Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Bible Questions and Answers, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1301

For you who haven't been here in the past, let me introduce this by saying we feel that in the New Testament, especially in the Book of Acts, there is indication that when the Apostle Paul taught, that he taught out of a dialogue format, or out of a question and answer format. The word that is used to translate reason has to do with dialogue. He heard their questions and gave them answers; and I think one of the things that I've learned as a pastor is that it's not only important for me to tell you what I want you to know, but for me to also answer what you wanna know. And so, from time to time, we have questions, and we give a whole evening to question and answer. Sometimes on Wednesday evening, we have question and answer from the floor, as well.

If someone marries secretly, what is God's view of their sex relationship? Lemme answer that this way. In the first place, God doesn't acknowledge, generally speaking, secret marriages. Marriage was never intended to be something you hide. It was intended to be a commitment and a vow to two people in front of the whole world, right? Public. The Old Testament weddings were public. They had a feast. Everybody came. If somebody married secretly, No. 1, I'd say they were probably out of the will of God. Probably their families were against it or probably what happened was somebody got pregnant, and they ran off and got married in secret to try to cover it up and didn't want to announce the date, because then they would be able to figure out by the calendar that they were pregnant before they were married. But I don't think God wants people married secretly. I think God wants people to make public vows, so that the world will hear their commitment.

That's why people don't get married today anyway. They just live together, 'cause they don't have to make a commitment, and you can turn your back and walk away from it. That isn't God's intention. God's standard for marriage is always the normal custom of the day of the country you live in. Anything less than that does not constitute marriage, and God would see sex in that kind of a thing, I think, as if there was no real marriage. If...if...if by this question, the person means some secret, mystical marriage performed in the woods by some hippie, that's no marriage at all. If, on the other hand, it's a...it's a run to Las Vegas type thing, and you have a legal document, and it's legal in the country, yes, God would see it as a legal marriage. Yes, He would see the sex act as a legitimate thing in that legal marriage. If it's legal, follows the normal custom of the day, I think God accepts that as marriage. But if it doesn't, if it's some specialized, clandestine arrangement, then I don't think that's the thing God sees as a true marriage. New Testament really hits on the sanctity of marriage. Jesus began His miracles at a wedding, and I think by doing that, He approved of them and, in essence, was saying, "This is the normal thing. I approve of this."...

Oh, here's a good one. Practical. What does a Christian wife do if her husband fails to be the authority for her to submit to? This is a common situation. Gals will say, "You know, I'm...I'm submitting, but he doesn't tell me to do anything. You know, I'm so willing. I just want some orders. What do I do? I wanna be the submissive, but he won't do anything." That's a good, good practical question; and we could talk a lot about some practical instruction. Lemme give you a couple of thoughts. Ephesians 5:25 just helps you here. It says...5:22, I mean. "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as unto the Lord; for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church and the Savior of the body. So as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in...what?...every thing."

First thing you do is don't quit being submissive. Got a letter this week from a wife. She said, "John, I made a terrible mistake. I tried to be submissive. My husband wouldn't take the leadership. Little by little, I took the leadership, and now I'm dominating, and he will never take the leadership. I made a terrible mistake. How do I get out of this mess I got myself into?" I would say this to you: Keep being submissive. Force the issue. Continue to submit. If he doesn't give you anything to submit to, submit to the things you think he might like you to do. Anticipate so that you don't alter that pattern; and if you can't submit consciously to him, then submit to him as unto whom? The Lord. So have a consciousness of submitting to Christ, and make your whole life a willing submission to Christ; and like it says in 1 Peter chapter 3, that "In the same manner, wives, be in subjection to your own husbands." That's just to make sure a lot of other people don't go telling you what to do. _____ "That is you obey...if...if any obey not the Word, they may without the Word be won by the behavior of the wives while they behold your chaste conduct coupled with fear." And he goes on to talk about how you adorn yourself and all of that, modesty, and so forth.

Now, if a wife will just take the proper role and keep the proper role, even though it's difficult, rather than taking over, you may be a lot better off in the long run forcing the issue by gentle persuasion, submission, and love, quietly doing what you must do, even if he doesn't. Even premeditating and anticipating the things that need to be done and submitting to them, and from time to time giving him wise counsel...you might get at the solution; but don't change your role. That's a tough question. There's a lot more involved, but that's at least a start.

In a Christian marriage, another question, in a Christian marriage, should the wife work? That's a good question. I'll give you a rule of thumb that I always go by. It's optional...You say, "Ohhhhh, that's profound, MacArthur. I came all the way down here to hear that? What do you mean by that?" I mean that the wives are to submit to their husbands. That comes into play, don't you think? Maybe your husband says, "Honey, go to work." Consideration. On the other hand, Titus 2:3 to 5, "The aged women...I know none of you in this audience would include yourself in that category, so lemme change the word a little bit...The mature women...The mature women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not lingering long beside their wine, teachers of

good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober minded...Know your priorities. That's what it means...love your children, love your husband, be discreet, pure, take care of the house, be kind, obey your husband, that the Word of God be not blasphemed."

What is a wife to do? One, submit to her husband. Here it says she is to know the priorities, love the husband, love the children, take care of the house." That's priority No. 1. Do you have time to love your husband? I mean do you have time to give yourself totally to your husband? To pour out your affection, to pour out your love on him? That's important. Do you have time to pour out your life into your children, to love your children, to invest your life in your children? Do you have time to keep your house...to obey your husband? Now, all of that's good. If you work, are you able to be chaste, pure, godly, so forth. All those priorities have to come into account. You have opportunity like in 1 Timothy 5 to be hospital and open your home, to wash the feet of strangers, as it were, to take care of those who have needs, etc. Now, the priorities then: submit and love your husband, take care of your husband. You know, let your relationship just lavish love on him. Time to invest in loving your children. Time to invest in keeping your home for the sake of the family's happiness, and so that others might come in and enjoy the hospitality you provide.

Now, you say, "Well, John, you just gave...gave your answer." Not really. There may be opportunity, even within that framework, for you to work. Proverbs 31, we've answered this question before, but Proverbs 31 talks about a righteous woman, a virtuous woman; and, boy, she's a clever gal. She...she works. A lotta good things about this gal. Gets up before daybreak and makes breakfast. Lotta wonderful, wonderful traits...But she's real enterprising. She has her own business kind of. This is so good. Verse 19, well, no, let's go back a little bit. We gotta cover more there. Verse 16, "She considers a field and buys it." She's got the...the bagel jar so full of...of...of extra money. You know, for so many years, she's been saving and saving that she's got enough to go out and buy a field. That's an enterprising lady. "She buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard." She's...she's earned enough money. She's a wonderful woman. She takes care of her husband. She does him good all her days. She's just a fantastic, verse 14, "She's like the merchants' ships; she brings her food from afar." She'll go to the market where the sale is no matter how much gas she wastes, so forth. Verse...verse 17, "She girds her loins with strength and strengthens her arms. She works with energy and force. She perceives that her merchandise is good; her lamp goes not out by night." Doesn't go to sleep unless she has to. She works...

Listen, this is the Word of God...Now, verse 19 tells us what she does. "She lays her hand to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff." You know what that is? Flax tied to the staff, and she spins to make thread. "She stretches her hand to the poor." You know why she makes these things? For what reason? To give them away. She got a field, though, to make a little profit; but she made some things to give to the poor. "She reaches her hands to the needy. She isn't afraid of the snow for her household; all her household are clothed with scarlet." She anticipates the winter and makes clothes for everybody. "She makes herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is white linen...really, the...the

Hebrews...white linen and purple; and her husband is known in the gates." He comes in, and they all say, "That's the husband of so and so."

