

Romans 14: 2-3- Black or White 2 - 16 June 2013

Now, this morning, we embark on session two or sermon number two in our series in 'Black and White' and in order to introduce that again, let's watch this little video clip.

(Video Shown)

Yes, we are in our series called 'Black or White' because many things in life are not always black or white. It may be a mixture of both. It may be grey areas. God did not say eating black 'Chai Tao Kway' (Hokkien dialect words meaning carrot cake) is better than eating the white 'Chai Tao Kway'. It doesn't make you more spiritual or less spiritual. These are things that are not explicitly commanded in the Scriptures. We call them the grey areas and that's what we are looking at in our series here, 'Black or White'.

We are reminded of the verse in Romans 14 where it says, "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions." (Romans 14:1, ESV) There are many things in the Bible that we must fight for; there are many things in the Bible that are rock solid. They are clear teachings that we must stand upon and there can be no flexibility, there can be no variations. But equally, there are many things in the Scripture that allows us freedom and flexibility. What to eat, what to drink, how you eat, how you drink, how you dress, there are many things that are flexible. That's why we've such variety today. All of us are dressed differently. All of us combed our hair differently. There is flexibility in many things. And the Bible is saying, there are some areas of life, where it will be belonging to opinions and He doesn't want us to quarrel over opinions. Remember this wise saying? We believe it's from Augustine, who says, "In essentials Unity, in non-essentials Liberty, (but) in all things, Charity."

Christians today got to grasp this: there are essentials of the Bible, called fundamentals in the Bible, that there can be no variation in. The deity of Jesus Christ, the triune God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These are the essentials. You don't touch them, you don't shift them, you don't change them. We must be united on such strong fundamentals. But at the same time, not everything is where we fight about. You have the non-essentials and there can be liberty, there can be freedom, but in all things, let's remember, it's about love, it's about charity. And we can be very right about things and be very unloving, about how we approach others. So in all things, charity. So essentials are where we need to unite in, non-essentials are where we can

have some variations. Of course, even the variations are to be guided by principles of the Bible. And all matters, whether essential or non-essential are actually all important. 0:03:45.8

Let me explain to this a little bit more with this diagram again. This is a diagram where you see a core of essentials and then you have the non-essentials, all are important, let me say that again. All are important. They cover different issues but they are all important because they are all touched about, or biblical principles are brought in, in such issues. But let's look at essentials. What are they? People asked, "Pastor, what do you think are the essentials of the Bible? What are the things we cannot budge, we must be firm and convicted about?" I believe the essentials covers aspects here as I have mentioned: God, Gospel, Grace, Godliness, Glory.

God! That's so essential! I mean if you tell me, Jesus is not God, you have departed from the faith. The deity of Jesus Christ, the Trinity are all essentials, according to Scripture. Gospel. The Gospel is the good news, the saving message that God gives to us, whereby man may be born again. And the Gospel is an essential that we cannot budge. Grace is an essential, because everything else, every other religion talks about good works to earn your way to heaven, but it's in grace that God freely bestows to us eternal life. This is a fundamental of the Christian faith. It's where we fight on. This is an essential. Then you have godliness, what it really means. The glory that should come. Heaven and the glories that God will give to those who believe in Jesus. All these, I think are the fundamentals. 0:05:29.3

What about the non-essentials? It's a bit complicated here, but followed me a while and it will all make sense in a moment. Non-essentials. Non-essentials are important, but they're not the core, alright? They are important but not the core. I also want to say to you, the boundary between essential and non-essential and so on, sometimes for different people, they can have different margins. It can be a bit blurry. It's not as absolute as it seems. But in non-essentials, we have two parts. We have the explicit. Explicit means clearly spelt out, specifically commanded, clearly spoken of, that's what the explicit are. And then you also have the non-explicit, of course.

