Making the Hard Decisions Easy
Selected Scriptures
80-24

I told you this morning that I want to just share some things very practical from my own life, along the line of making the hard decisions easy. And I want to pull together a lot of things out of the Word of God. But before I do that, just a little bit of introduction.

The Bible is very explicit on matters of sin. There's not any reason to wonder what it is that God forbids. You can start with the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord lays out the things that He does not permit. There are other things which God commands us to do and not to do those is sin. We are not in the dark about sin. The things explicitly spelled out in the Scripture are very clear to us. We know what's wrong. We also know what is right in regard to many things, for God has given us very clear word on that.

Now we don't want to talk about what is explicitly right and what is explicitly wrong in the Scripture, we want to talk a little bit about what falls in the middle, because that really poses the difficult problem when it comes to decision making. If somebody proposes to you the possibility of lying, cheating, stealing, killing somebody, committing adultery, coveting, that's pretty obviously not acceptable. If somebody proposes to you the idea of reading the Bible, praying, witnessing, sharing the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word with someone who needs to hear it, that's pretty obviously right.

But what about all that stuff in the middle to which the Bible doesn't explicitly speak? And this is a large category. For example, there are some people who say that there are certain foods we should eat and certain foods we should not eat. There are those today who would want to bind us to an Old Testament dietary law and tell us that true spirituality is really involved with what you eat. And, of course, if you eat pork, or any thing that's not kosher by Old Testament law, you've committed a sin.

Other people would tell us that you can drink certain things and not other things. And if you drink certain things, that's sinful, and certain other things are not. And there's a lot to be said about that in Scripture but no specific prohibition regarding what we may or may not drink.

Some people believe, and this might sound strange to you, but it's true, some people believe that sports are sinful. In fact, I know a man who feels that way very strongly and says he's writing a book on the sin of sports. Now some of you don't believe it's a sin, to you it is a god. And you bow down and you worship it every opportunity you get.

There are some people who believe television is a sin. If you own a television, you're not spiritual. There are other people who are zombies. They stare at that box. Doesn't matter what's on, even a test pattern tickles their fancy, and they'll watch it as long as the fuse lasts.

Some people would say that if you go to a movie you've committed a sin. If you enter into a theater, you're participating in ungodliness. If you plunk down your - I don't know, whatever it costs to go to a theater - that you are paying money into the godless, movie-producing industry. Other people say,

“Well, you can go to a movie and it’s a diversion, it’s recreational. You can see the beauty of certain scenery,” and so forth.

There are people who think that if you do anything on Sunday other than sit and read the Bible, you have entered into sin. You’re not - when I was a little guy growing up, I can remember when we were back in - particularly on the east coast, in Philadelphia - you were not allowed to do anything on Sunday that even remotely resembled recreation. We came home in our Little Lord Fauntleroy suits, with the little stiff collar, and a little tie, and sat on the couch all day. Couldn’t read the funny papers, couldn’t read the sports page, couldn’t look at television, couldn’t go out in the yard and play catch, couldn’t take a walk. We sat. The only sin we could commit, and we could commit that sin all we wanted, was the sin of gluttony. We could literally gorge ourselves on Sunday. And, of course, most of the women spent all morning cooking up this massive meal by which we sinned all afternoon, but couldn’t - but couldn’t run it off. And so we were stuck with the consequence of our evil. But that sin was tolerable. And in most evangelical circles it still is - as given evidence by the shape of most evangelicals. But anyway, we’ll stay away from that one.

I remember as a little boy that you could play cards. You could play cards as long as the cards didn’t have jokers, spades, clubs and those other things. If they had anything else but those, they were okay. But if they printed those on them, that was sinful, and no self-respecting person would ever pick up a card and see one of those markings on it without dropping immediately lest he commits some evil. Now you could play “Pit” and scream, and shout, and throw things, and that was all right, but watch what’s on the card.

There were people who believed that certain games were sinful. Certain games like “Monopoly” taught materialism and there should have been a game called “Humility and Poverty” for those who really wanted to pursue true spirituality in their recreational life.

And then there are people who believe that it’s a sin to stick leaves in your mouth and set them on fire and blow smoke through your nose. I was just in North Carolina and I saw most of the deacons doing just that. And I asked somebody how it is that that’s not a sin and they said they all raise tobacco back here so that’s not a sin.

But anyway, there are other people who say that if your hair is too long, that’s a sin. And if it’s too short, that’s not a sin unless it’s really too short, and that may mean you’re gay, so find a middle ground somewhere so you’re not sinning on either end.