"She makes fine linen and sells it, and delivers belts to the merchant." She's enterprising. "Strength and honor are her clothing," and so forth; and she's got wisdom, and so all these beautiful virtues. "Her children rise up...verse 28...and call her blessed, and her husband also, and praises her," and so forth. Here's a woman who is able to care for the family, to...so that the people in the town talk about her, so that her husband blesses her, so that her children rise up and call her blessed. At the same time, she's enterprising; but, notice, she is enterprising really for two areas. No. 1...three areas...No. 1, for the sake of the family, for the sake of a wise investment to secure the family, and for the sake of those who have needs. And so I submit to you that a woman should work only when she can still lavish love on her husband and her children, keep her home, and that her work has to do with necessity, never luxury. Necessity, never luxury.

Another question. Can Christians live together in one house in a communal situation? Well, lemme answer that this way. Genesis 2 says this, "A man and a woman are to leave their father and mother, and they two become...what?...one flesh." I really believe that God expects us to establish a unique union. Now, at the same time, they live in family proximity in Judaism, so that the families were all in the same area, and that's great. It says in Acts 2 that, "They held all things in common." That does not mean they lived in communes. There was hospitality when a stranger was in town or a pilgrim was in town. They were kept in the home; but we don't know of any specific occasion anywhere in the New Testament where communal living existed. That is, where several families shared all of the same facility. I think there's a genius in that beautiful independence that God has designed for marriage; and to construct that union, at the same time, we should live with open homes, open hospitality, and open proximity. There's no Biblical precedent for a permanent communal living situation.

What is the Christian view of abortion and birth control? That is a very important question, particularly, I think, in the day in which we live when there is being a tremendous amount said on the subject. There is very definitely a scriptural view of abortion. Just to give you a simple definition, "Abortion is...and I'm just quoting medically...the expulsion of a human fetus from the uterus prematurely with the stoppage of life. When this occurs spontaneously, it is called miscarriage. It is the expulsion of a fetus." We have come to know abortion, not in the natural sense or the spontaneous sense, but rather in the induced sense where embryonic life is terminated, either by medical, surgical, or chemical, or physical means; and such abortion has become a rather common process of birth control. If the pill doesn't work, we get an abortion.

Therapeutic abortion, as it is called, is granted today on three bases. One, when the continuation of the pregnancy may threaten the life of the woman or seriously impair her health. Two, when pregnancy has resulted from rape or incest. Three, when continuation is likely to result in the birth of

a child with grave physical deformities or mental retardation. Now, in these cases, we have what we know as therapeutic abortion. For the most part today, however, you can get an abortion for any whim or any reason that you want it. There are clinics that just constantly offer that service.

To find out what the Bible instructs about abortion is, I think, a very simple thing. Lemme give you some incidents from the early church, because it's important for us to know what the early church thought. In the teachings of the twelve apostles, which is, incidentally, one of the earliest historical writings that we have after the years of the church, it says this, the early church. Quote, "Thou shalt not slay a child by abortion, nor what is begotten shalt thou destroy." The viewpoint of the first century church and the second century church was that abortion violated the commands of God. Tertullian, who was one of the early church fathers said, quote, "To hinder a birth is merely a speedier way of killing, nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born or destroy one that is coming to birth. That is, a man which is going to be one, you have the fruit already in the seed." The early church had a writing entitled The Apostolic Constitution, and in it, it said this: "Thou shalt not slay a child by causing abortion."

Now the reason we quote these extra-Biblical sources is because the Bible does not say anything about abortion, particularly, but it does say, "Thou shalt not kill." And we believe that the Bible teaches that abortion is tantamount to murder; and that is, I think, supported for many reasons. For one very interesting passage, look at Exodus 21; and we're not gonna spend a lotta time on this, but I would like to point out this is where we have some indication regarding fetal life. Exodus 21:22, assume that in the middle of the...of the street or in the middle of the house, two men start a fight and there happens to be a pregnant lady there who gets somehow drawn into the fight, not according to her own wishes, but she is either struck or hit or knocked over or something, and you have the incident indicated here. "If men strive...that is, if there's a fight going on...they hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follows, he shall be surely punished according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine." If a fight occurs and a woman loses her baby, without an intent, by accident, then there was a price to pay. "If any mischief follows...verse 23...then thou shalt give life for life."

Now, there are two interpretations. That mischief means the death or the injury of the mother...or that mischief means the death of the unborn child; and most commentators would say that it refers to the unborn child. Now, if the unborn child dies, according to verse 23, if that's what mischief is, then you shall give what? Life for life; and therein does God regard that life, that fetal life as real life, as actual life, and required, if that is indeed the meaning of the term mischief, the life that took that life.

I think Psalm 139 bears reading, verse 13 and following. "For Thou hast possessed my inward parts. Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hidden from Thee when I was made in secret, and intricately wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine

eyes did see my substance, yet being unformed; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." In other words, "God, You had a perfect description of me physically before I ever existed. When I was yet in the womb and unformed, You knew what I would be when I was formed. How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake I am still with Thee."

And here we find God active in forming the fetus, God active in the actual life of that child before it is born; and I think this is sufficient evidence to indicate that the fetal life is, indeed, considered by God to be actual life; and God certainly is the One who created that life. If God wanted the cessation of that life, God could take care of it. The natural process of miscarriage is God's way of aborting that which God does not desire to be born; and I don't believe that, even in the cases of therapeutic abortion, there is any justification for such abortion. I think it has to do with the providence of God and the care of God, and God bringing about that which He desires. He will effect what He will effect.

Now, in the case of birth control, just to add to that, I don't think there's anything in the Scripture to limit birth control. Certainly, by abortion, yes, but by other means, I don't think the Scripture qualifies anything against birth control. I don't think the argument of population explosion, you know, we read that somewhere in the world there's a woman having a baby every fourth of a second. Of course, I think we oughta find her and stop her; but...I don't really think that that is any reason to defend birth control. I think birth control, the Lord has left up to every individual husband and wife for their own determination for what is the will of God for their and what they are desirous of doing. The Scripture is silent on that issue; and I think it is wisdom that does allow for some birth control in some certain cases, obviously.

All right, now here's another interesting question. I hope some of these are interesting. They're interesting to me. This one is interesting, very interesting. Why did God allow polygamy in the Old Testament? Now, first of all, I want you to know that what God allows and what God wills are two different things. You understand that? You think God wills that any should perish? No. Does He allow some to go to hell? Yes. Do you think God wills that you sin? No. Does He give you the freedom to do that? Yes. God does not will polygamy. That's multiple marriage. Bigamy on to polygamy. Bigamy would be two...two married to one. Polygamy would be ad infinitum.

God's standard is clear, Genesis 2, from the very, very beginning. When God made the first family, people, how many were in it? Two. That's a...that's a rather significant statement, don't you think? And in verse 23 of Genesis 2, Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman." That's a dignified name, beautiful name. The Greek word is goonay. I don't understand that. But, anyway..."She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man." Now watch, here's God's standard for marriage, verse 24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, cleave unto his wife, and they shall be...what?...one flesh." Nothing added, nothing

subtracted, two people, one flesh. From the very beginning, folks, that was God's plan.

