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## Like Mere Men

In I Corinthians 3: 1-4 the apostle Paul refers to some “brethren” as carnal. Carnality means to be governed by one’s natural fallen condition. After mankind sinned, “prone to sin” became the natural condition. There is a remedy for carnality. It’s spirituality, which means being under the influence of the Holy Spirit, which is analogous to being under the influence of wine.

For a Christian to be carnal is like living in an Arctic house with the furnace turned nearly off. With little influence from the furnace, the house returns to the natural condition – cold. Mind you, the house has a furnace, but it’s turned down. A carnal Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit is grieved, quenched, and largely ignored. Why would anyone live in an Arctic house with the furnace turned down? Perhaps to save fuel cost. There is an explanation. Still, it’s a poor choice. And there are reasons Christians minimize the influence of the Holy Spirit; nonetheless, it’s a poor choice.

Sadness over carnality underlies this book. However, its content will not cure the ailment. I believe this book will help someone who is eager for truth, someone whose intellect is weighing evidence. But foundational to good lifestyle choices is being under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18

A word of warning. Should you pursue holiness and purity, do not be intimidated by accusations of legalism and unChrist-like separation from lost people. James 1:27 names two characteristics of “pure and undefiled religion.” One is visiting orphans and widows; the second is keeping oneself “unspotted from the world.” Such religion has an outreach dimension and a personal holiness dimension. The two dimensions are compatible.

## Green Sock Supposings

In a Christian school class designed for Christian growth my students welcomed discussions about sinful or questionable activity. They were prone to ask "What's wrong with \_\_\_\_\_?" I wanted to avoid "savory" reviews of wrong. So I found myself repeatedly saying something like "Suppose it became clear that God didn't want people to wear green socks. Would you commit yourself to not wearing green socks? Unless your answer is 'Yes,' there is no reason to discuss what is wrong with \_\_\_\_\_."

As we are confronted with questions of right and wrong, good or bad, wise or unwise, let us first be committed to choosing God's choice.

## Holiness and Legalism

"Holy" does not mean super-spiritual. Genuine spirituality cannot be overdone. To be holy means to be set apart. God is holy in two ways. He is set apart from all creation; uncreated and greater than creation. His glory is unique. This kind of holiness is sometimes called His transcendence. A second way to be holy is to be set apart from sin and defilement, as God is. Only in heaven or a new kingdom will we be completely set apart from sin, but we should pursue such holiness: "you shall be holy; for I am holy." (Leviticus 11:44, I Peter 1:15-16).

We are to be set apart *from* sin and *to* God. Some Scripture emphasizes the "to God" part. God told the Israelites "you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure ...." In other verses the "from sin" part is prominent. II Corinthians 7:1 tells us to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness ...."

**Salvation legalism** says grace is not a sufficient source for salvation; that for it God requires more than repentance and faith.

**Lifestyle legalism** is a problem or distortion in the way someone relates to rules. Which of the following describe legalism?

- +Thinking that God delights in me just because I abide by a recommended set of rules
- +To begrudgingly follow a list of rules
- +Keeping rules without having a submissive attitude toward God
- +Promoting rules that lack Biblical or reasonable basis
- +Attributing Biblical authority to rules (even good ones) that lack Biblical basis
- +Having rules that do more harm than good
- \*Espousing rules that annoy some people
- \*Having a long list of rules

I believe the first six are a problem and the last two are not.

In the four chapters of Philippians “joy” or “rejoice” occurs eight times. Each of these Philippian phrases is a “do” or a “don’t.”

“let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ” 1:27

“stand fast in one spirit ... striving together for the faith of the gospel” 1:27

“[Be] like-minded ... of one accord” 2:2

“let each esteem others better than himself” 2:3

“look out ... for the interests of others” 2:4

“Do all things without murmuring and disputing” 2:14

“hold such men in esteem” 2:29

“rejoice in the Lord” 3:1

“beware of evil workers” 3:1

“join in following my example” 3:17

“Let your gentleness be known to all men” 4:5

“Be anxious for nothing” 4:6

“let your requests be made known to God” 4:6

“whatever things are true ...meditate on these things” 4:8

Probably the first New Testament book written was James. Within its five chapters I counted thirty-two statements meaning “do” or “don’t.” The number of times Scripture indicates a “do” or a “don’t” convinces

me that merely having numerous rules should not be called legalism. Professional sports have many rules. Homemakers make many rules.