There are people who believe certain clothing styles are basically reflective of a sinful society. Now I don’t understand the fashions today. I really don’t. Personally, I believe God is symmetrical. You understand that? I believe God is symmetrical. He likes the same thing on both sides of you. But I see, I see clothes that go every which way. I mean, crazy things like exploding things and everything all around. But I think God is a God of symmetry. But anyway, that’s just me. I like a pocket on both sides of my shirt, what can I say?

And there are some people who feel that certain musical styles are sinful. Rock music is sinful. And we might even agree with that. Country and western is definitely sanctified. They must not be listening to the words.

There are some people who think that it's okay to have boys and girls together swimming, and there are some, many in the south, for example, who believe that's a sin. They call that "mixed bathing" and that is forbidden.

But there are a lot of things like that that enter into the area where the Scripture really doesn't have anything to say and so we're left with having to make some decisions. Now the easy way is to make up a list of rules. That's very easy. We'll just decide. We'll get a committee and we'll say, "This is wrong. This is wrong. This is wrong. This is right." We'll just live by those rules. And if you keep the rules, we'll call you spiritual. And if you don't keep the rules, we'll call you fleshly. That's the easy way out.

As Christians, we need to know how to make decisions about those kinds of things. There are these things that face us every single day in our life. How do we decide? Well, I'm going to give you two handfuls of principles, all right? We're just going to lay them before you. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on them except to share them with you. These are the things that I use in my own personal life. I sat down one day and just wrote them down, just out of my own experience. I didn't have to go study to figure them out. These are the things that I ask myself periodically whenever I'm faced with making a decision that isn't black or white in Scripture. The sooner you learn to apply these things, the more you will enjoy your spiritual experience, and understand what it means to be free in Christ, and yet submissive to His perfect purpose.

Number one principle. And I'm going to give you ten, I think, if we have time. Number one. And you're saying already we won't. But I'll fool you. Number one. I'm going to do this tonight, folks, in the next few minutes. Number one. I ask this question. Will it be spiritually profitable? Will it be spiritually profitable?

Look with me at 1 Corinthians 6:12. A familiar text, I just want to touch on that. We studied it in detail in our study of this wonderful epistle. But notice verse 12, watch it carefully. 1 Corinthians 6:12. "All things are lawful." Now let me qualify that by saying this, all things that are not unlawful are lawful. That's what he means. There are some things in Scripture that are already said to be unlawful or sinful. He's not talking about those things. What he's saying here is all things that are not unlawful are lawful. Okay? All things in that sort of middle ground, that non-moral area are lawful for me. All things not unlawful are lawful to me. "But all things are not - " now this word literally means " - to my advantage." They are not to my spiritual advantage, they don't profit me.

So, I ask myself the question that Paul is posing right here. Will my doing this enhance my spiritual life? Will it cultivate godliness? That's a fair question. That's a basic question. Will it cultivate godliness? Will it be profitable to me? Will it be to my advantage? Will it profit me?

There are some things that are not wrong. I think about sleep. Sleep is not wrong, sleep is good. I try to do that now and then. I'd like to do it more than I'm able. But there's nothing wrong with sleep. In fact, there's nothing wrong with sleeping in. Do you ever look forward to a morning when you can sleep in? Sure you do. Sometimes it's Sunday morning, but the Lord will punish you for that.

But I mean, we all look to those times when we want to sleep in. I mean, that's a wonderful thing. But that good thing of sleeping in and collecting your physical strength, if done too frequently, will not be to your spiritual profit because it will cultivate what? Laziness. In and of itself, it is not wrong, but it

creates a habit of dullness. And overdone it is not to your benefit.

Now there are many things like that in life. Whatever they might be, you ask yourself the question, will it be spiritually beneficial? Will it be to my profit? To my advantage? Will it cultivate godliness?

In other words, I'm not looking at life from the standpoint of, boy, can I do this and get away with it? I'm looking at life, can I do this and have it increase my godliness? Will it be spiritually profitable? Let's call this the principle - and you can write this one down - of expedience. The principle of expedience. Is it expedient for my spiritual benefit?

Principle number two - and I'm just touching lightly on these. Principle number two, and it's a very close parallel, will it build me up? Will it build me up? The first one simply looks at it in isolation. Will it profit me spiritually in itself? The second question, will it put me on the path to greater spiritual maturity? Will it build me up? First Corinthians 10:23. Go over a few chapters. First Corinthians 10:23. He gives basically the same idea. "All things are lawful - " that is, all things that are not unlawful are lawful, all things that aren't right, that aren't wrong in themselves. "All things that are not unlawful are lawful for me, but all things are not profitable." Same thought. Then this. "All things are lawful for me, but all things do not - " what? " - build me up."

