

An Exercise To Discern Both Good and Evil (Hebrews 5:14)

What's That In The Trash?

Scenario:

You are invited to the home of a member of the congregation for a meal and social interaction. You know this brother or sister in Christ fairly well. He or she has been a member of the same congregation with you for a number of years. However, you have not been to his or her home before. After you eat and spend some time talking after the meal, you are helping to clean up. When you take some items to the trash can you notice a beer can in the trash. You are uncomfortable. You are unsure how to approach the situation. You don't want to jump to a conclusion, but you feel you cannot leave it alone either as there could be many things going on. You don't want to ignore it in the unlikely event it is a problem. So, in a later discussion, you ask them about the beer can in the trash. You say: "I know you don't drink alcohol. I happened to notice a beer can in your trash. I have to ask. Did someone throw a beer can in your yard or something and you just cleaned it up?"

Statement That Arises From Our Scenario:

In response, your brother or sister says: "I don't think I have to answer this question. You are making a subtle accusation against me. This is why I don't have brethren into my home. It is like you are here investigating me or something."

A Later Statement Is Made:

"You said you know I don't drink alcohol. How do you know that? You've never taken interest in me before today. Maybe I like beer. Maybe my doctor told me to drink it like Paul told Timothy to drink for his stomach problem. Maybe it is my beer can and maybe I have a right for it to be."

For Discussion: What do you see in those statements?

- First, I cannot answer this as though it is me. I would not handle this situation the way it was handled. If I knew the brother I would not even question him on this. I would have no reason to if I knew he didn't drink alcohol.
- It is good when brethren are inviting or being invited into the homes of each other (**Acts 16:13-15, Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:1-2, and I Peter 4:9**).
- There is a level in which you can know your brethren (**Matthew 7:15-20**). In some cases, when you really know a brother or sister, you could know a person would not do something (**Luke 6:43-45**). However, even when you know a brother or sister in Christ very well, that doesn't mean there cannot be things you don't know both good and bad (**Matthew 6:1-4 and I Timothy 5:24-25**). Furthermore, once faithful doesn't mean always faithful (**Colossians 4:14; cf. II Timothy 4:10**).
- There can be a lot of reasons brethren have not been to each other's homes. One should not assume good or bad in such a case (though more information is coming in this case). Consider, for example, that someone just simply might not have the

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means to be hospitable as one of many reasons you may not have been in his or her home. Maybe someone has various conscious issues, or you do, and they might not know how to deal with them (**Romans 14:1-15:9**). Maybe someone wants to do this good thing, but the opportunity is not there for various reasons (**Galatians 6:10**). What if this person gets overly anxious with guests in his or her home trying to be a good host (**Luke 10:38-42**)? There are many other reasons, which are not sinful, wherein someone might not open their home to brethren.