So what are examples of the explicit? I believe it will be areas such as worship. Now, Pastor, don't you think these are essentials? Yar, I think they are. But there are some aspects in worship, in fellowship, like how often do you worship? What is worship? How often do we fellowship? How do you do evangelism? Now these things are in a sense essential because they're part of godliness. But in some aspects, they are also in the non-essentials because there is flexibility and variety in the way we apply it. So

the boundaries do have some overlap, but I'm giving you this so that you just have a kind of a gauge-feel of what we mean by essential, explicit and then the non-explicit. Follow me so far? 0:07:04.3

Okay, let me go to the non-explicit and that was what we covered 2 weeks ago, right? The non-explicit are things like tattoos, dressing, Bible version, musical instruments, style of music, whether you can watch TV or not watch TV, alcohol intake, smoking and so on and so forth. These are the non-explicit. Are they important? They are important, alright? They are still important, though they belong to the non-essential realm. This is where I can vary with you. I can differ with you. I can agree to disagree. We can all understand it's different, not wrong, but they are still important. And biblical principles are needed to approach these various subjects.

So we looked at what the verse says. When you talk about the opinions, the non-essentials, we must not quarrel over them. Must not! There are some people who feel that everything in a Christian life is an essential. Now, you will be very difficult to live with, because the what you eat, how you sing, what instrument you use, to you is the ultimate and you will clash with virtually every one. It's hard for you to hold a theological perspective like that. Your theology is like a stack of cards. One card goes, everything goes. But really, I believe we must not quarrel over opinions as Romans 14 says. This is where we must fight and be very strong in essentials, but the non-essentials is where there can be flexibility and liberty. You get that so far?

We looked at some examples 2 weeks ago. We looked at tattoos. Wah, Pastor, can tattoo or not? Well, I believe this is where it is belonging to the realm of the non-essential. The Bible never really say to all of us here today, you cannot tap tattoo or you can tattoo. It's a grey area. But it doesn't mean then that I go around and tattoo myself, because you have to ask yourself what are you going to tattoo? Why you tattoo and what do people think? Will you affect others when you tattoo? These are very reasonable questions to consider.

We look at dressing. How should we dress? How should we dress in life and how should we dress in church services? We answered that question - can women wear pants to church? It's a hot topic in the past. Not so in our day and age today. What about Bible versions? King James, NASB, Good News Bible, NIV and... and so on and so forth. Bible versions - do we divide and fight over these things? The pulpit, interestingly Pastor Paul mentioned about the pulpit last Sunday as well, in his message. Bibles - can I read off my handphone or must I always take the physical hard copy? What about musical instruments and what about music style? Now, if you

want to find the answers, go back to the YouTube, the sermons are uploaded, it's er...2 weeks ago.

But today I just want to deal with one example. Just one example. One example that I hope will allow us to see a little bit more about black or white issue. And it's the example of alcohol, wine and beer. I wanted to ask, how many of you drink? But I think I better don't ask that. (Laughter in the congregation) What does the Bible say about drinking alcohol, wine and beer? Er...let me say this is a very passionate subject for some people. I know I'm putting my neck out for people to chop, literally, I think. Because after the service, you may come to me and you may punch me in the face or I don't know what... but I know people can be very passionate about the subject of alcohol for Christians.

There's a pastor who was going to preach about alcohol and he was very passionate about the subject. And so he says, "If I have all the beer in the world, I will pour it into the river." Then he went on and he says again, "If I have all the wine in the world, I will pour it into the river." And then he says, "If I have all the whiskey in the world, I will pour it into the river." And when he finished his sermon, he sat down. Then his worship leader stood up and said to the congregation, "Let us all arise and sing our last song. It will be: Shall We Gather at the River." (Laughter in the congregation)

People can be very passionate about it. And frankly, I think, if I were to ask you right now, many of us will have different views about alcohol. Very different views. There are basically three basic views. I'm not going to give you the labels or terms. But some people think we can drink, some people think we can drink a bit, and some people think that we cannot drink at all. So different views, right? Alcohol and the Bible. Let me say this from the word 'go', I'm not trying to be controversial. I do know some of you, after hearing a sermon like this, you may say, I decide to leave GLCC, this is not the church for me and so on and so forth... that's fine. But I'm not trying to be controversial. What I'm trying to do, is to just give you the biblical principles by which you can make decisions on black or white issues, such as something so sensitive, like alcohol. People can divide and quarrel over this. Therefore, I think it's important for us to see what the Bible has to say and then check our own attitudes to issues such as this.