So, I ask the question, will it build me up? And the word is "*oikodomeō*," it means "to build a house." Will it add to my life things that increase my spiritual stability, strength and maturity? First Corinthians 14:26 says, "Let all things be done unto edification." Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:19, "*We do* all things, dearly beloved, to build you up." In 1 Corinthians 9:24, back a chapter, Paul says, "You know that we run and we all run in a race, but only one receives a prize so run that you may win the prize. Every man that competes in athletics is temperate - " that is self controlled " - in all things." Why? Because he wants to win. Verse 27. "I bring my body into subjection." Literally, he says, "I keep under my body - " means to give it a black eye. "I punch my body in the eye," if you will, "I buffet my body," not buffet my body. "I buffet my body, I give my body a black eye for the purpose - for the purpose - of keeping it under control, in order that what I do may be self-edifying." "I make my body my slave," would be another way to translate that.

Frankly, and this is an honest thing for us to admit, most of us are slaves to our bodily desires, right? I mean, we basically respond to whatever physical impulses are there. That's why I've always said in the matter of self control and self discipline, there are several key elements. You remember, we covered this some months ago. To be a self-disciplined person, you have to train yourself in discipline.

And I use a lot of little practical things like, for one thing, always do the most difficult task - what? - first. That helps you to learn self discipline. Another one that helps me is always be on time. In order to do that you've got to order the diverse elements of your life all to converge to have you in the right spot at the right moment when you're supposed to be there. That's a control. That indicates you can pull the pieces together and manage. And another one that helps me is learn to say "no" when you have every right to say "yes." In other words, when you have a right to go out and just have a great big huge meal and top it off with, you know, hot fudge sundae, or whatever, just say "no" so you can say to your body, "See, I'm still in charge." Cultivate self control. When you control your desires with your mind, your spiritual mind, you exercise the right muscles in training yourself for godliness.

So, I ask myself the question, if I do this, will it build me up? Will it strengthen me? Will it move me toward Christ's likeness? Toward greater spiritual maturity? Let's call that the principle of edification. So the principle of expedience and then the principle of edification.

The third principle, and for this one turn with me to Hebrews chapter 12 - Hebrews chapter 12. And let's ask a third question. Are you ready for this? Will it - and this is the negative side of the two we just mentioned - will it slow me down in the race? If I'm running, as 1 Corinthians 9 says, if I'm running to win the prize, if I'm running to obtain, then I have to ask myself if this will slow me down. Notice Hebrews 12:1. We are in a race, the race of faith. We have seen in chapter 11 a host of people who lived by faith and they are living witnesses of the validity of living by faith. They are the cloud of witnesses who tell us to live by faith.

You know, back there at the beginning, verse 4, "By faith Abel ... by faith Enoch ... by faith Noah ... by faith Abraham ... by faith Sarah ... by faith Jacob ... Isaac, Jacob ... by faith Joseph ... by faith Moses." And it goes on to talk about by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, by faith the harlot Rahab and then Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, on and on, and on. Men and women all living by faith.

Now with so many people testifying to the significance of the life of faith, we are also to live by faith, to run the race of faith. Now, in order to do it successfully, notice verse 1, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Now the key that I want you to notice, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin." Now what do you conclude from that? That the weight is different than what? Sin. We are to lay aside sin and we're to lay aside the weight. Well, what's the difference? To run in this *agōn* from which we get the word "agony," which is the word for race, this demanding grueling life of faith requires determination, perseverance, self discipline. And in order to do that, we have to lay aside every weight as well as sin.

Now what is "every weight?" The word is onkos. It simply means "bulk." Bulk. It isn't sin. It's just needless bulk, something that weighs us down, diverts our priorities, takes our attention, sucks our energy, dampens our enthusiasm for the things of God.

Now let's take an athlete who is going to compete in the 100 meters, and let's say that before he ran in the 100 meters, say in a world class event, he went out and got drunk and committed sins of dissipation, and then came in and tried to run. He would be running without having set aside sin. He sinned against his own body and sucked out his strength. But let's assume that he trained perfectly, that he did everything he was supposed to do in the process of preparation, he was in top physical shape, everything was as it ought to be in his training, his moral life was clean, he didn't dissipate his body, but he came in and decided to compete in combat boots and a wool overcoat. That wouldn't be sinful, but it would be pretty stupid. That would be unnecessary bulk.

