

## Abstain

Text: I Thessalonians 5:22, 23

Today I would like to talk with you about the value of abstinence. Roots of the word “abstain” are from Latin *abstinere*: *ab* = from + *tenere* = hold. To abstain means to withhold one’s self. The word often refers to people who hold themselves back from indulging in habits that are bad for them, physically or morally. It means to choose not to do or have something: to refrain deliberately and often with an effort of self-denial from an action.

A cultural shock was taking place in the early church. There were those Jewish members of the church that wanted the church to hold fast to the ceremonial portions of the law. Then there were the incoming Gentiles that were getting confused as to what was expected of them. A conference was held at Jerusalem and guidelines were set up as seen in Acts 15:28, 29: “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.” From this passage we understand the apostles were desiring the church to abstain from that which would cause harm and encourage them to “...do well.” Let’s talk about this subject of abstinence.

### I. ABSTAIN FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS.

“...Abstain from meats offered to idols” (Acts 15:29a). Across the world idolatry had its hold. And even now idols of all different manners rear its ugly head. John said in I John 5:21, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”

In I Corinthians 8, the subject is brought up about eating the discounted meat that had previously been offered to idols. Idolatry had such a hold on people’s lives that Paul was willing to go to extremes to not be a stumblingblock to those who would be tempted to go back into idolatry or whose conscience would be defiled as stated in I Corinthians 8:13: “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”

### II. ABSTAIN FOR THE SAKE OF GOOD HEALTH AND PERSONAL TESTIMONY.

“...And from blood, and from things strangled...” (Acts 15:29b). Although the ceremonial law concerning meats had been lifted (Acts 10:15; I Timothy 4:4), permission to indulge in appetites that would be harmful to their health and personal testimony were not permitted (Romans 14:15-23).

Along these lines, allow me to list some reasons to abstain from alcohol by drink. Proverbs 23:29-35.

1. Because you are placed into the category of the foolish.  
Proverbs 20:1; Proverbs 31:1-7

Is it any wonder that alcohol is sometimes called “spirits” (Ephesians 4:30; Ephesians 5:18)?

2. Because drunkenness is so seriously condemned in the Bible.

Romans 13:13; I Corinthians 5:11, 6:10

One hundred per cent of people who do not drink do not get drunk.

3. Because alcohol impairs your thinking.

Proverbs 23:33; II Samuel 11:13

Think of the number of car, train and shipwrecks caused by drinking. The surest way for a pilot to lose his license is to be caught with a questionable alcohol content in his blood.

4. Because alcohol ruins families.

Genesis 19:33-38; Proverbs 23:33

Criminal records are replete with this irrefutable proof.

5. Because alcohol creates poverty.

Proverbs 21:17

Casual drinkers spend 300 dollars per month on alcohol. Heavy drinkers spend 600 dollars a month on alcohol. Drinking decreases occupational productivity. You miss days of work. Many are fired, losing their ability to make a decent living. Take a trip to skid row; there is more than ample proof in the gutter of life.

6. Because alcohol creates immeasurable sorrow.

Proverbs 23:29

Fifty per cent of all homicides, highway fatalities, incarcerations and birth defects are caused by intoxication. There are 83,000 rapes and assaults per year by those under the influence of alcohol.

7. Because alcohol is addictive.

Proverbs 23:35

### III. ABSTAIN FOR THE SAKE OF OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMAND TO BE PURE.

I Thessalonians 4:3-5; Acts 15:29

Recently I was with my good friend Pastor Keith Smith of Albany, Georgia. He told of a Mr. Latent who had a concern about the school where his sixth grade child was attending. The school announced sex education classes were going to be taught. Being the conscientious Christian, Mr. Latent decided to go to a school meeting where the plans and curriculum were going to be discussed. Pass outs to the parents were distributed detailing the subject matter. Mr. Latent raised his hand and asked, “Don’t you think somewhere you should be listing total abstinence as at least an option?” The crowd groaned, guffawed and laughed.” One man said, “Why don’t you get your head out of the sand and face reality!” Mr. Latent was discouraged and quietly sat back down.

The spokesperson said after her introductory remarks, "Let's everyone stand up, make your way to the tables in the back, grab something to drink and eat and come back to your seats. Mr. Latent said the Holy Spirit spoke to his heart to not stand up and go back to the refreshment tables. Someone approached him and said, "Please, Sir, make yourself at home and go back to the table and get a drink and something to eat." Again, Mr. Latent heard the Lord say, "Don't stand up, stay in your seat!" He politely refused. In about ten minutes everyone were back in their seats. The spokesperson said, "Okay, everyone look at the bottom of your cup and see if you have a flower on the bottom of your cup." One lady, waved her hand confirming that there was a flower on the bottom of her cup. She was the only one with a flower on the bottom of her cup. The spokesperson said, "Who shook hands and met this lady?" Hands were lifted around the room. Then the question was asked, "And how many shook hands with those who have their hands lifted." It appeared that all hands were lifted. The spokesperson said with a knowing confidence, "See there! that lady with the flower on the bottom of her cup represents someone with a sexually transmitted disease. And as you can see all of you were susceptible to contagion."

The Holy Spirit spoke to Mr. Latent and said, "Now stand up!" Mr. Latent stood and clearly spoke out, "I was not susceptible! I abstained!" His point could not have been made clearer. It was now time for all assembled to face reality.

**CONCLUSION:**  
I Peter 2:11, 12