Now, personally, I've experienced the passion people can have, with regards to views on alcohol. I was preaching in a church years ago, deputising for the Pastor there, he was away, back home for several months and therefore I was there preaching,

teaching in the Bible studies, in sermons and so on. And ever since that time, I've never been invited back again. And I found out why. Because I expressed my perspective of alcohol in a Christian's life, and it did not sit well with of course, the founding Pastor and he has every right to have that stance, that's fine. But I realized that because of that, there is no more fellowship thereafter. So I know it's a passionate thing. Some of you love alcohol, love wine and you may be upset with me. Some of you are guardians of er... abstinence and you will be upset with me. Let me say this, alright? I'm just trying to be helpful, we can agree to disagree at the end of the message, I hope, and er... well, I'm going to stick my neck out for now, alright? So please be patient, I also want to say, please be patient with me. Along the way, the sermon may be, wah, what are you talking about? I... I... I think it's... be patient with me, alright? Judge it at the end, and not in the middle. Okay, so all this is preamble to a very sensitive subject - alcohol. 0:14:16.8

Let me say the first thing about alcohol in the Bible, and it is... Orr.. forgot to say this, it's so difficult as I've mentioned, because it's so varied in its opinions. You key in Google, alcohol, Christian and you will find this, one of the 1st pages in Wikipedia, it says here: Christians' views on alcohol are varied. If you ask churches, Christians, people's views on alcohol are very varied, very diverse. Historically, good godly men have actually enjoyed alcohol. This may surprise you but historically, good godly men have actually taken alcohol. A name that you may be familiar with, John Calvin, Pastor John Calvin. It is said that his annual salary package includes 250 gallons of wine a year, for himself and for his guests. That's his annual salary package. Not bad huh? It is said that Martin Luther, er... describes the Reformation with these words: "While I sat still and drank beer, God dealt the papacy a mighty blow." Of course we know, God used Luther to present the teachings of justification by faith and so on but this is how he described the Reformation. "While I sat still and drank beer, God dealt the papacy a severe blow." It is also said and it is true that Luther's wife is a brewer. I mean, she... she can brew wine and when they were apart. You know husband and wife were apart, he will write love letters to her and in the love letters, in his love letter to her, he will lament the fact that no one is brewing beer for him. So good godly men have taken alcohol, historically.

It was said that the Puritans, when they left England to go to the States, landed at Plymouth, one of the first permanent structures. In fact, the first permanent structure they build up was a wine brewery. Now, it was only in the 20th century, with what they called the temperance movement, that people began to see alcohol... by the way, we have a lot here, alright? People began to see alcohol as something sinful. And so, in churches, it started with the Methodists, in churches, they

substituted wine with grape juice. And right up to today, in GLCC, when we have our holy communion, we take grape juice, no one got drunk alright? Throughout the history of our church, never get drunk because we use grape juice, but that started in the 20th century. So, historically, very different views as well. So what do we say? Let me give you 3 basic principles, alright? That's all. I think it can be very simple, in a sense, if you understand the principles and that's what I hope you will seek to apply for your life. What is our Christian's view to alcoholism?

Number 1 - Drunkenness is sin.

This is very, very clear. Very, very clear in the Bible. If you are drunk, you have sinned. There's no negotiation, there's no ambiguity, it's as clear as it comes. Many passages in the Bible deal with this. 1 Corinthians 6 tells us, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, ESV) So, the Bible is saying when you are really a child of God, these things will not characterise your life. If you say you're a Christian, but you are practicing these sins, you are deceived. You were never born again. You never had that real life. These things do not characterise the lifestyle of a child of God. So, in the very same breath, same statement, ranked together with idolaters and adulterers, is drunkenness.

