

FROM THE EDITOR

## CHRISTIANS AND ALCOHOL

Since America was first settled by the Puritans, the consumption of alcohol by Christians has been a hotly contested issue. These early pioneers, who regularly drank wine, beer and distilled spirits, soon faced a problem when their “covenant” children abused alcohol and displayed unsavory behavior in the public square. Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729), pastor of Northampton Church in the Connecticut Valley and grandfather to Jonathan Edwards, summarized the state of affairs when he said, “Conversions [have] become rare in the age of the [new] world. . . . The body of the rising generation is poor, perishing, unconverted . . . and an undone generation. Many are profane, drunkards . . . lascivious. . . .” He challenged preachers to cry out for heaven-sent revival. Under his ministry five such harvests occurred among youths in 1679, 1683, 1696, 1712, and 1718.

Widespread public displays of drunkenness declined whenever revival broke out, but resurfaced in time. Before long, questions arose whether Christians should drink at all, even responsibly. In the mid-1700s, the Methodist movement was one of the first to take a strong stand for complete abstinence.

The controversy has not ceased. Recently, at their annual convention, Southern Baptists debated both sides of the issue.

Because the storm continues to rage, especially among evangelicals of all stripes, this edition of the *Criswell Theological Review (CTR)* features articles on the subject.

Bill Leonard, Dean of the Divinity School at Wake Forest University and professor of Church History, fires the first salvo. His article, “They Have No Wine,” traces the history of alcohol use among North American

Christians. You will be surprised to learn that some early American pastors were also local distillers.

Barrett Duke and Richard Land, representing the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, contribute “The Christian and Alcohol,” which may be one of the clearest and most well-reasoned arguments supporting abstinence.

Next comes Ken Gentry’s “The Bible and the Question of Alcoholic Beverages,” which tackles the question from a purely scriptural perspective. After examining all the essential passages dealing with the subject, Gentry concludes that imbibing is not forbidden, but is actually encouraged at times. Yet, he offers a word of caution.

Sarah F. Ward contributes an interesting article on the history and ministry of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), an organization that was originally founded to stamp out the sale and use of alcohol in America. The WCTU was at the forefront of getting the Eighteenth Amendment (Prohibition Act) passed in 1919. Ms. Ward is the current president of the World Woman’s Christian Temperance Union.

Finally, we offer our readers the original “Booze” sermon preached by flaming evangelist Billy Sunday as he crisscrossed the country speaking in favor of the Prohibition Act. This is not the “Booze” sermon he preached later in his life *after* the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. We have left intact the vocabulary and names of this period piece so the reader can get a feel for the times in which Sunday lived.

The remainder of our journal features 30 pages of book reviews from scholars and ministers who share with you their thoughts about some books you might want to purchase for your library. Additional reviews can be accessed on the *CTR* website at [www.criswelljournal.com](http://www.criswelljournal.com)

Yours for Christ and the kingdom,

R. Alan Streett, Editor