You say, "Well, how did polygamy get started?" It got started in the reprobate line of Cain the murderer. Look at Genesis 4 if you're there, in verse 23. One of the sons of Cain, the Cainitefamily, dwelled in the land of Nod in the east of Eden. Cain produced some family, and one of them was Lamech. Lamech was unbelievable. He was the first...artist. Verse 23, "Lamech said unto his wives, 'Adah and Zillah...that's from A to Z. That's his two wives, Adah and Zillah...He said unto his two wives, Adah and Zillah," and so forth. This is the first occasion of polygamy in the Bible, and it is in...notice that is in the line of Cain, the sinful line. Monogamous marriage was always God's will; but, listen, in the Old Testament, because of cultures, God allowed a certain developing process.

Missionaries today face the same thing. There are many occasions when a missionary has gone to a certain tribal people and found that they engaged in polygamy. Well, you don't just go in there and here is a situation where a man, and he's got three wives, and they have children, and in their culture, it's established as a family unit. The women are dependent upon him. They can't be thrown out. What are you gonna say? "Now that I'm here, everybody pick one. The rest out." Boy, that's tough. So even in modern missions, there has had to be a certain period of time in toleration until the culture can work out of its system those kinds of things; and the way to approach it is to begin with the new and the young and give them direction, and let the old phase itself out. In a similar way, once this thing got started in the cultures of the Old Testament period, God had to allow for it to work out as the...as the message of God's truth got into the hearts of those people; and God was patient...in that area. That doesn't mean that's God's will.

I'll tell you something else. In the early days of the Bible, remember, that families were huge, and they had their roots back, and...and there were such great big families, inclusive, consanguinal families. That word means they're related by blood. Families were so big that people were also marrying relatives, but they had to at the start. Did you know that Jacob married Leah and Rachel, and they were his first cousins? Do you know that? That's right, first cousins. You say, "That's not right." Later on in the Mosaic economy, it wasn't right. But it had to work its way out, because during the patriarchal periods, there were huge groups of families living together; and that had to come in time. So God patiently allowed for it to work out; but I believe all polygamy and bigamy was sin; but allowed a certain time of ignorance, as the Book of Acts says, for the working out of some of those cultural things.

Now, lemme give you a...an illustration. Deuteronomy 21:15, "If a man have two wives, one beloved and another hated...and this is a verse people pick...If a man has two wives, one beloved, another hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated, then it shall be, when he makes his sons to inherit that which he has, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn." Now that that's clear, we'll go on to verse 17. "But he shall acknowledge the son of the

hated for the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his." Point is this, you had two wives. Wife No. 1, you don't like. Wife No. 2, you like. Both have sons, you're prone to give the inheritance to the second wife, to her son, even though he's not the firstborn, because you like that second wife better.

People say, "Well, here is God allowing bigamy." No, not at all. The point here is simply this. Here is a man who has two wives in his lifetime. The assumption is one has died, one is alive. He may not give the inheritance to the second, though she is his beloved; and maybe he's long forgotten the first, but his inheritance must go to the first. It's a situation here, and if you study carefully through the text and through the verb forms that are used here, you will see that that is supported by the text. The word "had" is there. The word "was hated," past tense relative to that wife who has died. And I'll tell ya, those who engaged in it suffered. Look at Solomon. He had so many wives and so many concubines, and all of his political marriages trying to...you know, the way to solve a problem with a neighboring country was take the daughter of whoever ran it, or the neighboring tribe and marry her, make her a part of the deal. His life was a disaster, and the kingdom of Israel was torn and split.

Believe me, God wanted monogamy. Look at His illustration in Hosea. He's a faithful husband. Israel's an unfaithful wife. That's been God's pattern all the way, one husband, one wife. No polygamy was ever good. Lemme give what I think to be the most confusing relationship about this in the Old Testament. Genesis 29. You remember Jacob? Poor Jacob really got conned. He was looking for a wife. He probably was in too much of a hurry to start with. Kinda got slowed down, though; but he was looking for a wife; and in Genesis 29, "Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. He looked, a behold, a well in the field, and there were three flocks of sheep by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks...Jacob's well...a great stone was on the well's mouth. There were all flocks gathered. They rolled the stone from the well's mouth, watered the sheep, put the stone again. Jacob said unto them, 'My brethren, where are you from?' And they said, 'Of Haran are we.' And he said unto them, 'Hey, do you know Laban the son of Nahor?' And they said, 'We know him.' And he said, 'Well, is he all right?' And they said, 'He is well; and behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.' And he said, 'Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together. Water ye the sheep, and go and feed them.' And they said, 'We cannot until all the flocks be gathered together, till they roll the stone from the well's mouth. Then we water the sheep.'"

Now, it seems to me that he was trying to get rid of everybody. "And while he yet spoke with them, Rachel came from father's sheep, for she kept them. Came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother...see, first cousins...and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel." You say, "He should not have done that. Why, that's, you don't start like that. That comes later." See?

Wow, Jacob, are you ever forward. What kind of an act is that? To add to that, "He lifted up his voice and wept." I mean he really gave a song and dance. Well, what it was, was he was greeting his long-lost cousin, see. Right...Oh, that's interesting. Verse 13, "It came to pass when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, and they embraced and kissed, and brought him to the house," and so forth, so...

"And Laban said to him, 'Surely you are a bone of...bone of my flesh,' and so for they abode the space of a month. Right. And verse 15. "And Laban said unto Jacob, 'Because you are my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nothing? I mean, I can't have you around here for a month working for nothing. What would you like?' Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah. The name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was weak-eyed." Now, we don't know just exactly what that means, but in those days, we have some ideas. Women...women were covered except for the face, and weak-eyed would mean basically homely. Could be cross-eyed, which may be the best translation. "Leah was cross-eyed." It's a little tough to think about, but that's...I mean if all you've got going is the...everything is covered but...and they're crossed, that's, you know...

Anyway, so Leah, Leah had a basic problem. "And Rachel was beautiful and well-favored." Rachel was...she just...really beautiful. "And Jacob loved Rachel, and said, 'I'll serve you seven years for Rachel.' Laban said, 'It's better that I give her to thee than that I give her to another man. You're better than anybody I've met so far. Stick around.'" Now, you know he loved her, if he's gonna work seven years for Rachel; and I'm sure they enjoyed each other's company for that period of time in a...in a filial relationship. "They...and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had for her."

Seven years went by. He loved her so much. You know, we make a beautiful story out of this; and it really is. It's a great emotional love story. "And Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.'...And he just...'It's time for our marriage.' And Laban gathered together all the men of the place they had a big feast. Came to pass in the evening, he took Leah his daughter and brought her to him; and he went in unto her." He snuck Leah in there.

And verse 25, "It came to pass in the morning...ho-ho, now I don't know what kind of a marriage ceremony they had in those days, but apparently the...the conjugal act itself constituted the ceremony, and it was night. What a shock...In the morning, behold, it was Leah." I like that line. "Behold it was Leah, and he said to Laban, 'What is this you've done to me? I served you for Rachel. You beguiled me.' And Laban said, 'It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. It's a custom. It's a rule we have here, sorry.'"

Now he says in verse 27, "Work another seven years, and I'll give you Rachel." Yeah, a little discouraging, right? "So Jacob did, fulfilled the week, gave him Rachel his daughter as his wife."

