

Making Decisions on Non-Moral Issues - John MacArthur

The following message was delivered at Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California, By John MacArthur Jr. It was transcribed from the tape, GC 80-95, titled "Making Decisions on Non-Moral Issues." A copy of the tape can be obtained by writing, Word of Grace, P.O. Box 4000, Panorama City, CA 91412.

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Romans 14-15

I want us to go to Romans, chapter 14, and I want us to look at a principle, which is essential for us to understand. And it is one that is lofty and strategic and we cannot close out this book without some grasp of it. It has to do with the matter of how we live our lives. It is a very practical, very pragmatic thing, and in particular, how we live our lives with regard to issues which are not moral in themselves, which are not either righteous or unrighteous, which are not either good or bad, which are not either black or white. How do we deal with the issues of life that are not moral in and of themselves? Such issues as food, drink, recreation, television, movies, books, magazines, sports, Sunday activities, cards, games, smoking, hair styles, clothing styles, music styles, etc., etc.

None of these, in themselves, are moral issues. How are we to deal with them? Those of us who have grown up in Christian families and Christian institutions and Churches and have strong Christian backgrounds, particularly if we have come from fundamentalist roots where there was a great circumscription to the authority of the Word of God and to holy living and all of that, are used to having had to grapple with those things. We grew up (I did) with certain taboos. There were things that were absolutely forbidden, they were not Biblical issues, but they were forbidden. There were certain things that we were not allowed to do. They had no moral character inherent in them, but they were certain things that were on the list of forbidden things.

I went away to college, at a very narrow, kind of circumscribed legalistic school, and everything was reduced to rules. We had rules for everything. In fact, we used to say the school song was, "I don't smoke, and I don't chew, and I don't go with girls that do!" And that sort of summed up the whole approach to spiritual life. Everything was reduced to some kind of list of things that were forbidden. That's pretty typical for an older generation of Christians. That is pretty typical today for a more contemporary church in other parts of the world. Certainly the church in Eastern Europe has many traditions and many rules that binds its conduct in nonmoral issues. One of the things that struck me as a fascinating thing about the Church in the Soviet Union is that if you are really spiritual, you button all the buttons on your coat. If you have any of them unbuttoned that is a sign of a lack of spirituality. If you are sitting on the platform and your legs are crossed or your feet are crossed, someone will poke you and say please uncross your legs or uncross your feet, that is not a spiritual way to behave.

There are many such things that exist in various different countries and cultures of Christianity and Christian tradition. The question comes, "How do I deal with all of that?" There are some people, for example, who feel that there are certain foods that are wrong. Even in America we have advocacy groups in Christianity who are trying to hold up an Old Testament, Jewish ceremonial dietary law as binding on Christians today. There are some who want to say that it is all right to drink wine and other alcoholic beverages in moderation, and there are others who say it is absolutely wrong to do that. There are some who believe that recreation and sports are a form of evil. There are others who feel that they are not. Some who feel television in itself is inherently evil and they should not possess it, others who do not. Some who think movies are evil and some who don't. There are those who believe that it is wrong to do anything on Sunday, absolutely anything. I remember in my childhood, in Philadelphia, where we spending part of our life when I was young, it was not allowed for us to do anything, I mean absolutely anything, on Sunday. We came home from church dressed in our little Lord Fauntleroy suits and we sat all day. We couldn't go outside and play, we couldn't read the paper, we couldn't engage in any activity at all, we only sat. However, there was one sin in which we could indulge without limit, and that was the sin of gluttony, because all I ever remember was from the time we got home until we left for Church at night--we ate huge meals. And so that seemed to escape the list somehow.

