

must not be to any thing which is absolutely *necessary* to man, even though it should be a cause of sin.

This may prepare us to observe, in the second place, that the sole reason why these things were forbidden, was that they led some of the brethren to *commit sin*. The prohibition is not founded on the nature of the things themselves, but on their consequences. It ought to be recollected, however, that, if the nature of wine and other intoxicating drinks shall be found injurious to man, the words of the Apostle do not release us from the law of God, to abstain from what is hurtful. He certifies that it is not *unclean*, but not that it is harmless; nor can his words be construed into a commendation of the use of it.

A third consideration now presents itself, and the most important in the controversy, *how could the use of "flesh and wine" lead others to commit sin?* The context enables us to give a definite and satisfactory answer to this question as far as it respects *flesh*. Some kinds of food were forbidden by the ceremonial law of the Jews; and as it was impossible for those, who had been taught to venerate that law from their infancy, to set it aside all at once, without doing violence to their consciences, it hence became their duty to abstain. And even those, who, possessing greater knowledge, could eat all kinds of food indiscriminately without doing violence to their consciences, were to consider it their duty to abstain also: for, though their eating was perfectly harmless so far as they themselves were concerned, yet their example led others to imitate them, who fell in their attempt to do so. Thus far we have no fault to find with the views of Mr. M'G. as expressed in these letters, for they do not appear to us to be materially different from our own. When, however, he declares that "here the doctrine of 'example,' so efficacious in the estimation of my opponents, is triumphantly refuted," we must enter our dissent. If Mr. M'G. intends to deny the "efficacy" of example in producing either good or evil, he will find himself engaged in a task in which both Scripture and reason and observation are opposed to him. The law which we are now considering is one for which there would have been no necessity if example had no "efficacy," for what but example led to the sin which it is intended to prevent? It is plain that those who committed it would never have done so had they been left to act of themselves. Their *conscience* was opposed to it—they looked with horror upon the use of things *common or unclean*. But the use of these things by others, whom they respected as men of exemplary worth, enticed them to do so, and thus sin was committed. On

this point Mr. M'G. favours us with the following sentiment, which almost makes us hesitate whether we ought to laugh at its absurdity, or express indignation at the liberty he uses with an inspired Apostle:—"The text," he says, "recommended abstinence to those who regard all things equally lawful, that those who abstained from some things which they considered unlawful might in time (being instructed) partake also." One man is to *abstain*, then, it seems, as a means of leading another to *partake!* What absurdity! he might as well say, that one man is to *stand still* as a means of leading another to *go*. To put such an absurdity as this into the mouth of an apostle, more especially when he declares so plainly that the design of the abstinence here recommended was to prevent sin, betokens either great carelessness on the part of Mr. M'G. or loose views of the doctrine of inspiration.

But although the context informs us how "flesh" led a brother to commit sin, it gives us no information respecting the way in which "wine" could produce this effect—the whole of the Apostle's reasoning respects the use of meats. Mr. M'G. makes it a special subject of inquiry "whether it was on account of its containing alcohol that wine was abstained from;" an inquiry which appears to us altogether unnecessary, and indicative of any thing on the part of Mr. M'G. than a candid desire to ascertain the truth. It is by no means probable that the apostle, or those Christians whom he was addressing, knew that wine contained alcohol. And since it is so plainly stated that wine was "abstained from" because it made a brother to *stumble, or to offend, or to become weak*, we think Mr. M'G. would have dealt more fairly with the controversy between him and us if he had inquired *how* wine could produce these effects?

We have seen that the use of *flesh* led to these evil consequences solely because certain kinds of it were forbidden by the ceremonial law; but, as this law *never forbade wine* to the people generally, the evil consequences in this case cannot be accounted for in the same way. It is vain for Mr. M'G. to quote, in proof of the harmlessness of wine,—*I know and am persuaded of the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself*. The early Christians never regarded it as *unclean*—they could not, therefore, abstain from it on this account, nor could they commit sin in the use of it by entertaining any mistaken notions of this kind respecting it. The question then recurs, how could wine cause a brother to offend. The only answer which can be returned is this, *it rendered him drunken*. We all know how it causes a brother to offend at the present day. We know