Now, I'm gonna say something that I...that you may not have heard before. I believe...stay with us...I believe that Jacob sinned. In my own heart, I believe he sinned in marrying Rachel. I believe God...allows one wife, and, even though Jacob received Leah, it was more important to be obedient to God's pattern than to be emotionally satisfied. Now, think about that. When somebody comes to me and says, "I'm leaving my wife because I don't like her," that means nothing to me. There's...there's a right and a wrong, and it's right to stay married to the one you're married to, not because you found somebody else more attractive.

"He loved Rachel more than Leah, and when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb and made Rachel's barren." God said, "I'll bless you, Leah, and I'll compensate for the love you're not getting like you should get from Jacob," and she's the one that produced the first four boys, the fourth of which...which was Judah. Through Judah came whom? Jesus Christ the Messiah. "God said, 'I'll bless you, Leah, in spite of him.'" And I think that the anxieties and the anguish that created in Jacob's life as a result of this were because he was disobedient and willful and sinful in pursuing a marriage that God had tried to show him He didn't want him to have, in spite of what he felt emotionally. It isn't always necessary to be emotionally involved with the one you're married. You know, only in our culture do we function like that, in Western culture...

So Jacob resented Leah, made her feel unloved; but, boy, she had the children. She had the children. The Lord gave her four sons, Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. She was never loved, and she knew it. Verse 14, "Rueben went the days of wheat harvest." Rueben, he loved his mother, Leah. He wanted his father to love his mother, so he got some mandrakes. You know, what does it say in the New American? Love apples, does it say that? That's what they are. They believed it was some kind of a love potion, see, and so old Rueben was gonna help his mother try to, you know, get her a place in his father's love; and so he got some love apples and brought 'em to his mother.

"Rachel said to Leah, 'Give me of thy son's love apples...supposedly a sexual stimulation..."She said, 'Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband?'" You see there? In her mind, Leah says, "You took my husband." You see? I think how...I think that's how God looked at it. I think Leah walked with God, "'And would you also take away my love apple? Wouldn't you even let me go in unto him? Would you even let me sleep with him? It's not enough you've taken my love. Would you not allow me to be attractive?' And Rachel said, 'All right, he'll lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes. Because of all the trouble he went through, it's okay tonight.'"

See, she...she wanted this so badly, she was unfulfilled all her life. "And then she bore Jacob the fifth son...in verse 19...She conceived again and the sixth son." And God blessed her. In verse 21, she had a daughter named Dinah. And then finally, "God remembered even Rachel, and she conceived and bore a son and called his name...what?...Joseph." God is gracious, isn't He? It wasn't really Rachel's problem. It was Jacob's problem. Now, all of that just to say this. Do I believe God allows polygamy? Yes, I believe He allows it. Do I believe God wants it? No, in Old Testament times, he

only allowed it. Today, there's no reason for it. Our culture doesn't acknowledge it. It is a...it is against the law. It is a crime, and I think that's based upon an ethic that's found in the Bible. All right, that's kind of an interesting answer I think to that question. I hope so.

Let's answer another question. Now, this question is interesting. What is the Bible's standard of divorce? You know, there's a tape on that that covers it at great length; and, if you really wanna know in detail, you need to get the tape; but lemme draw your attention quickly. Deuteronomy 24 is the first passage that deals with this issue. In Deuteronomy 24:1, "When a man taken a wife and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes because he's found some uncleanness in her, that he write her a bill of divorcement, give it in her hand, and send her out of his house."

Now here the Bible provided for divorce. This is the first indication of divorce. From the beginning, God didn't want it that way. From the beginning, it was not so. In the beginning, God designed that a man and a woman should leave their parents and cleave to one another. They two should be come one flesh, and that's the way it oughta be for good. But because of the hardness of hearts, according to what Jesus said, God had permitted a bill of divorcement, and under certain circumstances this could happen.

In Isaiah chapter 50 verse 1, God recognized a bill of divorcement. In Jeremiah 3 verse 1, God refers to this passage in Deuteronomy, again indicating that He had permitted it, and He had allowed it. So it was a bona fide act of God; and it was done because of the hardness of hearts. God did not want to force people to have to maintain a shameful relationship. He is merciful, and He desired to release the innocent one from the bond of a shameful union.

Now, there were some cases where absolutely no divorce was permitted; and you'll find those in chapter 22 verses 13 to 19. So God was very explicit; but the very fact that there were cases in which divorce is stated to be not permitted, indicates there would other cases where it would be permitted. Now, you see here, this statement a bill of divorcement in verse 1. It was mandatory in the case of dismissal and had several purposes. One, it was a testimonial to the innocence of the...of the one who was released. Two, it gave evidence of legal freedom to remarry. Three, it protected the woman's reputation. It was a certificate of innocence. The right to freedom, 'cause of innocence. The right to remarry and the protection of a reputation were at stake.

Now some say, "What is uncleanness?" 'Cause that's the first grounds for divorce. Is it sexual adultery? Not really in this text...and the reason I say is because when somebody committed adultery in the Old Testament, what was the judgment? Stoning. So divorce wasn't the response to adultery. Stoning was. Uncleanness, then, would be shameful and, notice this, this is important. Those people knew that if they committed adultery, they would pay with their life. So you know what the temptation was to do then? Everything short of that. See? Everything just up to that point; and so the temptation would be to just go almost that far. Well, in a shameful union, God wanted to permit a

release for an innocent party in the case where the partner was doing that continuously and always stopping short lest he lose his life or she lose her life, but still shaming and shaming and shaming. Do you see?

But Jesus took that thing and qualified it even further in Matthew chapter 5, and He removed the uncleanness and brought it to this, in Matthew 5 verse 31, "You have heard it said or it hath been said, 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.' But I say to you...and here Jesus really supersedes the Old Testament, says...anybody that puts away his wife except for the cause of fornication...That is sexual involvement...causes her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery." There's only then one ground for divorce according to Jesus. That is adultery. That's all.

Now, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 10 and 11, you have the further word on divorce; and it says there, "Unto the married I command (yet not I, but the Lord): let not the wife depart from her husband...God doesn't want people separating...But if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband." And, again you see, God says, "If they're apart, let them be rejoined." But verse 15, "If the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, that God hath called us to peace." The only other case Paul allowing here for divorce is where you have the case of an unbeliever who leaves, he departs, let him depart. A believer is not in bondage. He is not in bondage; and so this seems to indicate a freedom from that union.

So we find then that the only legitimate causes for divorce in Scripture would be adultery or an unbeliever who departs; and probably the implication is departing because he cannot tolerate Christian faith, and the Lord doesn't want a Christian to have to endure constant punishment year after year for his faith in Him. All right, and as I say, that's covered in further detail on the tape.

All right, another question. What is your obligation to your parents if they're not Christians, they're in their 80s, and they drink alcohol, and expect you to serve it in the home and have no respect for your Christian faith? That's a very important question. You know, the Bible says that you're to obey your parents. The Bible says you're to honor your father and mother. In the Old Testament people were promised long life for doing that. Jesus comes along in the New Testament and says you have to be willing to leave your father and mother, even to hate them. What's the difference?

Simply this, when your father and mother invite you to do those things that they have the right to ask of you, obey them, even though they're things that you would not prefer to do; and even though they may restrict the things that you think you should do, obey them. This is God's plan. When they invite you to do those things which are contrary to the direct command of the Word of God, at that point, you have to say what Peter and John said, "You judge whether we ought to obey God or men." So your obedience is continually to those people. You continue to honor them until it comes to the place where they would have you violate the principles you know to be revealed in the Word of God; and at

that point, you follow the injunction of our Lord, and you have to be willing say goodbye to mother and father and to step out and live for Him. That's as simply as I can state it from a Biblical viewpoint without getting into detail.