- Seeing something that indicates potential sin can be concerning and it would be right in such a case to inquire to help (**Galatians 6:1-2**).
- We should have the relationship with our brethren wherein questioning something like this is not awkward (**Romans 12:9-10**, **Galatians 5:13**, and **I Peter 3:8-11**).
- Shouldn't brethren ought to be able to correct one another if necessary (**II Samuel 12:1-15**, **Proverbs 27:5-6**, **Acts 18:24-28**, **I Thessalonians 5:14**, **James 5:19-20**, and **Jude 1:22-23**)?
- In this scenario the person seeing the potential problem doesn't know how to handle the situation. Well, until you KNOW how to handle it you shouldn't guess and create another problem. You should know before you act (**Romans 14:23**).
- It is right not to jump to a conclusion (**Proverbs 18:13** and **John 7:24**).
- Saying "I know you don't drink alcohol..." is not the approach you take when questioning whether or not someone has a problem (**Psalms 12:1-3**, **Proverbs 29:5**, and **I Thessalonians 2:3-5**)? It is not honest (**Ephesians 4:25**). If you knew they don't drink alcohol you wouldn't ask. If it is just bothering you, you can keep it to yourself until you know the right way to handle it (**Proverbs 15:28** and **Daniel 7:28**).
- The response of the brother or sister is both worrisome and also reasonable at the same time. There is an underhanded subtleness here. Why? In a reasonable person this would create questions about the questioner (**II Corinthians 11:3**)?
- However, even if the approach is off, why would you not answer a concern about your faithfulness? Would you want questions to arise when you could put them to bed (**I Peter 3:12-16**)? When Paul was even wrongfully examined by erring saints, he answered (**I Corinthians 9:1-27**).
- When this defensiveness arises and the combative mentality comes about, the situation is going to escalate (**Proverbs 15:1-2**). By saying this is why brethren are not invited into his or her home, the questions are just going to stack up. Many would want to know what you have to hide when we, as saints, should not be secretive (**Proverbs 4:14-19**, **Matthew 5:14-16**, **John 18:20**, and **Philippians 2:14-16**).
- Why would a honest person offer up "maybes"... (**Matthew 5:37**)?
- When the answer invokes a misunderstanding of **I Timothy 5:23** the questions are really going to arise.
- First, Paul did not tell Timothy to drink alcohol (**I Timothy 5:23**). No honest, knowledgeable Bible student could ever study this subject and come to that conclusion (**Habakkuk 2:15**, **Proverbs 20:1**, **Proverbs 21:17**, **Proverbs 23:20-21**, **Proverbs 23:29-35**, **Proverbs 31:4-5**, **Isaiah 5:11**, **Isaiah 5:22**, **Hosea 4:11**, **Matthew 26:41**, **Luke 21:33-34**, **Galatians 5:16-21**, **I Thessalonians 5:6**,

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Titus 2:1-14, I Peter 1:13-16, and I Peter 4:1-5). The English word “wine” was used even in a non-intoxicating form (**Isaiah 65:8**).

- Secondly, if you’re not doing anything wrong you would have no reason to twist Scripture to defend it? Even if you thought you had authority to drink alcohol this brother’s objection would remove that right (**Romans 14:21**).
- There is not “maybe I have a right” when it comes to alcohol. There is no consistent, rightly divided authority for consumption of alcohol. That makes it wrong just as is any matter you cannot prove is acceptable before the Lord (**Leviticus 10:1-2, Numbers 9:1-9, Deuteronomy 4:2, Deuteronomy 12:32, Deuteronomy 29:29, I Samuel 15:1-35, II Samuel 6:6-7 [cf. I Chronicles 15:1-16], II Samuel 7:1-7, Job 32:1-8, Proverbs 14:12, Proverbs 16:25, Proverbs 20:25, Proverbs 21:2, Proverbs 30:5-6, Isaiah 8:20, Jeremiah 7:30-31, Matthew 4:4, Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 12:46-50, Matthew 15:1-14, Matthew 17:5, Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 4:4, Luke 6:46, Luke 11:28, John 14:15, John 14:23-24, I Corinthians 4:6, Galatians 1:6-12, Ephesians 5:10, Colossians 3:17, I Thessalonians 5:21, II Timothy 1:13, James 1:21-25, James 2:10-12, I John 2:3-6, I John 5:2-3, II John 1:9, and Revelation 22:18-19**).
- There are things on both sides of this scenario that are problems, as we’ve noted above. These two are going to have to reconcile this one way other the other. It may be that the only hope for a peaceful resolution is for one of them to step back and forbear with the other (**Ephesians 4:1-3** and **II Timothy 2:24-26**) enough to bring this to a level discussion and Scriptural resolution. If anger abounds, good will not come from it (**James 1:19-20**).
- If this defensiveness continues, and contentiousness abounds; the ultimate sad result of exposing this person and withdrawing from them will be the only action left to be taken (**Titus 3:9-11**).
- At the end of this, we all need to be sure when souls are at stake that we speak clearly (**II Corinthians 3:12**).