Let me put it simply to you. Is it sinful to go out with your wife on a Saturday night and have a late dinner and just eat a nice big meal and then go for a drive and sit in front of the moon at the beach and tell your wife how much you love her and go home at two o'clock? Is that sinful? No. You say, "I

wish my husband would do that." But, let's add one other dimension. You have a prayer meeting at 8 o'clock Sunday morning and you have to teach the Word of God at 8:30. Let me tell you, it's not sinful to do that, but it is a lot of unnecessary bulk that will have an impact on what you're able to do the next morning.

So, there are some things in our lives that we restrict for no other reason than that they would slow us down in the race, right? That's why for me, for example, Saturday night is a very sacred time. It is a "do nothing" time. I can remember when my boys were playing football games. Thankfully the last one is finished with his football career now, Mark. And I can remember Saturday night football games, and I would go out, and when your son is playing football, you get into the thing. I get into it anyway, having played so much and loving the game. And you're watching your son, and your emotions are running high at a fever pitch, and you come back and you're playing the game over and over, especially if your son breaks his leg and he's in the hospital, as happened at homecoming last year and he severed his femur right at the growth plate, and we're there half the night, and we've got to get up the next day and preach the Word of God, and so forth. You get your emotions and your mental processes running down the wrong channel.

Now it's not sinful to go watch your son play baseball, eh, football unless you think football is a sin. And that's your privilege, I guess. But the point is, you add to your life unnecessary bulk. You don't need that. You don't need to encumber yourself with that.

There's lots of forms of bulk: Legalism, ceremonialism, needless waste of time that sucks your energy and fouls up your priorities. So you ask yourself a simple question, will it slow me down in the spiritual race? Anything that impinges upon my effectiveness in serving Christ, I won't do that. It might be something in and of itself is not evil, but it becomes a needless weight for me to bear. Let's call this the principle of excess, of excess.

Number four. Number four, will it bring me into bondage? Will it bring me into bondage? First Corinthians chapter 6, back to the verse we started with, 1 Corinthians 6:12. Listen to this. "All things that are not unlawful are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient or profitable." Then this, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of - " what? " - of any." I will not be brought under the power of any. I will not allow anything to master me, to master me.

We should never allow a non-moral thing to become our master. And yet there are people - think of it, man, the king of creation, we saw it in Psalm 8, we heard it sung. "What is man that thou art mindful of him. You've made him just a bit lower than the holy angels. You've crowned him with glory and honor. You've given him dominion over creation. He rules the beast of the field, the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea. He rules the land and all it produces. Man, the king of the earth." But isn't it amazing how he yields up his sovereignty to the stupid little things?

How many men have turned into absolute slobbering, blithering idiots because they can't control what comes out of grapes? How many people have ended up dead because they can't deal with tobacco? How many people literally have their lives totally run by a television, which is a bunch of wires that were invented by man, the king of the earth? All of a sudden television is king, television is sovereign, and man is nothing but a slave to that. Drugs, invented really and discovered by man for the benefit of those who have need of them, becomes the master of so many men, so many women.

There are many things that can enslave us that come from creation, which God designed to be ruled by us. So I ask myself the question, will this put me into bondage? I remember a particular preacher who was preaching the circuit in evangelism and finally had to leave evangelism because he was so engulfed in losing money in golf that he literally bankrupted himself, getting to the point where he was playing for three and four hundred dollars a hole in a golf match. There are a lot of people in this world controlled by a little round ball like that, a lot.

There are those kinds of things that inherent in them take control of us, take control of us. I watch that happen with music. Young people who are dominated by that. I watch people who are literally paralyzed if they can't get home and see the next edition of the soap opera. So many things can bring us into bondage. Let's call this the principle of enslavement. So we ask, will it bring me into bondage? Does it have the potential to make me its slave? The principle of enslavement.

Number five. This is a very practical one. Will it, number five, will it hypocritically cover my sin? Will it hypocritically cover my sin? You say, "What do you mean by that, John?" Well, I mean this. Am I doing it in the name of freedom when the truth of the matter is I'm really pandering my own evil? Look at 1 Peter 2:16. You know that we want to say, "Boy, I'm free in Christ. I'm free to enjoy this, and I'm free to enjoy that, and I can do this, and I can do that." The truth of the matter is you are free, but you are simply covering over your lust, or your evil desire.

The man who say, "Well, I'm free to do that. I'm free to go here and see that movie. Why, I'm certainly free to do that. I have that liberty. I'm very selective." But when he goes there, he goes with the purpose in his heart of having his own evil desire pandered to by what he sees. He merely speaks of freedom as a cloak over his evil.