By the way, when you're drunk, drunkenness is a... is a someone who brings in a lot of 'friends'. When you are drunk, you bring in sins of adultery, orgies and... and reviling and all that is associated with drinking. It's a severe problem and I know there may be homes that are already broken up by drunkenness. This is a clear fundamental. Drunkenness is a sin. No doubt. And again we see in Galatians 5, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry..." and so on and so forth (Galatians 5:19-21, ESV). Now, let me be clear, the Bible is not saying when you avoid these things, you can be a Christian. No, no, no, no, that's not the point. The point of the Bible is, if you have believed in Jesus and He has changed your life, this will not characterise your life. Drunkenness is a sin, it's the works of the flesh. It is an evidence that the Holy Spirit was never in you. And you don't display the fruit of the spirit, but all that characterises you are the works of the flesh. Ephesians 5, short, simple verse: "Do not be drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit." (Ephesians 5:18, ESV) 0:19:58.2

Not only does Paul teach against drunkenness, Peter himself says, “For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do...” (1 Peter 4:3, ESV) He says, before you came to Jesus, you live a life of debauchery. Before you came to Jesus, you were living in sin, but now that you have come to Jesus, it’s enough! Stop it! Don’t continue living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, lawless idolatry. He says this is sin and I think this is very clear, isn't it? So, this is a fundamental principle we need to grasp. Alcoholism, drunkenness, intoxications, they are completely, clearly forbidden in the Bible. So if you're drinking till you're drunk or you're drinking with the intention of getting drunk, you have sin against the Lord, and there is no excuse whatsoever.

But the difficulty comes when we are not talking about alcoholism, nor drunkenness, nor intoxication, we are talking about not alcoholism, but alcohol intake. We are not talking about drunkenness, but just drinking it. When we are talking about intoxicate... we're not talking more intoxication but ingestion. So, what do we think of these things? I know drunkenness is wrong, but what about drinking a little bit? How about drinking a sip? How about taking a little, small little cup of wine...glass of wine? Is it wrong? Let me show you some verses. Thereafter, I'll bring it together in a while. The Bible says, in Psalm 104, “You cause... (that is God)... (God) you cause the grass to grow for the livestock and for...and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of men, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.” (Psalm 104:14-15, ESV) God you made all these, for men. Food is good, bread is good, oil is good, and if I may say, wine is good. Same breath, same sentence.

Ecclesiastes says, “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.” (Ecclesiastes 9:7, ESV) No, no, no, this is all in the Old Testament, you say. Well, let’s look at the New Testament. Paul, the great apostle of Jesus Christ, says to his protégé, Timothy. Timothy, I know your stomach is not doing very well. You always have stomach upset. I don’t know what lah, gastric problem, I don’t know what it is. But Paul’s advice is no longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. Well, certainly Paul wouldn't tell Timothy to take something that is sinful in and of itself, right? If taking a little bit of it is already sin, then he shouldn't even say this. So it’s strange, if we believe that alcohol in and of itself, now, excessive intake, abusive use of it, is wrong, clear. But in and of itself, I can't see that yet, in the Scripture.

What about Jesus? Story in John chapter 2, how at the wedding at Cana, Jesus turned water to wine, for what? So that the guests may drink it. Would Jesus turn it,

to be sinful substance for people then, to sin? I find it difficult, to believe so. Now, some people would then argue this away by saying, “Pastor, you don't understand, the wine that is turn from water to wine, is not really wine like we know it. It's not so concentrated, it's a very diluted form. In fact, it is so dilute you cannot get drunk on it. It is more like grape juice.” So Jesus turned the water to grape juice. If I may change it. Jesus turned the water to ‘Ribena’ or the equivalent. Now, there are some people who believe that. Now certainly there can be different concentration levels and so on and so forth, but the wine word that is used is the same word that is used in Acts chapter 2, where they says, when they saw the people, overcome with the Holy Spirit, they acted in a way that is a... that is amazing and bewildering to the crowd and the crowd says they are filled with new wine. They are drunk, same word. In other words, the wine that is commonly understood in those days is not just grape juice. It does have the capacity to cause people to be drunk.

