



**Testimony before The Senate Regulated
Industries and Public Utilities Committee
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**By Rev. Michael R. Griffin, Sr.
Senior Pastor, Liberty Baptist Church
Hartwell, Georgia**

When it comes to the question of Sunday alcohol sales I believe the broader and more far reaching reason to maintain Sunday restrictions has more to do with basic public health and safety than with someone's religious conviction. Now, I don't say this to negate the fact that personally I don't believe in drinking. However, when it comes to public policy it must address more than my personal conviction. Therefore, the real issue in continuing "any" restrictions on the use of alcohol also needs to be based on basic public health and safety issues.

This being true, the question is not whether the use of alcohol agrees with my religious tenet, but is it in the best interest of our community's health and safety to have more availability for the consumption of alcohol?

Case in point. When New Mexico lifted the ban on Sunday sales of packaged alcohol, alcohol related crashes increased by 29% and alcohol related fatalities increased by 42% on Sundays alone. These increases were documented during a five year period following the repeal of blue laws regarding Sunday alcohol sales. This was a sharp contrast to what was promised by advocates who said the repeal would reduce alcohol related crashes and fatalities. In fact, it had just the opposite effect.

Therefore, I believe the same rationale for smoking restrictions stated by Dr. Don Thomas should be used for this issue. He stated in the preamble to the smoking bill that it relates to offenses against public health and morals and to health. When the smoking ban in restaurants was introduced no one proposed that each county vote on these restrictions. The public health and safety concerns and the fact that smoking is the number one cause of deaths in America warranted legislative action.

Legislators wisely realized the effects of smoking on our society and made changes to better protect us and future generations. While it has been proven that smoking adversely affects even the non-smoker; it has never been asserted that smoking while driving endangers others. Yet, we know that alcohol not only has long-term effects on the one who drinks, but it also impairs their ability to drive and can even cause traffic fatalities.

It is reported that:

- Almost half of all traffic fatalities are in some way alcohol related.
- A fourth of all emergency room admissions are alcohol related.
- A third of all suicides are alcohol related
- Half of all domestic violence homicides are alcohol related.

In fact, alcohol consumption is the third highest cause of death in the United States. And according to another source, alcohol abuse is America's number one drug problem.

Whether it is violent assaults, problems associated with interpersonal relationships, or spouse and child abuse, all are intensified and increased when alcohol is more readily available and accessible.

A study done between 1997 and 2002 showed that of the nearly 2,400 children who died in traffic accidents involving alcohol, 1588 (68%) were passengers with drivers who were under the influence of alcohol!

It is hard for me to believe that any citizen, not to mention a legislator, would think that the increased sale and consumption of alcohol could have a positive effect upon the social ills facing most communities in our state. How can anyone believe that if we drink more alcohol that our community is going to become a safer place to live, work and raise a family?

So, I think that the question should be phrased like this: How many of you believe that our communities would be socially benefited by the increased sale and consumption of alcohol?

I remind you again of the action legislators took in 2005 when they felt that a smoking ban was warranted in restaurants and other public venues because of the health concerns they had for the general public. It was such a serious matter these legislators felt they needed to make the decision and not leave it to the decision of their constituents, who could have been manipulated by the tobacco industry.

Given the facts such as they are, I believe the same type of response is warranted regarding the Sunday restrictions on the sale of all alcoholic beverages.

Michael R. Griffin, Sr.
Pastor, Liberty Baptist Church
Executive Director, Ten Commandments – Georgia, Inc.
P. O. Box 811
Hartwell, GA 30643
706-376-0154
pastormike@hartcom.net

Related links:

Atlanta Life Magazine article link:

<http://atlantalifemag.epubxpress.com/>

Pages 12-15 contain Point-Counterpoint, featuring Pastor Mike Griffin in support of maintaining restrictions on Sunday alcohol sales.

Savannah Morning News link:

<http://savannahnow.com//node/235842>

AccessNorthGeorgia Article link:

<http://www.accessnorthga.com/news/hall/newfullstory.asp?ID=112122>