There are rules not found in Scripture that may be good and right. To imply that they come directly from Scripture would be a form of legalism. But, by themselves, such rules are not legalistic.

Sixteen year old drivers shouldn't have four rowdy passengers.  
Video games may only be played after homework is finished.

Look both ways before entering the street.

Little boys should not play with matches.

Don't leave your car with the keys in it.

Our family will always pray before meals.

Don't slam the door.

Keep your shoes off the sofa.

Make your bed before coming to breakfast.

Call if you are working late.

Check with the cook before inviting dinner guests.

Don't straighten my desk.

Hang up your wet towel.

Thursday night is parents' date night.

Rules are often annoying to the people they are designed to change. For example, someone who drives too fast will probably be annoyed by speed limits.

Is being strict legalism? People may want policemen to be lenient about speed limits, but want a surgeon to be strict about where he cuts. They want a referee to be strict about opposing team fouls and lenient with their favorite team.

What is "too strict?" Too many rules? The rules are too demanding or too limiting? The allowance for shortcomings is too narrow? The attention to enforcement is intimidating? The penalty for breaking a rule is too severe?

Is God strict? It seems to me that God was strict when Uzzah touched the ark of the covenant and strict with Ananias and Sapphira. Yet God's tolerance for Jacob's multiple wives and stand-ins seems not strict. For Jesus to defend David's use of the tabernacle bread seems lenient. The closest I come to understanding the differences is to remember that my parental decisions may have been more consistent than my sons or on-lookers recognized.

I conclude that labeling God as strict or lenient is like assuming we understand the interaction between His justice and His mercy or His wrath with His grace. They are beyond us. So I suggest we not aim to be strict or an opposite. Aim for wisdom.

It has occurred to me that the only things I don't do are things that interfere with what I want to do. I want a pure mind, so I don't watch obscene media. I want a healthy body, so I don't use heroin or tobacco. A positive bias can undermine legalism.

## **Dirty Dirt**

The erosion of dirt from farming fields is a major problem. That dirt is wanted. A landscape project may require dirt by the truckload. Homeowners buy forty pound bags of dark, black dirt. House builders like high plateaus of solid dirt.

But a thin smear of dirt on the farmer's shirt makes his shirt "dirty." People work or pay to remove traces of dirt from a "dirty" car. People dislike "dirty" windows. Gardeners remove their "dirty" shoes and wash their "dirty" hands.

So what makes dirt dirty? Being in the wrong place.

Sexuality as a private expression of marital unity and emotional bonding between a husband and wife is glorious. As public entertainment, it's "dirty."

Privacy enhances the precious quality and value of sexuality. “Dirty” jokes, “dirty” literature, and “dirty” television violate that privacy. If you understand and appreciate the value of sex you should resist its intrusion in the wrong places. Sex is part of God’s “good” creation. Keep it in the right place.

### **Doodling on a Rembrandt**

What really saddens me is seeing a pretty girl with a tattoo. What a mar! I see a young man with a prominent tattoo and I think: surely the day will come when he will regret disfiguring himself.

The New Testament doesn't mention a tattoo. Leviticus 19: 28 does. "You shall not ... tattoo any marks on you." I realize that Christians are not bound by Old Testament law, and that a tattoo may not send the same message today as in Old Testament times. Nonetheless, I think that verse should prompt some analysis. What message does a modern tattoo send? Regardless of the intended message, what message is conveyed?

I'm guessing that a tattoo commonly (not always) reflects discontent. The person was discontent with his or her appearance or share of attention. In this case, discontent is disfiguring. Perhaps the male wanted to appear more fearsome or macho. Perhaps the girl sought to fit in with a fearsome dude. Perhaps the tattoo speaks of a longing or greed for recognition.

I suppose that some Christians are looking for an innocent way to identify with their generation. My suggestion is that you not identify with a symbol of discontent and longing.

### **Stories for a Price**

I don't savor shopping like some do, but I delight in a “good deal” on a car, on clothes, on lots of things. Christian stewards appreciate a good price.

In my mind, a few dimes for an occasional serving of high quality ice cream is good stewardship. But five dollars for the same serving? No deal. Poor stewardship.