I grew up in a situation where if you had your hair over your ears as a man, if you had your hair touching your collar it was considered evil. You were not permitted to do that. There are still churches that I know of, in recent years, even in the San Fernando Valley, where if you tried to go in there with your hair on your collar they would turn you away at the door, and that still goes on. But we were taught that men and women were never to be swimming in the ocean, or a lake, or a swimming pool at the same time. I went to a college where they had different hours for both sexes using the swimming pool there. We were taught certain music styles were in and certain were out. Certain clothing styles were in and certain were out. We were taught that if you smoked that was a sin. Those were the issues. I had the opportunity to preach all through the South in churches where the whole congregation made all of its money through raising tobacco and the pastor didn't really have too much to say about smoking because it was an economic issue there. And so that wasn't a problem for them; it was a major problem for others to the point where if you saw someone who smoked, you sort of felt that that was a preview of where they were going to spend the rest of their eternity. And that was just the way it was.

So all of us have sort of come in and out of Christianity with certain taboos and certain issues thrown at us in one way or another, and we need to be able to know, "How do we react to nonmoral issues? How do I make decisions, because that's the crux of life." It is not difficult to make decisions about things that are flatly laid out in Scripture in the Ten

Commandments and other instructions that relate to sin and righteousness. But where the real difficulty in spiritual living, and where the real challenge is, is in this matter of the non-black and white issues, the gray areas, the nonmoral issues. How do we deal with them? Things created by God, things allowed by God, things that exist in society and culture that have no inherent moral character. How do we deal with them?

Now there are two basically popular ways to deal with them. One is the way of the legalist, you just make rules. We will tell you: "You can't do this, you can't do this, you can't do this, you can't do this, sign on the bottom line." That is very typical. When I went away to a Christian college, that is exactly what I did. I signed on the bottom line of a long list, "I won't do this, I won't do this, I won't do this, I won't do this, as long as I am here." And you sign it and that's it, and everything is cut and dried. They will tell you exactly what you can and cannot do. It's all prescribed for you, you don't have to think about it, you don't have to meditate about it, you don't have to search the Scripture about it, you don't have to talk to the Lord about it, you don't have to consult the Holy Spirit about it--you have the list! And you just conform.

On the other side, I guess what you would call the "Libertine Folk" who don't want anything to do with "the list," and they want to say we are in grace, we are under grace, grace surrounds us, and everything that we need to do will be driven by some kind of impulse within us, and if we mess up God will forgive it. One very popular book says don't even worry about getting to the edge of your liberty because if you happen to fall into sin God will forgive it anyway. So you just sort of do whatever you want, and they really are very mad at the people with "the list." And they think the people with "the list" are narrow-minded fundamentalists, (as someone said, fundamentalist is no "fun" to much "dam" and not enough "mental"). And that would be the way they would define fundamentalists, and they think they are over subscribed to rules that don't matter. And these fundamentalists on this side look over here at the liberated people and they say, "They are running amuck, they are running off of the deep end, they are not constraining their lives towards holiness, they are doing whatever they want. This kind of "supergrace", indulge yourself and if you happen to bump into a sin just ask for forgiveness and keep on enjoying the edges of your liberty, is absolutely beyond what God would want."

So you have these two extreme approaches, neither of which is right. Neither of which is proper. What we want to know is how to deal with these nonmoral issues without making a rule that makes us mindless and subscribes us to a forced kind of conduct which cultivates no relationship with the Lord. And we also want to avoid the abuses that come when we do whatever we want and just blanket it with the word grace.

Now in order to come down the middle and do what is right we need to ask some questions. And I believe that we have a couple of those questions and then we will look at a few more. But a couple of them right here in Romans 14 and 15. I can't unfold all of this in the time we have, obviously, but I do want to get you in touch with the heart of this section. In chapter 14, Paul is facing an issue, and this is kind of how the issue plays out. In the Roman Church there are some obviously new converts, of course most of them were relatively new in Christ, but some very new converts. Some of them have come out of Judaism and they have been all of their life in Judaism, and Judaism is a very prescribed, circumscribed, legalistic life pattern. In fact, everything from the way you dress, to the way you prepare your food, to the way you eat your meals, to what you do with day and night, with weeks and months, and with years is circumscribed in the ceremonial and the Sabbatarian laws of Judaism.

