are not concerned with alcohol content. For those making such an argument, either the alcohol itself is evil or the argument is made that Christians must be aware of the "weaker brother" argument. The "weaker brother" argument is a biblical argument. In essence, it states that the stronger brother should take care not to offend the weaker brother (Romans 14:13-23). In most regards, in the New Testament, the concern had to do with eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Some members of the church really struggled with the idea of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, so, Paul says that the strong brothers must take care not to offend the weaker brother by eating meat that was sacrificed to idols in the presence of the weaker brother. This is a good and right principle that Christians must acknowledge and follow, yet, we must also be careful to not allow the consciences of weaker brethren to dictate every aspect of our own freedom in Christ. There are limits to the authority of the weaker brethren's conscience. Furthermore, the weaker brother should not remain in their state of a weaker conscience. They should grow in their maturity over time to understand what Scripture teaches about self-control and freedom in Christ. As Chuck Swindoll noted, "Be careful, there are some people out there who are professional weaker brethren."

Blanket abstinence is not a solution to problems of the heart. Spirit-filled self-control is the solution to addiction and moderation regarding addictive or potentially dangerous substances. Blaming a substance like alcohol for a person's addiction is much like blaming a firearm for a murder. It removes the personal accountability and places the blame on things instead of persons. In the case of qualifications for leaders in the church, we need men who have self-control, who are controlled by the Holy Spirit, not alcohol, tobacco, food, or prescription drugs.

However, if such men are not controlled or addicted to such substances, then they should not be disqualified from being considered as a deacon in our church. If they choose to have an occasional drink, partake of an occasional tobacco product, eat an unhealthy meal of fried food on occasion, or follow their doctor's orders and take a highly-addictive pain pill for relief, then, if they are not addicted to or controlled by these substance, if they demonstrate self-control as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, then we as a church should welcome them for consideration for service among our deacons and remove the unbiblical prohibition from our deacon covenant that requires complete abstinence from potential addictive substance for service in church leadership.