How much should we pay for a good story? A good story may be humorous, adventurous, intriguing, educational, mysterious, heart-warming, thought-provoking, and usually some combination of these. I think our attraction to good stories is instilled by God. He tells interesting stories. One of my favorite video stories is Treasures of the Snow, based on the book by Patricia M. St. John. It's both entertaining and edifying. At the price we paid, the video was a good deal. But what if the price were two hundred dollars? No deal. I'm not that needy for a story.

Consider the moral price you pay for an otherwise good, but polluted story. Often what began as a good story becomes polluted with sensuality and profanity. Thus making the moral price too high. Consider the price you pay in terms of good thinking (Philippians 4:8), in terms of keeping yourself "unspotted from the world." (James 1:27) Are you paying too much? Poor stewardship of the mind?

## **Modern Dance**

Among the American Christian taboos common in the past but gaining acceptance is dancing. It's important to note that the dancing shunned is the variety popular in the United States in modern times.

There's no doubt in my mind that God designed for people to dance - to celebrate, to have fun, and to demonstrate happiness. Psalm 149:3, Psalm 150:4, Jeremiah 1:4

Also, I have no doubt that God's good pleasure excludes dancing as an occasion for sensual touch, sensual movement, and sensual gesture. I concede that there are people who have danced in contemporary mode apart from sensual awareness, just as a one-

year-old can wander naked without shame. But it is hard to deny that most modern American dance is laden with sensuality.

Perhaps I need to define sensuality. I've heard the word used in a neutral sense, but not so in the NASB version of Romans 13:13, II Corinthians 12:21, Galatians 5:19, or Ephesians 4:19. In those verses sensuality is bad. Think of sensuality as any attempt to satisfy, arouse, or flirt with an appetite intended, by God, to be satisfied only in private by a married couple.

In my own experience my elders' evaluation of modern American dance brought about a teenage detestation of sin. We had been robbed. Sinful misuse of dancing had spoiled a good thing.

So why not, among ourselves, redeem it? Should churches train people and provide for healthy dancing? Sounds reasonable. But will it work? Can young people, whose environment fosters a twisted sense of normality, be expected to catch on and maintain healthy dancing? Maybe we should just accept our loss and play it safe. I don't know. I can understand either approach. But, let us make it clear. Any person who chooses to dance must accept responsibility for doing so in a wholesome manner.

## **You Lose**

If you gamble (I'm talking about money and plain gambling, not reasonable business risk), you might lose. I'm assuming that is not welcome. If you win, are you taking money from someone who didn't want to give it? A losing activity either way; it makes for a poor sport.

If one gambles against professionals, he usually loses. If he wins, he may be among the many who become addicted, leading to economic shambles. That's not the kind of business we should enrich.

I once interviewed a gambler turned rescuer. He spoke of himself being consumed with the next bet, stealing money, and owing thousands of dollars of casino debt. He referred to others hooked on

lottery tickets, and gamblers with tarnished reputation, decreased ambition and efficiency, carelessness about family, problems sleeping, unmet promises, guilt, and suicidal thoughts.

Some gamble with their life. What about bull-fighting or auto racing? For me? I'm pro-life. I'm convinced that risking your life for an important cause is courageous. To risk your life for a frivolous cause is wrong. Where should we draw the line? I don't know. There are puzzling situations. During the summer of 1968 I drove a city bus, in Chicago, in a poor neighborhood, after dark, while most bus drivers from my side of the city were on strike. I believed there was good reason. But I was scared; especially when that striking driver came aboard.

Satan dared Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple while claiming the Father's protection. Jesus replied, "You shall not tempt the LORD your God." I conclude that taking a clearly unjustified risk, while trusting God for protection, is tempting God. Matthew 4: 6-7.

I admit there are questionable situations. For such occasions, trusting God for wisdom is good. So is asking for advice from a Christian friend. Take a clue from the age old reputation of gambling. On the other hand, "... whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." Mark 8:35

## **Wine**

Wine is OK, drunkenness is not. That's a short version of Bible teaching on potentially intoxicating beverages. So why did I get the impression that total avoidance was the only Christian way? The reason can be appreciated, but such teaching can be problematic.

In the United States 88,000 people die each year in alcohol-related incidents. That's 30,000 more than American deaths in the entire Viet Nam war. Add to that less-than-deadly spousal violence, child

abuse, and the other alcohol related crimes. Intoxication is a gigantic problem. It sneaks up on people. Heavy drinking enslaves many people. We can understand the reason many people, many Christians included, myself included, have decided to abstain totally and recommend that course to their children.