Look at 1 Peter 2:16. "Don't use your freedom for a cloak to cover your evil." A veil over your evil intent. Be honest with yourself. Ask yourself, is this really something that benefits me spiritually, is for my spiritual profit? Is this something that builds me up? Is this something that is not unnecessary bulk, but something helpful? Is this something that will not lead me into bondage? Or am I really cloaking over my evil desire? Look at your motive. Look at your motive.

People say, young people say, "Well, the Bible doesn't say you shouldn't dance. David danced before the Lord." Well, I can tell you one thing, he didn't dance the kind of dance people do today. But people say, "What's wrong with dancing?" Ask yourself the question. Am I advocating dancing because I know it will build me up spiritually? Because I know it's not unnecessary bulk, it's very important to my spiritual progress and there's no way it can enslave me? Or am I desiring to do that in the name of liberty, in the name of freedom, but the real motive is because of my own lustful desire? You see, I've got to get down to the motive and ask myself the real question.

You see, Galatians 5:13 says that it's a very common thing to turn liberty into - what? - license. And you have to guard that. You have to guard that. Let's call this the principle of, so we can stick with our *E* here, equivocation. E-Q-U-I-V-O-C-A-T-I-O-N. That means to lie or falsify. And there are people who literally falsify their motives. "Well, I'm free to do that. I certainly am." And they're equivocating. They're lying. They want to cover their evil intent.

The guy who says, "Hey, God made horses. I'm free to go to Santa Anita. I go out there and enjoy God's creation. Those horses just run and I say, 'Praise You, Lord. Look what You've made,' while

I'm dropping money all day long." And what you have there is a cloak of liberty put over the top of an evil intent, which is to gamble, which, of course, is to take the stewardship that God has given and throw it into the air at the discretion of chance. So, we ask ourselves, will it hypocritically cover my sin? That's the principle of equivocation. Am I falsifying a true motive?

Number six. Now this is a very important one. Will it violate the lordship of Christ in my life? Will it violate the lordship of Christ in my life? And for this one I need you to turn to Romans chapter 14. We spent a long time there, but this will refresh you, I think, briefly. Will it violate the lordship of Christ in my life?

Now listen to this basic thought, all right? Grab this one. Every Christian should live in submission to the lordship of Christ. Everybody agree on that? All of us are to live in submission to the lordship of Christ, true? Do you understand that? Then do you understand this second point, that not all of us agree 100 percent on what the Lord would have us to do? Is that right? Some people think the Lord says no to this, and other people think the Lord says that's okay. Some people think the Lord says it's a sin to do this, some people think it's okay.

Now listen, not all of us, we would know the explicit things in Scripture, sure, but not all of us agree the same about what the Lord would have us do. Some people think the Lord wants you to read your Bible every morning of your life and if you don't, you've sinned against God. Some people really believe that. Some people believe if you don't go to Sunday morning, Sunday night church and Wednesday night prayer meeting, you've slipped spiritually. Other people are not bound in their conscience to do that. They can go Sunday morning, they can go Sunday night. Whether they go Wednesday night may be a matter of convenience. There are some people who want to read the Word as often as they can, but they're not bound in their conscience to read it every morning of their entire life.

There are people, you see, who sense the lordship of Christ in different ways. Now please notice in Romans 14:1, well, let's start at verse 2. "One believes he may eat all things, another who is weak eats *only* vegetables." You've got people who are vegetarian. They think the Lord wants them to eat only herbs, and somebody else says, "Hey, you can eat anything you want." "The one who eats, don't let him despise the one who doesn't eat. The one who doesn't eat, don't let him judge the one that eats, for God has received - " both implied "Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls; and he'll be held up. God is able to make him stand. One man esteems one day above another - " that is, he wants to keep the sabbath, make something special out of Sunday. He's what we call a sabbatarian, or one who sets the Sunday or the sabbath aside.

"Another esteems every day *the same*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regards the day, wants to keep that day sacred, he does it unto the Lord. He that doesn't regard it, he does it unto the Lord, too, cause he thinks the Lord is the Lord of every day. He that eats, eats unto the Lord. He gives God thanks. He that doesn't eat, to the Lord he doesn't eat and he gives God thanks that he doesn't eat. Nobody lives to himself, and nobody dies to himself. We live, we live to the Lord. We die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live, therefore die, we are the Lord's."

In other words, whatever may be the restrictions in a Christian's life, he does them because he believes that's what the Lord wants. You got that? He believes that's what the Lord wants. Now listen to me. As long as you believe that, then do it or don't do it. And ask yourself the question, is this something I believe the Lord would want? Is this something I believe the Lord would not want? And

that's a matter of - what? - conscience. You say, "Well, what if your conscience is wrong?" Don't violate your conscience. You'll never know if your conscience is wrong because if your conscience tells you that, it's because you think it's right.