Another question. What is the right Christian stand on dancing, playing cards, and drinking? I don't wanna get into this in long detail. Lemme just say this. Dancing is in the Bible to start with. There's no question about that. David danced before the Lord. There was dancing and praising God in Psalm 150. The Old Testament, there was dancing that was exalting and praising the Lord. Now, if you were, however, to use that as a defense of modern-day dancing, you would find yourself ill-pressed to do that. The dancing that was done in the Old Testament was done by an individual before God as the full expression of joy. I'm not even too sure that there were any particular steps. I don't think somebody did, you know, when they got really blessed, they did the Funky Chicken or whatever that thing is, you know...I don't think they had a...they had a new wave of Hebrew dances swinging through the lands.

What it means is that they praised God by the expression of the body. They just abandoned themselves to the joy that was theirs in God. There wasn't any indication that it was ever a partner thing or there ever was anything closely or remotely related to sexual stimulation involved. But, on the other hand, if you study Old Testament history, you'll find out that the pagans danced orgy dances, and the whole key to what they were doing was to stimulate the sex drive. That's what we've inherited today, not the worshipful expression of the body as it frees itself to just glorify God and to express its joy as it spins and twirls and jumps and leaps and praises God.

You know who did a dance in the New Testament? The guy in Acts that got healed. He was dancing all the way through the temple, leaping and jumping and praising God. Now that God likes; but hanging on somebody and going around a smoke-filled room with the lights out while somebody sings a suggestive song isn't remotely related to the Word of God. You know, we used to say when we were at Christian school, I went to a Christian school, they didn't have any dances, you know. We were fairly well protected. A guy became a Christian, you know, and he said, 'You know, we used to go to the dance, because we'd take a girl out and take her to the dance, get her all warmed up. Then we could go out and neck." He said, "Then when I became a Christian, I realized you don't dance. You just go right out and neck."...Yeah, true, right? The point is anything, anything that in any way stimulates...desire for another person physically outside marriage, outside that which honors and glorifies God in every part, is to be disregarded and turned away from totally. Totally; and believe me, with the way the world sets up dances, they aren't dances to praise God. That's the only kinda dancing Israel ever did.

Now what about playing cards? Well, there's nothing wrong a card. A card isn't gonna hurt ya. Just a little card. The only thing I can say is this. If...if it bothers your conscience to do it, don't do it, or if it's gonna make somebody else stumble, don't do it. Or if it's gonna make somebody else think less

of your testimony, don't do it. But if you feel that it has not those factors, it isn't problematic, and you can do it to the glory of God, that's between your conscience and the community in which you exist and the people which you exist. For example, if I were to go over to the middle of Africa and sit down among a crowd of Africans and somebody pulled out a deck of cards, and we were to sit there and play, I don't know, what do you play? I don't even know how to play the thing. But let's say 21. I remember that one...Let's say we all sat down in the middle of Africa and played 21. You think the Africans would be offended? Not on your life. They wouldn't have the faintest idea what we were even doing. Certainly wouldn't be any great offense to God if we didn't anything else to do in the burning sun, play a little 21...But, on the other hand, in the culture in which I live, if I were to be doing that, somebody would stumble over it, so I don't do it. Card in itself isn't evil.

What about drinking? Well, the Bible says so much about that, and I've said it all in the past. Recently, a new article came out I thought was very, very interesting. It was in Christianity Today, and I thought I'd give you some thoughts from it that were very helpful. Written by Robert Stein. It says this, among other things. "The wine of the Bible was not unfermented grape juice. Yes, it was different from the wine of today." What he means by that is some people would say, "Well, the wine Jesus drank wasn't fermented." Of course it was fermented. How could they keep it from being fermented? But it was different from today. Listen. "In ancient times, wine was usually stored in large pointed jugs called amphorae. When wine was to be used, it was poured from the amphorae into large bowls called craters, where it was mixed with water...From the craters, cups or kilikswere then filled. What is important for us to note is that, before wine was ever drunk, it was mixed with water. The kilikswere filled, not from the amphorae, but from the craters. The ratio of water to wine varied. Homer mentions a ratio of 20 to 1, 20 parts water to 1 part wine. In ancient works, Athanasius, the learned banquet written to AD 200, we find in book 10 a collection of statements from earlier writers about drinking practices, a quotation from a play by Aristophanes reads, 'Here, drink this also, mingled three and two.' Demasays, 'Zeus, but it's sweet and bears the three parts well.'"

So here again is an indication of history that it was always mixed. There are mentions of everything from 2 to 1 to 20 to 1. Now, sometimes in history, the ratio of mixing water to wine goes down to 1 to 1, and when it does, it is not called wine, but it is called strong drink. This is important. Drinking wine unmixed, on the other hand, was looked upon as a Scythian or barbarian custom. Athanasius, in his work, quotes Manessiusof Athens, and this is what he said. "The gods have revealed wine to mortals to be the greatest blessing for those who use it right. But for those who use it without measure, the reverse, for it gives food to them that take it in strength in mind and body. In medicine, it is beneficial. It can be mixed with liquid and drugs and bring aid to the wounded. In daily life, to those who mix and drink it moderately, it gives good cheer. But if you overstep the bounds, it brings violent. Mix it half and half, and you get madness. Unmixed, body collapse."...

From these incidents in history, it is evident that wine was seen in ancient times as a medicine or a solvent for medicines, and, of course, as a beverage. Yet, as a beverage, it was always thought of as

a mixed drink. Plutarch says, "We call a mixture wine, although the larger of the components is water." The radio of water might vary, but only barbarians drank it unmixed; and a mixture of wine and water of equal parts was called strong drink and frowned on. The term wine or oinosin the ancient world then did not mean wine as we understand it today, but wine mixed with water. And, in fact, when it was unmixed, they used the term aquatesteronwhich meant unmixed wine. Barbarians drank that. People who wanted to play around with the edges drank 1 to 1, but people who had sense of propriety always drank it mixed.

Even the Bible makes the distinction, "And the Lord spoke to Aaron saying, 'Drink no wine nor strong drink...and there is the differentiation...when you go to the tent of the meeting.'" Well, there, you can see, people, the safest and easiest method of making water safe to drink was mixing it with wine, which acted as a purifier; but the wine was always safely diluted. To say, "Because they drank wine in Bible times, I am free to drink it today," is to miss the point. They drank it diluted, because it purified the water. In fact, in the early church, an interesting note, unmixed wine was found unacceptable. Always, it had to be mixed with water.

I think that's interesting. To consume the amount of alcohol, listen, that is in two martinis, by drinking wine containing three parts water to one part wine, you would have to drink 22 glasses. In other words, it is possible to become intoxicated from wine mixed with three parts of water, but one's drinking would probably affect the bladder long before it affected the mind...That's pretty clear, isn't it? People, what it means is this. Nobody drank strong drink unless they were considered a barbarian. That just adds to the things we've already said in the past about it. I hope that's helpful.