So you have people who had certain approaches to feeding their families, certain approaches to preparing their meals, certain approaches to clothing, certain approaches to life patterns, life styles, Sabbaths, New Moons, feasts, festivals, and all of that. They come to Christ. In Christ, all of that is past. The ceremonial law is set aside (Acts 10 makes that abundantly clear, Colossians 2 makes it abundantly clear). The Sabbath laws are set aside. We are in the New Sabbath which is Christ, Christ is our Sabbath, He is our rest, of which that Sabbath was only a picture, and that is why in the New Testament all the Ten Commandments are repeated except "To keep the Sabbath" because the reality has come and the picture is no longer necessary. The reality is there--the shadow is not important.

So we are now in the "rest" of Christ, we are in the New Sabbath in Christ, but here you have a Jew who has come to Christ. He is now in Christ, but he has had ingrained in him for so long that he is to keep the Sabbath day holy, and some Christian brother goes to him and says, "Hey, we are going down to the shore and we are going to go swimming (on a Sunday), do you want to come?" And he is saying, "Now wait a minute, this is my new day to worship the Lord, shouldn't I treat my new day the way I treated the Sabbath?" Or he might even say, "I'll be at Church on Sunday to worship with you but I still got to keep the Sabbath. God is still the true God. I now fully understand who He is and who He is revealed in Jesus Christ, and I still have to keep my Sabbath so I'll be there Sunday to worship with you but on Saturday I am going to keep my Sabbath." And you want to say to the guy, "Look, you can enjoy Sunday afternoon swim if you just understand your liberty. And you can forget Saturday all together if you just understand your liberty." But for him that is very hard because this is a life long pattern in which he believed he was honoring God. And he was--in his own conscious.

And then you got a Gentile, and this Gentile has been worshiping false gods and idols, and involved in that worship he would go to the temple and they would offer offerings, they would bring food and they give some of the food to the god and then they would sit off and eat some of the food. So this was their worship, and then they would engage in prostitution, and wild music, and orgies, and gluttony, and all of the horrors of the pagan mystery religions that found their form in Paul's world. And this guy would come to Christ. And he would come to Christ and he would want to cut himself off, rather than the Jew who wanted to hang on, the Gentile would want to cut himself off from all of that dirty vile, filthy former way of life, which involved eating certain foods and drinking certain drinks and engaging in certain music and all of that. And somebody might say, "Well, you're free in Christ, you can eat anything." And he would say,

"Now wait a minute. If you bought this in the butcher shop that's outside the temple, it might have once been offered to idols. I can't eat it and the reason is it conjures up my old life with all its debauchery. I want nothing to do with it."

Now, Christianity would say, an idol is nothing (1 Corinthians 8). You don't need to be worried about that. That idol is a nonentity, it's nonexistent, it's a fabrication of imagination. What was offered to that idol isn't anything. You can eat it if you want, it doesn't make a bit of difference. It doesn't matter. I remember as a child trying to prove that point to a kid who was a friend of mine--I drank his bottle of Holy Water. I mean it was an insensitive thing to do, I admit, but I was just trying to get the point across. Now, see you will forget everything I said today but you will not forget that. For him it was a horrible thing, because he put so much stock in that. But you see when we are in Christ we are free from those things. What you do in a false form of religion doesn't mean a thing, it has no value, it has no meaning, it has no significance. And I was insensitive in what I did and Paul is saying, "Look, you don't want to be insensitive towards people who have some baggage from their former life that compels them to behave in a certain way."

Now, when we are talking about Sabbaths, and we are talking about foods and drinks, and what we do on certain days, we are talking about nonmoral things. So in chapter 14, Paul says this, "There are some who are weak in the faith," (verse 1). Now, in verse 2 he says, "One man has the faith that he can eat anything, but somebody's faith is weaker, and he wants only vegetables." Why? He's afraid he might eat something offered to an idol. Ok? It bothers him and it bothers his conscience because it conjures up his old way of life. It's like the kid who's been in "Heavy Metal Acid Rock" and he gets converted to Christ, and he wants absolutely nothing to do with that, because all it does is remind him of the trash of his old life. This person wants to move away from this. So Paul says, "Look, let not him who eats regard with contempt him who doesn't eat. And let not him who doesn't eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him."