You've got - conscience only reacts to the mind. And in your mind, if you believe a thing is right, your conscience will stop you, or your conscience will impel you. The conscience is only a flywheel, the mind is the engine. The engine produces the action, the flywheel only engages behavior. And the conscience only takes what's in the mind, engages the flywheel, as it were, and generates behavior. If you violate your conscience, you're going to train yourself to do a very bad thing because as your mind grows to understand better what is right, when your conscience, then, tells you if you've trained yourself to violate your conscience, your conscience isn't going to do you any good. So don't train yourself to violate your conscience. And that's exactly what he's saying. You ask yourself the question, will this violate my understanding of the lordship of Christ?

Some brother might come to you - and this happens all the time - and say, "You can do that. Go ahead, you can do that. You're free. You're free. You're free. Why you can do that, that's not wrong. That's perfectly all right." If it violates your conscience - what? - don't do it. Don't train yourself to ignore conscience. Paul says, "I never do anything against my conscience. I don't want to sear my conscience with scar tissue so it's insensitive." The person who keeps the sabbath, if a person wants to sit on a couch and that's his way to keep the sabbath, don't bug him about that. Don't reprimand him about that. Don't push him.

I'll never forget the most classic illustration of that my father told me. He was in Michigan on a revival. And on a Sunday night he said to the pastor after the meeting, they started off for a week of revival meeting, the pastor said to him, "What are you going to do tomorrow?" And he said, "Well, I thought we'd get up in the morning and play golf. And then in the afternoon we'll do some visitation."

The pastor said, "Golf? During a revival? Aren't you committed to the work of God? Did you come here to play or to minister?" He got very eloquent. My dad said, "A little of both." He said, "In fact, I'd like you to come and we could have some fellowship in the morning and get acquainted." He said, "Never. Never. I commit myself all week long to prayer, all week long to the revival."

And my dad said to him to him, "No. I think it would be great if you'd come. And the song leader's going to go and it would be nice if you came along."

"No. I would never do that. I would never do that."

Well, Monday morning they were at the golf course and guess who showed up? The reluctant pastor. And he said, as the story was related to me, "I'm going to do this, but I know I shouldn't do it. I'm doing it out of hospitality. I know it isn't right."

Now mark this, first hole, they teed off, half way down the fairway somebody yells, "Fore." The pastor looks up and loses two teeth. My dad said he fell down beside a tree saying, "I knew it. I knew it." And you want to know something? If he believed golf on Monday morning during a revival was wrong before that, you can be sure he believed it was wrong after that. So all you did for that man was push him deeper into his lack of freedom, his bondage.

Don’t do that. Don't do that. He read that as the judgment of God. And you want to know something? It well may have been. God doesn’t want any man to violate his conscience. So we don’t want to do things that are going to lead people to ignore the lordship of Christ which they perceive coming through their conscience. Let’s call that the principle of encroachment. That means you’re encroaching on the sovereignty of Christ in the life.

If I choose to do something - let me sum that one up - if I choose to do something, it must fit within what I believe is the will of Christ my Lord, right? I don’t want to violate that. I don’t want to violate that. To violate that in my mind would be to take the control of my life, wouldn’t it? To usurp the lordship of Christ. I don’t want to do that. That’s encroaching.

Number seven. This is basic. Will it help other Christians by its example? Will it help other Christians by its example? Boy, that’s so important. We really do have to govern our lives by how other Christians will feel. First Corinthians 8:9. You remember this one? “Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a - ” what? “ - stumblingblock to them that are weak. Somebody sees you sitting in an idol temple, shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat the things which are offered to idols,” and so forth and so on. And then he’s going to be destroyed because he followed your example. He’s going to violate his conscience, wound his weak conscience. And you’ve sinned against him and sinned against Christ. Don’t do that.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, “I have a right to be paid for my ministry. I choose not to be paid. I don’t want anybody offended,” right? “So I set that aside.” In Romans chapter 14, where we have been, from verse 13 on, that’s the whole thing. “Don’t put a stumbling block or occasion to fall in your brother’s way.” If your brother is grieved with your food, change your food. That’s what it says. “Follow after the things - ” verse 19 “ - that make for peace, and build each other up, and don’t destroy the work of God in his life because of your food.” Don’t eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother stumble, be offended or made weak.