The next verse may even be more shocking to you. It says here in Matthew 11, “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man (everybody knows this is Jesus)... The Son of Man came eating and drinking...” (Matthew 11:18-19, ESV) Drink what? Grape juice? Water? Soya bean? No. He came eating and drinking wine because they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a...’ What? Drunkard. Let's be clear. Jesus never got drunk. I think that's absolutely clear. He didn't drink to be drunk and he didn't drink till He was drunk. He is holy, sinless, undefiled. He would never be drunk with wine. But in this passage, it would be clear he would be drinking wine. Otherwise they wouldn't say, “Look, he eats with them and drinks with them.” The Son of Man came, he drank alcohol, with no intention of getting drunk and never ever got drunk. So this is... this is what I think the gathering of scriptural evidence tells us. These are substances that can potentially lead to er... lead to drunkenness, but he never really went there all the way. So what am I saying to all these things? I'm saying:

Number 1 – (Let's be very clear) Drunkenness is sin.

Number 2 - Drinking alcohol in and of itself, (from the evidence of Scripture) is not sin.

You get that? Some of you will say, “Hallelujah, Pastor, you are a great guy, I love you man! Come! 我们兄弟去喝一杯(wo men xiong di qu he yi be) Heineken!” (Mandarin words meaning let us brothers go and have a drink) (Laughter in the congregation) Let's go open a can! Let's go drink to our hearts' content. Why? Because drinking alcohol in and of itself is...is fine. So you say I can drink. I can finally drink! I can have the good stuff. Orr... there is a principal in the Scripture you got to be careful of

and it's found in Romans 14. "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." (Romans 14:20-21, ESV)

Now, the context here, let me be clear, is not just about alcohol, it is about the Jews being uncomfortable with people eating non-kosher food. It's about Gentiles, being uncomfortable about eating food that has been offered to idols. The Bible actually says, it's fine to eat food that is not kosher, it's fine to eat food that has been offered to idols. It's fine in and of itself, everything is indeed clean, but it is not good when you eat it, and it causes your brother to stumble. It's all right for me to drink, in a sense, but it will be inappropriate for me to use that freedom to drink and cause you to stumble. So again ah, that is not alcohol, alright? I... I really asked you to come and try lah, if you don't believe.

Stumbling - what Scripture is teaching us, is that we have freedom. You have freedom to eat black 'Chai Tao Kway', you have freedom to eat white 'Chai Tao Kway'. You have freedom for tattoos, you have freedom to wear dress that are this, how many cm, 10cm, 5cm or 30cm above your knees or whatever. You have freedom to do these things. You have freedom to drink alcohol but do you use your freedom, to satisfy yourself or do you use your freedom to serve others? This is the principle. 0:29:13.3

Let me show you one other verse, that...that might be helpful. The Bible says in 1 Timothy, chapter 3, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine..." (1 Timothy 3:2-3, KJV) Right? These are the criteria for being a pastor. A bishop is a pastor, shepherd, er...synonyms. So he must not be given to wine. Look at this for a deacon. What is the deacon's criteria? Deacon is: "Likewise, must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine..." (1 Timothy 3:8, KJV) You say, "It's the same." No, it's not the same. What's the difference? What's the difference? Difference? Anybody caught it? (Response from congregation) Very good. The difference is in the word 'much'. Interesting, right? Don't you think so? You can check your own Bible if you don't believe. You check whether the word 'much', the Greek word 'polys' is there? Is there for the deacons, is not there for the elders. It seems to be, that the elders are called to a higher standard of living, higher standard of exempling, than the deacons would. But both deacons and elders are called to be examples to the flock. And therefore, though it is not wrong in and of itself, they are called to a higher standard of exempling for the congregation. So as leaders, as people who will influence others, you may have the freedom to drink but

is it good for you? Is it helpful for those around you to watch you drink? I hope I've illustrated that right before you.