Look, God accepted both of you, you've got your baggage from your former life and you got your baggage from your former life, just live within your conscience and don't judge each other. And then he goes on to talk more about that, he says, in verse 5, "Somebody wants to maintain the Sabbath Day, somebody else doesn't, well let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes it, does it for the Lord (verse 6). The one who doesn't, does it for the Lord. The one who eats does it because he thinks it pleases the Lord, the one who doesn't eat, does it because he thinks it pleases the Lord." And he follows that same point down to verse 12, where he says, "So, each one of us shall give account of himself to God." Verse 13, "Therefore, let's not judge one another any more."

Now, this brings us to the first principle. Ok? Here it is, principle number one in dealing with the gray area, principle number one, I ask a very basic question, "If I do this, will it violate my understanding of the Lordship of Christ? Will it violate my understanding of the Lordship of Christ?" Or, to put it another way, "Will it violate my conscience? Will it violate my conscience?" You see, my conscience is the convicting voice of my belief system. Did you get that? Your conscience can only act on what you believe, and if you are a Christian you have a belief system in your mind and your conscience reacts to what you believe, and it makes you do certain things.

We talk about people who are perfectionists. Somehow in their mind they have been made to believe that you have to do everything perfect and they are going to go to the very nth degree to make sure they do that. It isn't that, that's a divine law, it's just something that got planted in their belief system. Let me give you an illustration of it. We have all been very much aware this week that a world famous athlete has told everybody that he has the HIV virus. When he found out that he got the HIV virus his conscience went into motion, and his conscience said, "I need to be honest about this and I need to speak the truth, and I need to become an advocate for 'safe sex'." And so he took what he thought was a conscientious, bold stand, and the whole world is applauding this man because he has done what his conscience dictated him to do. His conscience said, "Come out, be open, be honest, and have the courage to admit that you didn't engage in 'safe sex' and you need to warn people to engage in 'safe sex'."

This is a perfect illustration of a man who has so long indulged in sin that his belief system doesn't include abstinence. That's not in his belief system. He isn't saying, "I'm telling you, be pure! Do not engage in sexual sin!" No. That's not what his conscience is telling him because that's not in the computer, that was abandoned, who knows when (if it ever existed). So you have a very conscientious, very bold, very straight forward, and in the eyes of the world, a very honorable act by a man, who convicted by his own conscience wants to tell the truth and call people to a higher standard of behavior. The problem is, the standard of behavior to which his conscience calls him is far removed from the one that is in the Word of God. Your conscience does not have an independent, divinely authored belief system. It only reacts to the belief system in your mind.

And so, if you have been raised in Judaism and piled on with a whole lot of stuff, or if you have come out of a Gentile culture, you've got certain things in your mind that make up your belief system that activates your conscience. And so what Paul is saying is, "Look, just ask this basic question: If I did, would it violate my conscience, because my conscience, now that I'm a Christian, is going to convict me of things that I will assume are things that displease God." So I ask the question, "Will it violate my understanding of the Lordship of Christ?" If it violates my conscience, it will. There maybe somethings that I am free to do that I chose not to do, because I believe that it will dishonor the Lord, because that's just the way my belief system is put together.

My belief system is the result of the Bible, it's the result of my parent's teaching and influencing me. It's the result of all the other influences in my life. It's the result of my own personal experiences. It's the result of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. It's the result of books I have read and messages I have heard and tapes that I have listened to. And that whole system comes together and in a sense my conscience reacts to that and Paul is saying, "Look, let the man work off

of his conscience." Why? Because once you begin to ignore your conscience you will train yourself not to listen to your conscience, and then when your conscience is giving you the right information, you will be able to ignore it. It's a form of training. Don't train yourself to ignore your conscience. If some brother over here wants to behave in a certain way because that's the way his conscience convicts him, let him do it. Don't sit in judgment on him. Don't try to push him in the other direction.