But misrepresenting Scripture is wrong and dangerous. Eventually people learn they were taught amiss and, I imagine, all they were taught becomes suspect. I'll illustrate the danger with a concocted story. (Please remember this comes from my imagination, lest I foster the very sin I'm decrying.) The Scripture part is true.

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" Genesis 2:16-17

When Satan tempted Eve, she quoted God as saying "You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die." Where did she get the part about not touching it? Perhaps from God in a non-recorded conversation. Or what if (here's the imaginary part) it came from Adam? I can imagine Adam speaking emphatically, "Eve, God said not to eat from that tree. Don't touch it, just stay away." And if she wandered near the tree, he repeated his admonition. Perhaps the serpent deceived Eve by touching the tree. "See, I touched it; nothing happened."

The moral of the story is that we need to properly label our admonitions. Our followers need to recognize a distinction between Scripture and man's advice; even though the advice may flow from wisdom. My dad taught me to scorn short-term loan businesses that charge very high interest. The advice was wise and appropriate. But it didn't come directly from Scripture. Now back to alcoholic beverages. I've read that in Bible times the wine was commonly watered down. Nonetheless, Total avoidance: That's fine. Moderate use: Do so cautiously.

## Wine Is OK

"He causes ... wine that makes glad the heart of man ...." Psalm 104:14-15 "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart." Proverbs 31:6 Jesus made wine. John 2:7-10

## Drunkenness Is Not

"Who has woe ... sorrow ... contentions ... complaints ... wounds without cause ... redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine. Proverbs 23:29-30

"And do not be drunk with wine ...." Ephesians 5:18

## Calluses on the Brain

For anyone who does hard physical labor, calluses on the hands are a blessing. But what about calluses on the lips? Not good. Not if you enjoy kisses. What about on the tongue? How about calluses on the brain or on the emotions?

I've heard that repeated exposure to violence desensitizes one to violence. It seems an increased percentage of our society has been dangerously desensitized to violence. Do you want that for yourself or your family members? If not, avoid violence on television, movies, and computer games.

Do you want yourself, your spouse, or your children to yield to non-marital sexual allurements? How can someone avoid yielding if he is frequently seduced on television, movies, and the computer? Perhaps by a certain amount of de-sensitization. Is that welcome? Not for my marriage.

Sexual lust in the heart? Jesus warned us about that. Watching some media is just "asking for it."

"I will set nothing wicked before my eyes ...." Psalm 101:3 I don't believe a television is wicked. But a lot of the programming is.

## TV and Me

In my childhood home some television programs were off limits because of the violence. Another family in the church didn't allow a popular sit-com (which our family enjoyed), because the TV son was sassy to his parents.

By the time I became a parent the content of TV had changed. So I reversed the burden of proof. There were only select programs that our boys could watch.

We monitored the television closely. I recall a son asking to watch a certain program. I said "No," he asked "Why?" and I said "It's not good enough." I didn't want to explain what sensuality is and I was trying to maintain a positive atmosphere.

Having a TV was hard on me. Sometimes I would allow a program, then debate with myself over whether it was indeed "good enough." But turning off a story in the midst was really rain on the parade and hard on everybody. So I suffered through it.

One of the approved programs was the "Waltons." The father was portrayed as wise and kind. But it was often noted that he didn't attend church. I wondered, Is Satan getting the best of me? The grandfather was portrayed as a likeable fellow. As I remember, he went to church to satisfy his off' cranky wife. Again I wondered if Satan were outfoxing me.

Eventually the TV broke. We did without one for ten years.

When our oldest son was a high school junior and the younger in eighth grade we returned to homeschooling. The boys had a decent attitude about that, but they missed the camaraderie of the bigger school. So I wanted to sweeten the deal. I paid \$10 for a used TV, with the intention of watching newsworthy events and sports. But I didn't want the TV to be a source of negativism with me repeatedly saying "No." Hence the rule: You are not allowed to ask to watch TV.

When I know there is something good, I will turn it on. Since we were moving from nothing to something, the boys had no trouble accepting the rule.

Eventually the boys knew which programs I would turn on and they would initiate turning on the television. I think they truly forgot about the rule. I know I did.