There's another principle that you might want to consider and it is this: in 1 Corinthians 6, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything." (1 Corinthians 6:12, ESV) In other words, if drinking alcohol tempts you and may lead you to a lifestyle of addiction, and you are brought under the power of alcohol, it is not something you want to pursue. Now, alcohol in and of itself is not wrong, but if you are addicted to it, or you are going to be addicted to it, that's where it crosses the line. The sum of these things, I'm trying to say is:

1. Drunkenness is sin.
2. Drinking alcohol in and of itself is not sin.

By the way you can search the Scripture, there's not a verse that says drinking alcohol is sin. Being drunk with alcohol is sin but drinking it, in and of itself is not sin. Some people would then argue, but pastor I know in and of itself is not sin, but if it leads me to sin, that is wrong, right? That thing in and of itself is wrong, right? Now this is where Martin Luther has this statement. He says, "Do you suppose that by eliminating the object, it will reduce or it would eliminate the abuse? So, removing alcohol means no more abuse. Is this the way Christian living should be?" Then he went on to say, "Man can go wrong with wine and man can also go wrong with women. Do we then remove women?" Women is sinful, women is bad. Flawed logic, you see. So this is where he says, that's where I think we need to be balanced:

1. Drunkenness is sin.
2. Drinking alcohol in and of itself is not sin.
3. Drinking alcohol is not always helpful.

I say this, I want to bring this up because we can live in extremes. There are some people who grow up because the pastor say so or because some writer say so, you believe alcoholism, no, not alcoholism, alcoholism everybody believes is way off the charts. You believe alcohol in and of itself is sin and you will not be reasoned with. You show Scriptures, you say no, it is sin. Why? Because I am told so. So I will not touch, and I want everybody not to touch alcohol. You stand in the extreme traditionalist's view. Then there're others who say, "Aiyah, drinking alcohol in and of itself is not sin, so I can drink all I want lah." That's another extreme view. But really, Biblical balance is when you're right in the middle. Understanding:

Point number 1 - Drunkenness is sin.

Point number 2 - Drinking alcohol in and of itself is not sin and

Point number 3 - Bringing me back to the center. It may not be wrong, but it may not be wise. It may not always be the best thing for me to do.

And if I am called to the Gospel, if I am called to be ambassador of Jesus Christ, I'm not living for myself, I'm living for others. I'm living for the glory of God. Will alcohol enslave me? Will alcohol allow me to glorify God in my life? Will alcohol be an act of love to my brethren or will it stumble them? Now, that is where you have to consider. See, it's not up to me to be a spiritual policeman, going around to say, are you right or wrong, drinking alcohol? But it is my job and responsibility to share with you, the biblical principles that you can make the choices, that are neither black or white, grey areas for your life, that glorifies God. 0:34:53.6

So let's put this into practice. Pastor, back to the simple question - can I drink? Well, I asked you...instead of telling you, yes or no, it's not black or white right? It's not yes or no, right? It cannot be a yes or no answer. It's got to be via questions like, if you ask me can I drink, I ask you, why are... why do you want to drink? Will you get drunk? Do you want to get drunk? Then I will ask you, if you say no to all that, and you say, I understand alcohol in and of itself is not sin, I will ask you the next question, why do you want to drink? Would it be helpful for you and for others? Will it enhance your worship, your walk or your witness before the world? And that's a question you might want to answer for yourself. You see, I believe principles are clear and universal. Applications are where you have to make your choice. Because we are all priests, according to Scripture. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you are priests. You don't have to come to me to give you a standard answer all the time. Now if you are young, alright, you are young people today, you don't go back to your mama, mummy and daddy, "Mummy, daddy, Pastor says I'm a priest. I don't have to listen to you about alcohol. I made my own choice." Ah...sorry, you forget another principle, submit to your own parents, alright? So you got to keep that all in balance. 0:36:27.1

But what about this other question? "Pastor, what do you do, what should I do if I see my brothers and sisters drinking alcohol? What should I do?" Now it's not about you drinking, alright? You've made your own choice. You may want to hide in a room or what... I don't know. But what if I see others drink alcohol, how should I react? Number 1, if you see your brother or sister drinks alcohol until he's drunk, please lovingly confront him, because he has sinned against the Lord. But if he is not drinking to be drunk and he's not drunk, what should I do?