I always think about the story my dad told me about the time he was holding evangelistic meetings in the Midwest and he preached on Sunday all day and they were going to preach every night, and do like a revival, and he said to the pastor, "We want to play golf tomorrow morning." And the pastor said, "We can't do that, we are supposed to have a revival this week, we are supposed to be doing spiritual ministry." He said, "We could never play golf, why would you want to play golf? We are in a spiritual struggle here." My dad said, "Well, I just thought we have some fellowship and get acquainted and play golf and then we'll get involved in the ministry the rest of the week." He said, "Naw, I could never do that." Well, so my dad and his song leader went out to play golf and sure enough the pastor showed up, I guess he felt like he needed to be a good host. He said, "I shouldn't be here, but I am here." And my dad said, "First hole, first hole." And as they are walking down the fairway and a guy teeing off, coming the other direction, hit a ball into their fairway, bounced up and hit the pastor right in the mouth! To which he responded, "I knew it, I knew it, I knew it, I knew it."

Now, by encouraging this man into his liberty, you set him back into legalism for the rest of his life. I mean, he will never believe anything other than that God hit him in the mouth with a golf ball for showing up on Monday. You are better off not to force anybody into a liberty they don't enjoy in their own conscience, because if anything goes wrong, they will go deeper into their own legalism.

We want to do what the conscience tells us to do and so with a young Christian who doesn't enjoy certain freedoms that you might because you are more mature in the faith, you want to be very sure you don't push that young believer and teach that young believer to go against conscience, because then when conscience gives the pure right call for righteous behavior, the person has learned how to ignore it. Not a good habit to get into.

So the first thing is: I ask myself, "Will it violate my understanding of the Lordship of Christ or will it violate my conscience." The second question I ask: it is this question, "Will it help others by its example? Will it help others by its example?" Now Paul goes to that one in verse 13, He says, "Look, not only don't judge each other and push people against their conscience, but don't ever put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way." And then he goes on to talk about things that aren't unclean in themselves, things that aren't wrong in themselves, but you can use them to cause someone else to sin. He goes all the way down to verse 20 and says, "Don't tear down the work of God for the sake of food. Don't tear down the work of God for the sake of some liberty."

People ask me all the time if I drink wine? And I say no. "Never?" No, I don't drink wine, unless I am somewhere having a communion service and they happen to serve it at the Lord's Table--No. Well, they say, "Is wine sinful?" No, it's not sinful, it's just inanimate, it's just there. It's not good, bad, or indifferent, it's just there. "Why don't you do it?" Well, there's one really compelling reason for me. First of all, I have a whole study on the fact that wine in the New Testament was mixed with water, in fact, mostly the wine they drank came from diluting a grape paste, which made it diluted with water to the degree that you couldn't drink enough of it to get drunk because it was so much water, you'd be full before you were drunk. That's why the Bible warns about strong drink which is unmixed wine, but I am convinced that Jesus and those in the Scripture, in the New Testament, were really drinking a grape paste diluted with water, which in effect was drinking water, but water that had been purified by the fermentation process in the grape paste. But anyway that's another issue. My point is this, no matter what it was, what happens if I drink wine? What happens if I drink? Well, I'll tell you what happens, somebody whose asking the question, "Should we drink wine?" says, "Well, John MacArthur does, and after all he's the pastor of a Church and he's a Bible teacher, and he does it, and if he does it, he's got to be pursuing godliness, it must be ok. And somebody else says, "Good, I'll follow John MacArthur in that and drinks and becomes drunk and does something disastrous. So if I can avoid setting any kind of pattern that somebody is going to follow and stumble into sin, I want to avoid setting that pattern, because I don't want to lead them into that. That has to do even with the food, from the standpoint, it is of concern to me that I not become obese, not only for the sake that I don't want to waddle around, and I don't want to be physically unfit, but I don't want to make somebody else assume that that's ok. Because I want to be temperate and moderate in my life so that others will see a pattern that is reasonable for them to follow. And I am not going to abuse some liberty with inanimate, nonmoral things that sets an example for someone else that leads them into some kind of pattern for sin.