Today my wife and I have a TV. Seldom do we watch anything besides news and weather. But the increasing number of offensive commercials has me hitting the mute button. We enjoy watching DVD's that are "good enough."

Our oldest son has four children, ages 9 to 15. He has tried various defense strategies. As of now, the TV is used only for videos. Actually I don't know what my younger son and his wife watch or don't watch on the television. But when their daughter was one year old she was not allowed to touch it, literally!

### **Public Nakedness**

Is the aversion to public nakedness only a man-made societal impression, or is it instilled by God? Are we free to ignore the aversion or is public nakedness morally shameful? Using the Bible as our guide leads to the conclusion that the aversion is part of a conscience designed by God.

The Bible explains that as soon as Adam and Eve became sinners they became conscious of their nakedness and covered themselves. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings." Genesis 3:7 Adam said to God, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." Gen. 3:10 It seems that God validated their inclination when He made more substantial clothing for them. Gen. 3:21

Perhaps nakedness symbolizes our fallen condition. The glory of God's creation is marred. Shame over the spoiled condition should prompt a covering. So why do some people seem to lack appropriate shame? Perhaps they are driven for attention or money. Perhaps their conscience in that area is burned to the point of insensitivity.

Or perhaps nakedness is symbolic of our vulnerability. Animals have tough hide, fur, or feathers. Mankind's body is uniquely vulnerable. So we are ashamed of our vulnerable condition. Before the fall of creation that vulnerability was no problem; but once man sinned, creation fell and our vulnerability was dangerous. Part of the glory of a healthy marriage is feeling so secure in the presence of our spouse that our vulnerability is no threat.

Often the Bible speaks of public nakedness as a cause for shame and a part of God's judgment upon sinners. In a warning of judgment God said, "I ... will uncover your nakedness to them, that they see all your nakedness." Ezekiel 16: 37 "Let her put away her harlotries ...lest I strip her naked and expose her ...." Hosea 2: 2-3 "Pass by in naked shame ...." Micah 1: 11

All of the above makes modesty in dress the right choice for males as well as females.

If public nakedness is a disgrace, I conclude that near nakedness is also, as is simulated nakedness. Webster's New World Dictionary defines "simulate" as "to have the external characteristics of; look or act like ...."<sup>1</sup>

Does that mean that for a woman to be covered from head to toe, with only her eyes uncovered is the ultimate good? No. I Corinthians 11:5-13 prescribes only an isolated situation in which a woman's hair should be covered. Verse 15 describes her display of long hair as an item of glory, not shame. The Psalmist asks God for help for his countenance (face or facial expression). Psalm 42:11 "A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance." Proverbs 15:13 In I Timothy

2:9 women are instructed to "adorn" themselves with propriety. I take it that women should dress to adorn, but not to allure. The same verse teaches that even the adornment should not be fancy. To some extent modesty is relative to what others wear. Conservative dress befits chaste intentions.

<sup>1</sup> Webster's New World Dictionary, (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1964,) p. 1360

## **Implied Contempt**

Hebrews 12:16 describes Esau as a "profane person" because he treated a special family function, serving as the firstborn, as cheap. He sold that status for one meal, treating an honored position with contempt. His was an act of profanity.

Onan was given an uncommon family responsibility. He was to marry the wife of his deceased brother and father an heir for that brother. Genesis 38:7-10 He acted sexually, but selfishly, "lest he should give an heir to his brother." He implied contempt for his responsibility, and turned a noble event into a contemptible one. God killed him.

Profanity is a form of irreverence. Some profanity involves showing disregard or contempt for an object or a name, especially an object or name that is sacred or treasured. Sometimes the contempt is targeted not so much toward an object or name, as toward someone who is hearing the words.

Scripture instructs us to "shun profane and idle babblings." II Timothy 2:16 We are told that uncleanness, filthiness, foolish talking, nor coarse jesting should "not even be named among you."

Ephesians 5:3-4

Some vocabulary, such as substitute swear words and substitute coarseness, seems designed to imply mild or restrained contempt.

Does that qualify as mild or restrained sin? Rather than profane speech, we are called to "honor all people." I Peter 2: 17

## **Help Wanted**

Boys seem drawn to guns; perhaps because a gun has power. My dad owned a .22 caliber rifle. On some of our visits to my grandparents' farm, we went rabbit hunting. A major part of the activity was my dad training me to be cautious with a gun, even if I thought it was unloaded. He taught me that guns have a place. But caution is always required. So we didn't totally abstain from guns. Yet I totally abstain from alcohol. What's the difference? There is another consideration.

