

The Brouhaha over the Brew

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Looks like John MacArthur's most recent article hit a nerve. He knew that before he wrote it—he knew it would offend some people—and yet he was still willing to write it.

I can hear some of you in the YRR crowd ask, "But why? Why would John risk alienating us, an enthusiastic group of young reformers?"

Simple. John thinks you're worth it. He cares, and he's willing to say the things you might not particularly like, at first blush anyway.

Of all the people who roam the vast fields of evangelicalism, you YRRers appreciate straight talk. You are right to be suspicious of those who pitch candy-coated messages in pretty packages. That's not John. He'll never tickle your ears, and we know that's why you're still listening.

Just in case you missed John's point in the dust-up (not only in our comment thread, but in other playgrounds as well), here it is: *It's irresponsible and wrong for YRR leaders to make beer/wine-drinking one of the badges of the YRR movement.* That's it. So, if that shoe fits you, wear it; if it doesn't, let it pass.

John clearly would like to persuade you of the wisdom of abstinence, but he's not interested in binding the conscience of the entire YRR movement by an artificial rule. And at the very least, he was calling the YRR leadership to exercise pastoral wisdom and compassion, knowing the devastation alcohol abuse brings in a beer-soaked culture. Here's a quote: "The last thing I would ever want to do is be the cause of stumbling for one of" [those] "who have been delivered from alcohol addiction."

John said, "It is puerile and irresponsible for any pastor to encourage the recreational use of intoxicants—especially in church-sponsored activities." To illustrate his point, he then quoted a major leader in one sphere of the YRR movement, Darrin Patrick, who expressed a concordant level of dismay. Here's what Patrick said:

As I coach and mentor church planters and pastors, I am shocked at the number of them who are either addicted or headed toward addiction to alcohol. Increasingly, the same is true with prescription drugs. One pastor I know could not relax without several beers after work and could not sleep without the aid of a sleeping pill. [*Church Planter* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 51]

Can someone please help me understand how John is so terribly misguided with his concerns? He is expressing a perfectly legitimate pastoral concern, which is shared by Albert Mohler, Russell Moore, and many other faithful pastors.

But again, it's the *young* pastors and church leaders who think John's aim is to convert everyone into grumpy, fundamentalist teetotalers. It's not about stealing joy; it's about promoting pastoral wisdom and compassion for people. Church leaders must consider the consequences of what they approve and promote.

Paul's version of contextualization led him to set aside his right (1 Cor. 8-10); some of the YRR leaders indulge their rights and parade them before their people. "But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Cor. 8:9). As a stronger brother in issues of conscience, Paul's concern was to protect the conscience of the weak—he kept his liberties to himself.

Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. (Rom. 14:20-22a)

If you are a YRRer, you lack the vantage point of age and experience—that's one of the liabilities of being young. So, consider the wise counsel of those who have gone before you, those who are older and more seasoned than you. And as you look for leadership and direction, consider these words from Hebrews 13:7: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." Men like John MacArthur, Albert Mohler, and Russell Moore stand firm in that category.

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