I follow that same pattern in my own life when it comes, for example, to going to a movie. People say, "Do you ever go to the movies?" Well, I don't. And there are a couple of reasons. One of the reasons is, as soon as I go, somebody sees me go, they assume that that's fine for everybody to do, and then they expose themselves to things at a movie that I would never expose myself too. And I just want to be careful. I want to take the "high ground" if I can on those kinds of issues. I'm not commending myself, I'm just saying my conscience tells me that, because I believe that's how the Lordship of Christ operates in my life, and I never want to do anything that's going to cause another Christian to stumble.

Matthew 18 says, "I would be better off if a millstone were put around my neck and I were drowned, than to make another Christian stumble into sin." So I have to ask that question. I'm certainly not going to destroy somebody just because of what I want to do in my own liberty or my own freedom. Down in chapter 15, he follows this same thought up, verse 2, when he says, "Let's each please his neighbor for his good, to his edification." I'm really after my neighbor's edification and spiritual growth.

Let me give you a third question, and for this one we bounce out of Romans into 1 Corinthians, but it is so germane to the point that we need to look at it. 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 12, (and these questions interweave and overlap), but in 1 Corinthians 6:12 Paul says this, "All things are lawful for me." He means all things that are lawful. He is not talking about sin here, obviously. But he is saying there is a category of lawful things. But look at this, "But not all are profitable." Here's another question I ask, Not only will it violate my conscience or my understanding of the Lordship of Christ, not only do I ask will it set a good example for others, but here's another question: "Will it be spiritually profitable?" "All things are lawful he says, but not all things are profitable." That is to be to my advantage, to profit me. Will it be a direct assistance to my spirituality? Is it going to contribute immediately to my godliness? Is it going to be to be to my spiritual advantage? I mean there are many things in life that fit into this.

I often think of Proverbs which makes such a big point about the sluggard, the guy who sleeps all the time. Sleep is a gift from God, is it not? It's not moral or nonmoral, it's just there. It's just sleep, we have to have it, it rejuvenates the body, it's absolutely essential. Sleep is there, but sleep can become a nonprofitable experience, especially if you do it while I'm talking (may God hold you forever accountable), or if you do it when you ought to be up at work, or if you do it when you ought to be speaking to your family and teaching your children and carrying out spiritual ministry, or whatever. I mean it could be anything. You have to ask the question, "If I do this is it profitable?" In other words, will it make a direct and immediate contribution to my spiritual well being? Pretty simple, basic, practical question. But that's absolutely crucial for me to ask. Will it make a difference in my spiritual life.

Go over to 1 Corinthians 10:23 (comparative text). 1 Corinthians 10:23 again says it, "All things all lawful--but not all things are profitable." It might be all right to play golf. The question is, "Would it be profitable to do that, if in doing that you took time away from the worship." It might be profitable to be in a bowling league, but is that really profitable if it means you forfeit teaching of the Word of God, being involved in a Bible Study or nurturing your children. I mean these are all the questions you have to ask. Is it spiritually profitable? You might say, "Yes, because I enjoy the fellowship, I have an opportunity to witness to unsaved people." The answer is whatever it is in your own life and experience, but that's the question you have to ask.

So he says it there in verse 23 again, but notice the end of verse 23, 1 Corinthians 10, "All things are lawful--but not all things edify." Not everything is going to build you up. That word edify (oikodomeo), "oiko" house, "domeo" domestic, domicile, to build a house. Not everything is going to put the pieces together in constructing your spiritual house the way you would want it to be. Not everything is going to contribute to your spiritual development. 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul says, "Let all things be done unto edification." 2 Corinthians 12:19, "We do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying." I just want to do everything that's going to build me up. I can ask myself that question about anything and I do it all the time. If I read that, if I look at that, if I go to that, if I experience that, is that profitable spiritually and will it build me up? Is it a contributor to a disciplined spiritual life? Is it a contributor to self-control? Is it a contributor to edification? Is it going to be something that will strengthen me?