By the way, I face that quite a bit lah. Er...as a pastor, when I go for wedding dinners, it's really interesting when I sit around with our church members. And usually I arrive a bit later, I tell the couple that I'll be a bit later. And when I arrived later, I realized a lot of them have glasses of red wine already. Swirling, swirling, swirling, swirling, then when I got down, they don't swirl anymore. They put there, as if it's not theirs. (Laughter in the congregation) And I'm exaggerating, of course. But then they start to look at me, look at the drink, look at me. "Oh no, I shouldn't have got the alcohol," they said. They look here, look there, look here, look there, and then they finally 'cannot tahan' (Malay word meaning cannot stand it), Pastor ah, what do you think ah? Can I drink or not? (Laughter in the congregation) Now, what should you do, if you were in that position? What should you do? Again, like I've said, if they are drunk, I'll take them to task lovingly. But otherwise, I find this verse helpful for my own soul, okay? It says here in Romans 14, verse 3, "Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats." (Romans 14:3, ESV) The man who ate the food offered to idols, oh no... the one who doesn't eat the food offered to idols, should not look at the one who ate food offered to idols and say, "Wah, this guy unspiritual." You get what I'm trying to say? I don't go to the wedding dinners, like a spiritual policeman, looking at whether you drink alcohol or wine or beer, I don't. If I see it, I see it. I checked with my own heart. Drunkenness is sin, yes. Drinking alcohol in and of itself is not sin. And I remember this, I will not pass judgment on you. I...I want to trust you, as led by the Lord to make the decisions for yourself. But if you should ask me, I will openly share. You get that? I'm not trying to judge people, in a sense, because this is not... this is on the matters of opinions, the non-essentials, not explicit. It's a black and white 'Chai Tao Kway' thing. You can make that decision. But if you cross line, of course I will share. 0:39:24.2

So, I know some even... some groups here, when you all have gatherings, you... you bring out wine. I...I'm not saying that bringing it out, is automatically sinful or wrong, but have you really gone through a checklist of what I shared with you?

1. Drunkenness is sin.
2. In and of itself is not sin – alcohol.
3. (And number 3) Is it helpful?

Are you helping your brothers? Or are you having an orgy? I don't know. You make your call. You make your decisions. So I think Christian living has a lot to do with wisdom and judgment. That is shaped by Scripture. Like I said, today I'm not trying to be controversial, I don't think I've said controversial things for the sake of doing

so. But I want you to, maybe by the grace of God come to biblical balance. So that what you do, and what you do not do, is not because it is outwardly compelled into your life, but it is what you are inwardly convinced and convicted about. You understand the whys, you understand the whats and the Lord leads you to apply this wisely. As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 0:40:41.4

Now that being said, I know after service, you may come and chop my head. I'll be glad to speak with you, share with you, but I hope this has been helpful to you. Finally, in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things, charity. Are you charitable? Are you loving? In all that... I know this is not easy, we all struggle with that. Not just alcohol but in every area of life, things that are really personal, sensitive to us, but may this be a reminder, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not meant to divide the church. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is meant to unite. And there will be many things that we have our preferences, many things that we come with, because of our backgrounds. But let's remember, Jesus came to re-establish a new community, a new humanity, a new race where we would demonstrate the love, the unity that the Gospel brings. So, I hope this has been helpful and I pray in our church, we will be a church united in the fundamentals, having understanding of liberty in the non-essentials and in all things, love one for another.

Let's bow, for a word of prayer. Father, we thank you that there is clear teachings and principles in Scripture. Thank you today, even our opinions are not left to our own imaginations, but that the Word of God can shape it. So that we will make decisions, even issues that are not explicit, that we can make decisions that will honour you. This is our prayer, whether it's a black issue or white issue or grey issue, all our decisions, our choices will glorify your name. I pray for some of us here today, who struggle with this subject - alcohol. Some of us here may need to make decisions in our lives, lead us. That we would not be led because we want to or because we like... like to but because we know we ought to. To submit to you and make our lives a living sacrifice for others. May love characterise all that we say and we do. Again, I pray for our church. I do understand that preaching a subject like this, has a tendency for people to divide over. I'm... but I'm looking to your spirit, Lord, as the truth is declared, that you bring us to unity in the Gospel, liberty in the non-essentials, charity in all that we are. May this community of believers, be a shining city set on a hill, in a world where there is so much divisions and strife, may they see the unity and love the Gospel brings. So, bless each one. I pray all this now in Jesus' name. Amen.