To pass on our values to our children, we need help. We need for those values to be reinforced by Christians with whom we interact, especially our church. At the same time, our children are very vulnerable to any expression by us of disagreement, disrespect, or disregard for our church.

It's for sure that your church is imperfect in your eyes, even if you picked the best available. Lest we "shoot ourselves in the foot," we need to be very careful not to undermine our children's respect for our chosen circle of Christians. Even though, intellectually, I am open to moderate use of wine; our church was not. I followed my church because I wanted my sons to do so.

## **You May Kiss the Bride**

I recently read [Preparing Your Teens for College](#), by Alex Chediak.<sup>2</sup> It is excellent. It could be entitled "Preparing Your Teens for Life."

I especially appreciated the clear guideline for physical contact between the sexes. The book says "...all sexual activity belongs only in marriage ...." "Everything sexual belongs to your spouse." And then further clarification: "If it's too intimate to do now with your sister or brother, it's sexual."

These guidelines suggest a fresh appreciation for the wedding permission given after the vows: "You may kiss the bride."

<sup>1</sup> W.E. Vine, Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Co.) p. 594

<sup>2</sup> Alex Chediak, Preparing Your Teens for College, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 2014) pp. 175-176

## **Scribblings for God**

Suppose your three-year-old brings you a picture, saying "Here Daddy, I drew this for you." You look at it and see scribblings. Should you say, "I'm sorry, Honey, it's really not very good. You need to wait until your motor skills are more developed before you draw Daddy a picture?" I think not. You say something supportive.

Do you then proceed to change your family culture so that scribblings become the norm - considered at least as good as Rockwell or Rembrandt? I think not. I think you gently uphold a higher norm for quality art which the child learns to imitate – albeit creatively.

Suppose a pagan musician becomes a Christian. He then writes music. The song reflects his sensitivity to God and his pagan cultural background. Should you say, "I'm sorry, Bro, it's really not very good. You need to wait until you're a mature Christian before you write music for God?" I think not. You say something supportive.

Do you then proceed to change the church culture so that pagan styles become the norm – considered at least as good as Wesley and Doane? I think not. I think we should gently uphold a higher norm for quality music which the young Christian learns to imitate – albeit creatively.

## Knowing God's Will

"Let's try an experiment. I'm going to ask you all three questions. After you have answered, I'll ask my wife. Take my word for it: I've never asked her these questions before."

"Question one. Suppose you and I are going out to lunch. We have decided for me to pick the place. My choices are \_\_\_\_\_. (And I named three similar places). How many of you are confident you know my choice?"

No one raised his hand. I asked my wife; she knew. (We had often joked about my liking a particular place that she disliked).

"Question two. Suppose I have been awarded a free vacation to one of three places. My choices are Washington D.C., Oregon, or Florida. How many of you are confident you know my choice?"

No one raised his hand. I asked my wife; she knew. (I was born in Oregon and had often expressed my desire to show her the Rockies and the northwest).

"Question three. I have been offered a gift certificate. It can be from a bookstore, a sporting goods store, or a camera shop. Which will I choose? How many of you are confident you know my choice?"

One person, a co-worker of mine, raised her hand. She was right, as was my wife. (I read a lot, seldom play sports, and never take pictures).

Now I will ask you the same question I asked the group. What is the key to knowing the will of Scott Long? Answer: knowing Scott Long. The better you know me, the better you will know my will.

There is no secret to knowing God's will. There's no prescribed three step procedure.

Prayer is appropriate. Good counsel is appropriate. But the key is knowing God. The Bible describes His values, His past choices, and His plans for the future. Obedience to whatever you know of His will fosters your knowledge of Him.

## **Wrong Team**

It seems to me that identification with evil people and practices erodes resistance to evil, even if the identifying mark is in itself harmless.

For sure, such identification can be troublesome. Some street gangs adopt a certain color or combination of colors. Simply being in the neighborhood wearing the colors of a rival gang can be dangerous.