Go back to 1 Corinthians 6 for a moment, let's complete this little circle in 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful--but not all things are profitable." And as we saw in chapter 10, not all things edify. Now, look at this one, "All things are lawful for me--but I will not be mastered by any." Now, he adds another question, not only, "Is it profitable? Does it build me up?" But, "Does it have the potential to dominate me? Does it have the potential to dominate me? Will it bring me into bondage?"

I don't want to be mastered by anything. There are so many things in life that can master you. Again, I remember my father telling me about a man who was a minister, a very gifted evangelist, who eventually had to completely get out of the ministry because he started out enjoying golf and ended up gambling for huge amounts of money and was totally disqualified from ministry. How in the world can a man let an inanimate ball destroy his life? I have been in mental institutions, and I have seen brilliant people with earned doctorates sitting in there drooling in straight-jackets in the cuckoo's nest, because they were controlled by grapes or hops. An utterly inanimate thing, just a thing, totally controls them.

And I have asked the question many times, "How can people even smoke? How can they do that?" Why does, first of all, anybody want to put a pile of leaves in their mouths and set it on fire and blow smoke out their nose? What is the point? Why does anyone want to do that? And when you know that everyone of those things is just a coffin nail--why? And then you stop and realize, man, the king of the earth, man the epitome of creation, man the very image of God is controlled by a pile of weeds. What? Absolutely unbelievable. I don't want to do anything that's going to control me. Nothing.

Some people are controlled by an electronic box, it controls them. Some people are controlled by certain "Soap Operas"--runs their whole life. Some people are controlled by music. If there isn't music going they are in sort of an apoplexy. Some people are controlled by fashion, you know. They just have to be there all the time getting all the stuff. It just dominates their life. There isn't anything wrong with being clothed, we hope you would do that. But you see that there are things in life that enslave you, so Paul says "Look, I have to ask some basic questions here, and one of those questions is 'Will it bring me into bondage?'"

Let me pose another question briefly, 1 Peter 2:16, "Will it violate my conscience or my understanding of the Lordship of Christ? Will it be a bad example or a good example to others if I do this?" Those are the questions. "Will it be spiritually profitable? Will it build me up or will it enslave me?" Here's another question, 1 Peter 2:16, (My, this is a good one), he

says, "You're free in Christ. You can act as free men." But look at this, "Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil." So I ask this question, "Am I exercising this freedom to cover my sin?" What does that mean? That means I say "I'm free," I say "I'm free," I say "I'm free and I am really enjoying my freedom in Christ," when the truth is, that is nothing but a hypocritical excuse for my desire to indulge in sin. Right? It is just a cloak for my lusts. It's a veil over my evil intent. I weary of this and it is very popular today. People putting the veil of grace over their evil intent. They want to do what they want to do, and they want to lust when they want to lust, and they want to have when they want to have, and they want to engage in what they want to engage in, and they just put the cloak of, "Free In Christ" over all of their behavior.

Be careful that you are not doing that. Peter says, "Don't do that." Don't ever use your freedom as a covering for evil. Don't kid yourself saying, "I'm free to go and engage in that; I'm free to go and enjoy that entertainment; I'm free to go and experience this; I'm free to buy that; I'm free to do this," and all it really is your excuse for indulging your lust. So ask yourself honestly, "Am I hypocritically simply veiling my sin with a false understanding of grace."

Let me give you another one. This is a very important question, 1 John 2:6. I ask myself another question about this gray area, and it is this, look at verse 6, "The one who says he abides in Him," Him being Jesus Christ. We abide in Him, of course, by saving faith. "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." Here's another question, "Would Jesus do this? Would Jesus do this?" Is that a fair question? It's a question that I have asked myself thousands and thousands of times, "Would Jesus do this?" That's very basic. "Would it be consistent with Him? Would it be the way He would walk?"

Some you may have read the book, "In His Steps" which makes this the thesis. As a Christian, I should be always asking the question, "Would Jesus do this?" And maybe that is the overarching question. I mean all of these sort of interface and overlap as I said at the beginning, and they really cover, in some way, the same ground. But this one has to be the simplest and most straight forward one, "Would Jesus Christ do this?" Because, then that makes me ask, "Well, if He would do it then it certainly would fit under His Lordship." If He would do it, it certainly would be a good example to others. If He would do it, it certainly would edify and build up. If he would do it, it certainly wouldn't enslave in some bad way. If He would do it, it wouldn't be bad, it would be good. If He would do it, it certainly wouldn't be a cloak for some evil intent, if He would do it.