Okay, another question. Now this one is...is important enough for us to consider carefully. What is Christian freedom? Now, that is a really important question. What is Christian freedom; and I think there were a couple people who asked this. First of all, lemme...lemme go with you to John chapter 8, and let's...let's look at the total picture of Christian freedom. You'd have to go to verse 30 to begin with. John 8:30, "And as Jesus was speaking these words...and marvelous words they were about who He was...He said...as He spoke these words...said John...many believed on Him. Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on Him, 'If you continue in My Word, then are you My disciples really, or for real...Alethos, truly...And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you...what?...free."

Now notice, first of all, that freedom is a result of truth. You take a guy, and this is the way I've usually illustrated this. You take a guy who...who's got a...a very, very complex math problem, and he's got this assignment that he's gotta turn in to his professor the next day, and he's in an advanced mathematics class or advanced something or other that has to do with math. He's gotta get his problem done, so he starts about 8:00, and he keeps this problem going, and he's got a buncha X's and Y's and all this kinda stuff, and he's trying to put the whole thing together; and he struggles and he struggles and he struggles. You know what happens? The guy is a slave to his problem, isn't he?

And let's say he comes to the conclusion, and he gets an answer, and he goes back and checks his answer, and it's wrong. He's still a slave. About 3:00 in the morning, he gets an answer, and he goes and checks it about five ways, and it's right. He's free, right? He's only free when he discovered the truth, that's all.

You see, freedom is the result of knowing the truth. There is no freedom apart from knowing the truth, because the search goes on. A man is never liberated from the dilemma until he arrives at the solution. So Jesus said to the Jews, "You guys are still fuddling around with the problem. You...you're still playing religious games. If you would listen to Me, you would know the truth, and the truth would set you free from the tremendous problems you have imposed on yourself by your legalism." You see, their legalism, they were satisfying themselves in the fact that they were working out a problem, instead of being satisfied with an answer. And they, of course, they said, "We are Abraham's seed, and we're never in bondage to any man. How sayest Thou, 'You shall be made free'? Why we've never been slaves to anybody."

Oh, really? Oh, have you forgotten that you were slaves to Egypt, slaves to the Babylonians, slaves to the Greeks, slaves now, currently, to the Romans? "We were never slaves to anybody." Check again. And then Jesus said, "Worst of all...verse 34...'Verily, verily I say unto you, whosoever commits is the...what?...slave of sin.' You're slaves to sin." You see, as long you sin, you sin, you sin, you never get a solution, so you never get free from the bondage of sin. When the solution to sin comes, sin's power is broken. Sin is forgiven. You're free. The problem is solved.

Isn't that...isn't that really what contributes to Christian peace? I mean if you stop and think about it, what is the greatest thing to know about as a Christian? It is to know that you're free from the consequences of what? Sin. You're free. So, first of all, Christian freedom has to do with finding the truth in Jesus Christ and being liberated; but taking it a step further than that, how far does our freedom go as Christians? There's a lot in the New Testament about Christian liberty, and about what Christians are free to do. You know, some people have taken this idea of freedom and just gone crazy with it.

"Well, I'm saved, and, boy, the Lord's gonna take of me, so I'll just do what I wanna do." I heard one man who said, I think it was the week before last, he said, "So what if I do wrong. The Lord's forgiven me in the past. He'll forgive me again." You know what that says to me? That says, one, he doesn't understand freedom. Two, he doesn't really love the Lord, 'cause if he loved the Lord, he couldn't tread on His love like that. You see, if you love somebody, you don't stomp their grace, do you?

So, you see, what is the boundaries of Christian liberty? Are we free? Listen, 1 Corinthians says, "All things are lawful." Did you know that? You say, "Where is it? That's my life verse. I gotta find that one, too." Where is it? I'm not gonna tell ya. Chapter 6, but "'All things are lawful,' but all things aren't expedient." Now there's gotta be a boundary. "'All things are lawful,' but I'll not be brought

under the power of any." Where does Christian liberty fit into this thing? Just how free are we? Well, I want you to know something exiting. Romans 6, in Romans 6:14, it says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you're not under the law, but under grace." So you've been freed from sin.

In what sense? Are you saying that, as a Christian, I never sin? Is that true? Some people say, "Well, as Christians, Romans says we're free from the law. We have been made free from sin. That means that sin doesn't bother us anymore." I've actually heard that phrase. "That we have been made free from sin. Sin doesn't both..." Listen, when you became a Christian, sin'll bother you a lot more than it did before you were saved. Being free from sin doesn't mean you're free from the actuality of it. It means you're free from the penalty of it. You're free from the wages of it. Why? Because you died with Christ. How many times can a person die? Once, and when sin comes to me and says, "MacArthur, I'm gonna kill you for your sin," I say, "Sorry, I already died." "When did you die?" "I died the day I received Jesus Christ. I was crucified with Him, nevertheless I live. I died in Jesus Christ on the cross. It's your tough luck, I also rose from the dead."

You see, that is the death. I died in Christ when I gave Him my life. I was buried, right? That's Romans 6, and I rose, and I walk in newness of life. I've paid the penalty in Jesus Christ by my union with Him. Sin has no claims on me. Sin can't touch me. I still sin. It just has no ultimate penalty...I'll tell you something else. I don't sin that grace may abound. God forbid. So we're free from the power of sin. We're free from the wages of sin. Free from the penalty of sin.

I wanna take this freedom to Romans 14 and 15, because here, you see, you ran into another area. How free are Christians? You know, somebody'll say, "Well, we're Christians. Man, we got liberty. We can do what we wanna do." And these are the same people who are always saying that you shouldn't feel guilty for anything. You just...you just do what you wanna do, and, you know, you've even got people who claim to be Christians and claim so much freedom that they can have sexual relationships outside of marriage, and they can just about do anything they want without any...any theological problems. Believe me, they don't escape guilt. They don't escape chastisement, but they, at least, have fit their theology to rationalize along with their behavior.

But in Romans 14, you have this idea of freedom, and how does it work together with the Christian's commitment. Now, lemme just say this to begin with. There are several principles here regarding freedom. Now, the first few verses of the chapter, in fact, I guess we'd have to consider the first 13 verses probably as one unit of chapter 14. Really tell us that we're free in Christ; but there are some other things that go along with it. It says, for example, in 1, "Him that is weak in the faith received, even not to doubtful disputations. For one believes that he may eat all things. Another who is weak eats only herbs." You got some people who eat meat and others who are vegetarians. "Let not him that eats despise him eats not; let not him that eats not, judge him that eats; for God's received them."

In other words, the big issue isn't what you eat or what you don't eat, and those were issues in those days. That's right. Listen, the Jew became a Christian, he went over to a Gentiles house, and they had roast pork. Well, he...he got apoplexy. He couldn't handle that; and oftentimes the Gentile was sticking in and turning it, you know. Say, "Hey, we're free, fella, you know, have a little pork." Oooooh-oooooh, see? I mean he couldn't handle that. You see, too many years. Too many years have gone by when he had been circumscribed to the law. Why, when, in Acts chapter 10, when the Lord came to Cornelius and spoke to him in the sheet and said, "See all those animals there? They're all clean. Go ahead, rise, Peter, kill and eat." Peter said, "I have never in my life eaten anything unclean." And the Lord said to him, "Don't you dare call unclean what I've cleansed." That was tough for Peter. I imagine the first ham sandwich he ever ate went down hard. Boy...