It’s so important. Flying home from Charlotte, North Carolina the other night, the stewardess comes down the aisle and they’re serving, I don’t know, champagne breakfast, or whatever, and she said, “Would you like some champagne with your breakfast?” And I like orange juice, personally, and I’ve never had champagne anyway, so but, you know, just, you just kind of thought kind of enters your mind, “Wonder what that stuff tastes like?” But, of course, I said, “No, I don’t want any champagne.” And so the thing went down the aisle and it was a simple little thing.

And I stood up a little while later, just to kind of stretch, and I was standing in the aisle and a guy about two seats back walks up and says, “I know you. You’re John MacArthur.” I said, “Right.” He said, “Oh, it’s so wonderful to meet you.” He said, “I’m studying for the ministry and I get the tapes,” and he went on and on with this wonderful testimony. He’s from Samoa. He came to the United States and he’s going to take all of our tapes to Samoa. And, you know, here was this thing and I just - you know. It just reminded me of how you may know when you’re being watched and you may not know when you’re being watched, and the pattern of your life is setting an example.

And it’s so wonderful to be able to limit your liberty and know that it will strengthen someone else. In fact, he commented that he had been watching me through the whole flight and hoping for an opportunity to speak to me. So, that was a wonderful, wonderful reminder for me of the fact that people are always watching. And my visibility is certainly more severe than yours.

But nonetheless, we have to ask ourself the question, will it help other Christians by its example? Am I doing something that sets an example for them? You know, even just little things in life, the discipline of your life, the fact that you watch your diet, or your weight, or you have a certain discipline time of study says volumes of people who are checking in for patterns to follow. And those little things in life can be so important.

So, do I want weaker Christians to follow my pattern? Let's call this the principle of example, of example, the principle of example. So, what have we got? The principle of expedience, edification. What's the next one? Excess, enslavement, equivocation, encroachment, example. Let's go to number eight. I love this one. Will it lead others to Christ? Will it lead others to Christ?

"Let not your good be evil spoken of," the Bible warns. Will what I do lead others to Christ? Boy, that's so important. Will they see a difference in my life? Will there be something unique about my life? Let me give you a classic illustration. Turn to 1 Corinthians 10, this is so practical. 1 Corinthians 10. Now it's a little bit obscure in the text, the English text, but the background is so great. Here's the picture. Now just listen for a minute. Here's the picture, right? Two Christians, two Christians. One is a very strong mature Christian - we're going to look at verse 27, 28, 29, right in there, 1 Corinthians 10. The first Christian is a very mature, very strong, very liberated Christian. He can eat meat offered to idols. He knows what 1 Corinthians 8 said is true. An idol is nothing, what's the difference?

Well, you know what the process was, right? You go to worship some idol, right? Let's say you go to some great temple and you'd bring your offering, which is food. And you put your offering on the altar. Well, you know as well as I do that the god is a dead god, he's a dead idol and he doesn't eat it. It just sits there. So after it sits there for awhile, and hundreds and hundreds of people keep bringing the food in, the priests take it away and they keep what they want to eat. Now they can't eat it all because there's less of them than there are of people making offerings, so they run the temple butcher shop out the back door. What they don't want, they take out, sell on the street at the best price because there's no mark up for them, they got it for nothing. So you want to buy cheap meat, you buy it from the temple butcher shop. That makes sense. Your wife would shop there, so would mine.

Now the problem is this, okay? You've got a guy who's a mature Christian. He says an idol is nothing. What's the difference? I'm a steward of my money. I'm buying it there. It's good. It's healthy. It's as good as anywhere else. And I'm not going to be concerned that it was once offered to a dead idol that was nothing anyway. But, he goes out for dinner with a brand new Christian just converted out of that same idolatry. And he has all in his mind the pagan idolatry, the cultic worship, the orgies, the temple prostitutes, the whole ugly, gross, immoral scene. And if he was told that something he was going to eat was meat offered to that idol, it would just gag him. He couldn't do it. He's a weaker brother who doesn't understand his freedom but we understand that. He's just come out of that.

So the two of them, the strong and the weak, they have a friend in common who's an unbeliever. They want to win him to the Lord. So the friend that's unbelieving invites the two of them to dinner and they go to dinner. That's the idea of verse 27. "If any of them that believe not bid you *to a meal*, and you be disposed to go, whatever is set before you -" what? You don't say, "Sir, sir, sir, where did you buy this?" "Just eat it, don't ask questions for your conscience's sake. But if the man voluntarily says, Hey, this is bargain meat offered in sacrifice to idols." Oh brother - the guy comes out and says, "How do you like this beautiful roast? Boy, is that good. Yeah, I got it down at the temple

butcher shop - what a bargain." And the weak Christian goes, "Oh."