And then one last note, this is very basic, 1 Corinthians 10 (and you are familiar, I know with this principle), verse 31, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." This is a magnificent text, listen to what the text is about, I won't take you into the details, just listen to the story. Two Christians go to dinner at an unsaved man's house, that is what's behind this. They want to win the unsaved guy, right? They have got one strong Christian and one weak Christian, one old Christian and one new Christian. They go to an unsaved man's house. The unsaved man sits them down, [and they say], "We are so glad to be here. It is so wonderful that you would invite us for dinner," and there they want to witness to him, these two Christian guys. So the man brings out this big plate of meat and the weak Christian looks at it, and he says to his strong friend, he says, "Hey, do you think this is meat offered to idols?" And the strong friend says, "So what, an idol is nothing. Haven't you heard 1 Corinthians 8 circulating around, you don't need to worry about any of that stuff, just eat the meat will you. We are trying to witness to this guy." He says, "Idolatry! That was offered to idols. All that garbage, filth, I can't eat this!" "You have got to eat this, if you don't eat this then we are in real trouble!"

Now the strong Christian has got a problem. The strong Christian either offends the weak Christian, or he offends the unbeliever. Who does he offend? The right answer, he offends the unbeliever. That's what it says, "Offend the unbeliever!" You say, "Why?" Because if you offend the weak Christian, the unbeliever is going to say, "I'm better off unsaved." Right? "He's nice to me, and those Christians, boy they don't get along at all, do they? What a strange bunch they are." What kind of testimony is that? Jesus said way back in John, "They are going to know you by your what? By your love." So what you say is, "I cannot eat this, as much as I would love too, and as deeply appreciative as I am. I can't eat this because, you know, that my brother came out of temple and out of this paganism, and he just can't eat this because it just brings up his old life, and I love him so much I just wouldn't offend my brother." And the unbeliever is going to say, "I would like to be a part of people who love like that."

And so he says, "Look, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God. Don't give an offense to the Jews, the Greeks, or the Church of God if you can help it. Try to please everybody." If you get into a fix, as he just pointed out, you have got to make a choice. But do everything you can to please everybody. Why, "Not seeking your own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved."

Now, here's the simple principle, do everything you can for the glory of God so that people may be, what? Saved. So I ask this final question, "If I do this, will it have evangelistic purposes? If I do this, is it possible that somebody might get saved?" I'll do it to God's glory and for the salvation of souls.

Now, back to my original thoughts. If you come to the difficult things of life (the gray things) and you make a list--you can just live off of your list. It's spiritual sterility. You don't need the Lord. You don't need a prayer life. You don't need to cultivate searching the mind of God. You don't need to pursue intimacy with God. You don't really need to know the heart of the Spirit. You don't need to dig deep into the Word of God--you just keep the list! And over here, if you are just going to live in free grace and run wild all the time and be unfenced, you don't need the Lord either, because you are not worried about anything, you just go and do what you want. The only time you need Him is you happen to sin, you can ask

Him to forgive you and then move on.

In either case, this is the key, you never cultivate an intimate, ongoing, continual, deep, meaningful relationship with the living Christ. But if you are going to live the way we have laid it out this morning, you are going to be daily, daily, daily seeking to know the mind of Christ. Right? Because you have to. Because you have to make these decisions constantly, over and over. And all it does is drive you into the depths of knowing Christ, which is the goal of everything in our Christian experience.

Father, thank you for the Word to us this morning, for its directness, its power, its practical impact in our lives. We are grateful when we look to see the profound character of Scripture, and at the same time, how specifically and how practically it forms itself into principles by which we can guide our lives. Help us Lord to ask these questions so that we may please you in all things, to the end that many may be saved. That's why we are here, and to that end we pray. Amen.