So, you see, there was a freedom there. There was a liberty there. There was no more dietary laws. There was no more of the clothing law, the wool, and so forth and so on, that...there was no more kitchen cooking laws. All of that stuff had been set aside. All the peculiarities of Israel had been set aside in the institution of the church. So those...those outward laws were gone, and, yet, the Jews couldn't handle those things; and when they saw some people doing certain things, it grieved their spirit.

And he goes further, and he says in verse 4, "Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Let every man be judged by God. One man esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." When I was a little kid growing up in Philadelphia, I could not read the funny paper on Sunday. You know, that's true in some cases now? Do you know there was a choir that came to a church back there where I went to church as a little boy, and they sang on a Sunday morning, and in the afternoon some of them went into the drugstore to make a phone call, and nobody in the church came back that night to hear 'em. They had violated the Lord's day. Well, there's no law you can't make a phone call on Sunday; but, you see, they had this little box in which they had fit everything...and so some people regard a day above another.

What happened here? Well, some of the Jews were still upholding the Sabbath, and some of the Gentiles were saying, "Oh, you legalists, we're free on the Sabbath. We're gonna go out and go fishing." And some of the more liberated Jews even, who had matured in the faith, were exercising their liberties. But he says, "Look, if he regards the day, he regards it to the Lord; and he that regards not the day to the Lord, he doth not regard it. He that eat, eats to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not to the Lord, eateth not and giveth God thanks." In other words, it doesn't matter. These are inconsequential gray area things...So you're free. You're free to do whatever you want. "Oh," you say, "I like that. Free to do whatever I want." Yeah, all things are lawful. Hmmmmm.

There's a second principle. First principle is you're free. Second principle is don't offend. Now that really ties it down, doesn't it? That's right, verse 13. "Let us therefore not judge one another any more, but judge this rather: that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." Hey, maybe I think I am free to do all those things, but maybe if I didn't do them, I might be more loving toward my weaker brother who doesn't yet understand his liberties. You see? There are some gray areas where these things apply. "I know, an am persuaded by the Lord Jesus...Paul says...that there is nothing unclean of itself." Boy, that is a very interesting statement. Now watch. Things are not evil of themselves. Is money evil? No. No. Is the fruit that comes from the tree, from the vine, from the grape, evil? No, it's just fruit that comes from the grape. You say, "But it gets alcoholic." Who gave it the property that caused it to get that way? Say, "Well, that was somehow in the Creation." Well, maybe it was in the Fall, but it's here; but it isn't evil. You see, it isn't the fruit of the grape that creates the problem. It's the guy who imbibes the fruit of the grape that is the problem. The thing of itself is not the problem.

You see, things are not unclean. Things are neutral things, and that one man could touch the thing and make it into an evil thing; another man can touch the thing and it can come a holy thing. The difference in wine is the difference between the wino and the communion service. You see? This summer when we went to Israel and they didn't have any grape juice, and we had to have real live wine at the tomb of our Lord, and I know that there were people in other groups who were going, "Oh, Martha, ooh-ooh, see," you know. Can we? Can we dare? Do we? See. The thing of itself is nothing. It is the communion. We were celebrating of our blessed Lord. I mean if you happen to be in a land where there's no Welch's, you make do, right? I mean it really isn't that big of a deal. You see, it isn't the thing itself. It is the man who has the thing in his hand that is the problem. "There's nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth it to be unclean, to him, it is unclean." In other words, if he's determined it in his mind, the best thing for him to do is avoid it. There's no sense in violating your conscience; and if you haven't matured to the place where you understand that freedom, don't violate your conscience.

Ah, but verse 15, "If your brother is grieved with your food, you're not walking in love. Destroy not him with your food for whom Christ died. Let not your good be evil spoken of; for the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Then he says in verse 19, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things with which one may edify another. For food, destroy not the work of God." In other words, just so that you can have something to eat or something to drink, verse 21, "It is good neither to eat meet nor to drink wine nor anything by which thy brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak."

Listen, he doesn't say it's evil to drink wine. No, he doesn't. I know there's some people who think it is a cardinal sin to drink wine. It doesn't say that in the Bible. It doesn't say it. Now, I hope I didn't shoot you down too bad, but it doesn't say that. What it does say is, "It is good not to eat meat or

drink wine or anything that will make your brother stumble, be offended, or be made weak." The reason the Bible doesn't say it's evil to drink wine is because wine, of itself, isn't evil. It's just wine. It's just there...

You say, "But don't you think it's a sin to drink wine?" Listen, friends, the sin is to violate the conscience of a weaker brother. The sin is to depreciate your testimony. That's the sin; and if any of those things make my brother stumble, then I will not do those things. The thing in itself is nothing; but the thing becomes a forbidden thing if it wounds or grieves another brother. That's all he's saying. You know, some people can say, "Well, I'm free in Christ. I can do what I want. I can...I can carry on like I want. I can drink as much as I want whenever I want in front of whomever I want." And you know what they do? They offend somebody else. "If you love your brother," Paul says, "you won't do anything to make him stumble." This is the whole point.

In verse 1 of chapter 15, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." In other words, you know, even if you have the liberty to do some things, don't do them just to take care of the weaker brother. You know who the weaker brother is? Not a new Christian, a legalist. A legalist. "Let every one of us please his neighbor." Who's the example? I love this. Verse 3, "For Christ pleased not Himself." Christ didn't do the things that He wanted to do always, but the things that He knew would be good for men.

So what are the principles? You're free. Don't give an offense. Maintain a clear conscience before God. This is God's standing. Yes, as a Christian, you're free. That's true. But your freedom should never get to the place where you exercise it to the wounding of another person. Peter says in his epistle, "Never use your freedom as a cloak of maliciousness." Don't use your freedom to hurt other people.

Lemme pursue this just a little further. Someone's asked this question, and this came in last Lord's day, and I'm just reading the question as it was. Please give some of the basics for Christian living. For instance, the scriptural viewpoint on dancing, drinking, smoking, and miniskirts, etc. Lemme answer this, and I wanna answer this lovingly; and yet I want to answer it pointedly...Dancing, drinking, smoking, and miniskirts are not the basics of Christian living. That - I mean that. They are not the basics of Christian living. Do you know, there are some very good Mormons who don't do any of those things and will spend eternity in hell. That's right.

Now, listen to this. There are many people, and I mean good people, Christian people who mean well, who base their entire spiritual life on what they do not do. Did you know that? You know, "We don't smoke, and we don't chew, and we don't go with girls that do." You know, rooty-toot-toot. See. "We're the boys from the institute," see...In other words, their entire orientation towards spirituality is what they don't do; and you know something? Usually, they don't do a lotta things. Mostly what they oughta do, they don't do, along with what they ought not to do, they don't do. They just don't do. I

wish they'd start doing what they oughta do, even if they wanna keep on not doing what they ought not to do.

Beloved, I'll tell ya, lemme tell you this. If you're going around, and you've got your thumb in your mouth, and you got your security blanket, and you're tickling your nose with what you don't do, I'd like to take your blanket away and make you face the issue that your spirituality is not a matter of what you don't do. You say, "Are you saying it's right to dance, drink, smoke, and wear a miniskirt?" I didn't say that. The Bible doesn't say it's right or wrong to do those things. The Bible doesn't talk about those things in that context. But I believe this - I believe that if you walk in the Spirit, the Spirit of God will take care of those kind of issues; but if you just base your spirituality on whether you do or don't do those things, then you have set up an artificial standard of your spirituality. You have probably bypassed true spirituality, and you have suckered yourself into thinking you're securely mature when, in fact, you're infantile.

