

# **Southern Baptists vow 'total opposition' to alcoholic beverages: Controversial amendment restricts board options for alcohol users**

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Southern Baptists—a group rarely associated with heavy drinking—have gone overwhelmingly on record in “total opposition” to consumption of alcohol. Delegates even added language that says no one who is a “user of alcoholic beverages” should be appointed to Baptist-related trustee boards.

“Our leaders should take the high road with our walk with Jesus,” said Jim Richards, executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, when he proposed the amendment about trustees.

But Tom Ascol, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida, argued against the extra language. “I do not think that we can be more holy than Jesus Christ,” Ascol said. “Christ turned water into wine.”

“Our convention has always historically stood against alcohol not only for scriptural reasons but also for real pragmatic, practical reasons—the damage that it causes families,” said Forrest Pollock, a Brandon, Florida, pastor who served on the resolutions committee, in an interview.

Some messengers, or delegates, at the mid-June meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina, particularly questioned the amendment.

Marie Stewart, a retired seamstress from Danville, Virginia, said she voted for the resolution against alcohol but voted against the amendment that would require teetotaling trustees. “I just think it should be a [matter of] conscience,” she said. “If you’re a born-again believer . . . you’re not going to participate in these things that would be a stumbling block to anyone else.”

While one person on the convention floor cited the biblical admonition to avoid “the very appearance of evil,” another challenged the resolution because it addressed one social problem and not others, such as obesity.

“The Bible speaks against gluttony,” conceded Pollock. “And who knows? Maybe . . . someday our convention has to speak out on issues like that.” *-Religion News Service*