The guy goes back out to get the rest of the meal, what's going to happen in the conversation? The strong Christian is in a dilemma. The weak brother says to him, "I can't eat that. I can't eat that." The strong brother says, "But if you don't eat that we'll offend the guy we're trying to evangelize." But if they go ahead and eat it and don't offend the guy they're trying to evangelize, then he will have offended his brother, cause him to stumble.

So the dilemma is this. Do you offend another brother or do you offend an unbeliever? That's the question. Do I offend a weaker Christian or do I offend a non-believer? What does it say? "If any man say to you this is offered in sacrifice to idols - " what? " - don't eat it for his sake that showed it and for - " what? " - the conscience of that weaker brother."

Wait a minute. Do you mean when you're trying to evangelize an unbeliever you're better off to offend the unbeliever than you are your Christian brother? Yes. Isn't it obvious? If you offended your Christian brother, the unbeliever would say, "It's better to be an unbeliever than to be a brother. They offend each other. They don't offend me. I'll stay where I am." See the point?

Well, when you offend that unbeliever and say, "You know, this meat offered to idols would so offend my brother that I just can't eat for his sake." That unbeliever is going to say, "Now, there is a brotherly love that I would like to experience." And the attraction of your love may be the greatest testimony that you have in evangelism.

So, I'm asking myself - and there's one illustration - the question, will it lead someone else to Christ? As I restrict my freedom, am I doing it with a view to winning someone to Christ, showing him a different life, showing him something that he doesn't see in his world, a purity, and an honesty, and a love, and an integrity?

In Romans 14 it tells us that we are to be approved. We are to live lives, at the end of verse 18, that are "approved by men." They say, "Boy, that's a different life." That's the principle of - here's another one – evangelism. The principle of evangelism. In doing this, is this enhancing my opportunity for evangelism?

Number nine. Number nine. Here's another question you ask. Will it be consistent with Christ's likeness? Put it another way, would Jesus do it? Boy, that's a heavy duty one, isn't it? I've used that since I was a kid. Would Jesus do this? Would Jesus say that? Most of the time in our lives we're saying, I know Jesus wouldn't have said what I just said, or Jesus wouldn't have done what I just did.

I ask myself that before, not after, and prevent things that otherwise might not be prevented. Simple. Would Jesus do it? Boy, that will really help you with a lot of decisions. Would Jesus do this? Would Jesus say that? Let's call that the principle of emulation. We want to emulate Christ. We want to emulate Him. First John 2:6. First John 2:6 says, "He that saith he abides in Him - " that is, in Christ " - ought himself also to walk, even as He walked." If you say you belong to Christ, you ought to live like Christ lived.

So, I ask myself the question, would Christ do this? Would Jesus do this? Is this consistent with Him, with Christ's likeness? That's such a provocative question. Would Jesus do this? The principle of

emulation.

Number ten, the last one. Very simple. Will it glorify God? Will it glorify God? And you know as well as I do that these kind of overlap. You ask yourself, will this glorify God? And the reference is 1 Corinthians 10:31. First Corinthians 10:31. “Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, - ” what’s the rest? “ - do all to the glory of God.” That’s the sort of total covering principle. Will it glorify God? And let’s call this the principle of exaltation.

We’ve been singing praise all night, and so we have to go beyond that and say, “Is my life going to give Him glory? Will this exalt God? Will this lift up His holy name? Will this honor Him? Will this adorn the doctrine of God in my life? Will He be glorified, and honored, and praised as a result of this?” That’s the principle of exaltation.

Now are you ready for the wrap up? Did you notice something? You couldn’t have missed it. All ten begin with what? Now listen. I call these the *E*s of decision making.” Not bad, right? This is the *E*s of decision making. This takes something very difficult and makes it - what? - easy. You got it, very good.

Now the point is, we can make the hard decisions easy if we use these principles. Will it be profitable to me spiritually? Will it build me up? Will it slow me down in the race? Will it bring me to bondage? Will it be simply a covering for my sin? Will it replace the lordship of Christ in my life? Will it set a helpful example for others? Will it lead others to Christ? Will it be like Christ? And will it - what’s the last one? - glorify God? Does that help? Let’s bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the principles that govern our behavior, and that You have not only given us the principles but You’ve given us the living Holy Spirit to activate these principles, that we might do the things that please You. Lord, help us to have wisdom to make right decisions and to know that right decisions are based upon these principles. And we thank You for what You mean to us, for what You’ve provided us in Your Word and through Your Spirit, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

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