That's hard stuff, but I believe it; and I'm not advocating all these things. Listen, I have very strong convictions about what's right and what's wrong, and...and I'll tell ya, I don't do any of those things, including wearing a miniskirt...and I want you to know that, as a Scotchman, we have the right to do that. Kilts have been in our family for years; but the reason I don't do those things has nothing to do with what I think the standards of the Christian life are. It has to do with what I think my testimony must be before other believers. When you go around, and you start evaluating people's spirituality by what they don't do, you're really sitting in the wrong seat doing the wrong thing on the wrong on the wrong basis.

People say to me so often, do you think it's a sin to smoke? Of course it isn't a sin to smoke. Where would you ever get the idea it is a sin to smoke? You say, "But...but we've always thought it was a sin." Listen, the Bible doesn't say anything about it. If you wanna put leaves in your mouth and set 'em on fire, that's...you know. I mean I heard one fella say one time, "Who likes to lean down and kiss a girl and smell a Camel?" You know. I'm being facetious, but the...the Bible doesn't say don't do that. I'll tell you what the Bible does say. It does say, "Don't gossip...don't backbite," and the Bible does say, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." If you begin on that principle, maybe smoking will take care of itself. But you see what I'm saying? Is people don't do all these little things, and they kid themselves into thinking that that's spirituality, when all it is is an inherited traditional legalism. True spirituality isn't that at all; but I believe, beloved, true spirituality in its depth and maturity takes care of those kind of things.

Lemme give you a little thought. Do you know the Bible talks about walking in the Spirit in the New Testament? This is the key to the Christian life. You believe the Holy Spirit can guide your life? You believe that we need to have a...a big thing here in Grace Church says, "We don't, we don't, we don't, we don't, we don't"? All we need to say is this: We do walk in the Spirit." You know, at our house, I don't have a sign in the kitchen that says, "Do not beat your wife. Do not main the children." I do not

have...you know why? I love my wife. I love my children. That precludes the necessity for the rule.

Listen, when the Apostle Paul wrote Romans 13, he said this, "Loving the Lord and loving your neighbor is the fulfillment of all...what?...the law." So, you see, the artificial standard of spirituality is the list of what we don't do. The true spirituality is walking in the Spirit and letting the Spirit convict us of the things the Spirit wants to convict us of. That's His business. Not talking about gray area things. Of course we know some things are wrong. Clearly, the Bible defines many things that are sinful and wrong. You read them. There are lists of them in the New Testament. When we get into gray area things, you know, and pe...kids always say, "But do you think it's a sin to dance?" You know, it's an interesting thing. I... I said this...this group of kids this week, I said, "You know, before you were Christian, you used to think you had to go to the dance, kinda dance with the girl, get her in the right mood, and then you can go out and neck. Then you became a Christian, and you realized you don't dance. You just go straight out and neck." See?

Yeah, well, you know, and the whole place just broke up. I mean they knew exactly what I was talking about. I mean there wasn't one guy in the building that didn't understand that. But, you see, there's the artificial standard of spirituality. "We don't do this. Ho-ho, but what we do," see. But that isn't covered in the list...It's very obvious to me, people, that for somebody to flop on somebody else and wander around the floor with moody music playing is not conducive to spiritual growth. That's very apparent. I don't need a rule on that. The Holy Spirit's told me that very simply. I understand that very clearly, and I realize, too, that...that a person's clothing and how they dress is usually a revelation of the depth of their spirituality. But don't let your dress become your standard of spirituality.

You see, Jesus said in John 15, "Here by is My Father glorified that you bear...what?...much fruit." You know what fruit is? Well, you could look about. You find the fruit is good works, Colossians. Fruit is not only good works. Fruit is attitudes, and so I've divided fruit into two things: action fruit and attitude fruit. You know what attitude fruit is? Galatians 5, "The fruit of the Spirit is...what?...all attitudes, love, joy, faith...and so forth...goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, self-control." That's attitude fruit. Now watch. The result of attitude fruit is action fruit. If you do action fruit without attitude fruit, that's legalism. Did you get that? 'Cause you're cranking it out in the flesh. If you walk in the Spirit, the Spirit produces the right attitude that's producing the right behavior. If you're just out there subscribing to some code, bypassing the attitude, that's legalism.

Now mark it. The legalist and the truly liberated godly, Spirit-filled Christian may do the very same things. One does them in response to the Holy Spirit; the other does them to try to buy favor with God. Do you see the difference? Well, this is an important issue, and I don't think that you wanna ever get in the place where you evaluate your spirituality by what you don't do. Very, very dangerous.

How can a Christian be popular with the world? The answer is by being a lousy Christian. There is no way that, when you define your Christianity, you can ever really, in the truest sense, be popular with the world. I think that Christians who have a warm and loving spirit, who do good unto all men, as the Bible says, not just to the household of faith; Christians whose lives are exemplary; Christians who meet the needs of the those who are in need, like the Good Samaritan; or Christians who supply for those who have lack; Christians who are loving and kind and gentle will have a certain amount of popularity. They'll have a certain amount of acceptance with the world. Those who are diligent, those who are faithful, those whose morals and ethics are above reproach, will be respected by the world; but in terms of actually being accepted in the system, being a Christian eliminates that possibility. "What fellowship hath light with darkness?" Right? Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the 6th chapter in 2 Corinthians. He said, "There is no fellowship at that point." The more defined your Christian faith becomes, the less able you are to accommodate the world; and if you're really bold and honest as a Christian, you're going to find yourself having to confront the world with honest answers, with honest comments about the true problems of the world, and you'll be very unpopular.

Another question. Now, these are not full answers. Lemme give you a short answer to a question. First Timothy 5:4, really jumping and running, but stick with me. First Timothy 5:4 is talking here about widows who would be serving in the church. "If any widow have children or nephews, let 'em learn first to show piety at home and requite their parents, for that's good and acceptable for God." What is piety? The question is what does piety mean in this verse?

The...the Greek word means to act reverently, and I think the only thing it's simply saying is this: that there should be an acknowledged reverence toward God, toward mother, father, duties, relationship, etc. Fulfill the role. That's all it's saying. I don't know any...anything more specific in rela...relation to the question than to say, "If a widow has children or nephews, let them learn first to...have all reverent attitudes in all relationships in...the home and requite their parents, for that is good and acceptable before God." Just talking about the fact that children should be reverent. They should, as the Old Testament says, honor their mother and father, honor even the grandmother and the grandfather. Show concern and reverence to everybody connected to 'em.

I don't...I don't think that it's talking so much about holiness as it's talking about reverence toward the position of authority and responsibility that adults have in a home, and that attitude should come from the heart of a child.

Let's pray. Lord, we just thank You for a good time sharing together. It's been lengthy, but, Lord, we've covered so many good things; and, Father, we're just so thankful that the Bible has answers to the cries of our hearts and the questions of our minds. Lord, we just really praise You for the good fellowship we've shared tonight as a family...We are just thrilled and amazed, the completeness of this revelation, and amazed at the wonder of knowing Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Oh, Father, if

there's some tonight who don't have these answers, who don't know You, we pray that tonight will be the night when they come to meet You. That tonight will be the night when they place their trust and faith in You, and begin to have that invisible means of support, that resource that is unending and eternal. God, we just pray that You'll take whatever needs to be applied to our hearts for much that was said and do that. We give You the praise in Jesus' blessed name. Amen.

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