Suppose you are not a follower of professional basketball - you don't have a favorite team. However, you attend a game of the Chicago Bulls playing the Indiana Pacers. There you see a teenager wearing a Pacers shirt. Does that bother you? Not me. What if we are told the teen is the son of the Bulls' coach? That would strike us as sad. He's identifying with the wrong team. An identifying mark may be harmless in itself, but it's sad to identify with the wrong team.

## **Stories For A Price Part 2**

Think: stories are like spaghetti. Suppose you came to our house for dinner. In the center of the table my wife placed a large serving bowl of hot spaghetti, heavily laden with sauce and meat. Before we ate I went out to the storm sewer and returned with a jar of gray solution – water, leaves, clay, grit, and whatever. I thoroughly mixed the solution into the spaghetti and gave you a serving.

You might say, “You spoiled the spaghetti.”

“What do you mean? Consider the quality noodles, the classic meat, the celebrated spices, the artistic cooking.”

“You spoiled the spaghetti.”

“Don’t be a prude! Don’t be a legalist! Ignore the parts you don’t like!”

“You spoiled the spaghetti.”

### **Extra-Biblical Wisdom**

My dad taught me that there is an appropriate occasion to borrow money, such as in order to buy a house. He also taught me to hold in disdain payment of 18% interest. Such teaching is what I'm calling extra-Biblical wisdom. It is good teaching. It is not taken from Bible chapter and verse. My message is that such teaching should be given, but it should not be mislabeled as a Biblical requirement.

For example, I appreciate that "fundamentalist" minority of women who shun wearing pants for sake of principle. Often they have been told (1) our society suffers from inadequate distinction between men and women. This is true. (2) Deuteronomy 22:5 prohibits women from wearing pants. "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God."

I object on two counts. First, my impression is that 21st century men's pants are as distinct from women's pants as ancient men's robes were from women's robes. Secondly and more importantly, New Testament women are not bound by Old Testament requirements.

If a woman decides that, in light of Deut. 22:5, wearing pants is second best, that's fine. Good for her. I respect any person, Amish and Islamic included, for being willing to be different for principle sake. Every Christian needs some of that fortitude. One can't be righteous in an unrighteous world without being different. But to give the impression that such behavior is a Biblical mandate is, in my opinion, a misuse of Scripture.

Thus I return to my assertion that we need to properly label our scruples. There are scruples warranted by wisdom and prudence which are not mandated by Scripture. To give the impression that such behavior is required by Scripture sets up a person for harm. Most likely the student will eventually discover the lack of Biblical authority behind the admonition. This discovery can lead to harmful skepticism and "throwing out the baby with the bath water."

### **Little Things**

Consider your favorite homemaker's attitude toward how the bathroom is maintained. Do little things matter to her? How does the man of your house feel about others rearranging his workbench or desk? Do you care how an egg yolk is prepared? Little things matter to us.

A family member is likely to be unhappy when his or her preferences are ignored. I suspect a major learning curve in every marriage is catching on that little things matter. So why would we think God does not care about little things? Such thinking is a misinterpretation of God's grace.

God's instructions for setting up the tabernacle and its furniture indicate that God cares about details. So do the prescribed procedures for sacrifices.

Let us not ignore God's will in little things.

### **Lust and Lasciviousness**

"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?"  
James 4:4

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world." I John 2:15-16

What is "the world" in these verses?

Two of the three ingredients "in the world" are a "lust." Similar to a lust is an appetite; in this case, a perverted appetite. And since people with whom I am comfortable are my friends, to be "a friend of the world" (James 4:4) is to be comfortable with a perverted appetite.

Thinking about "lusts" invites the word "sensual." Christians should flee any behavior that is, or likely to be interpreted as, sensual. This includes sensual dress, sensual dancing, and sensual entertainment. Engaged couples should avoid sensual contact.

Modern English has largely lost a useful word: lasciviousness. It refers to a failure to control an appetite. Appetites properly directed are gifts from God. Maintain their goodness.

The greatest enemy of the church is not a cult or government control. It is our own worldliness. Worldliness will not be banished merely by strict surveillance. It is best counteracted by an ongoing encounter with God.

### **Oh No, Not Another One!**

Within the Christian circle in which I was raised certain activities were taboo. We were taught not to dance, attend a movie theater, smoke cigarettes, or use cards associated with gambling.

I was given the rationale for these prohibitions and I trusted my elders. So I willingly complied with and defended these admonitions. Nonetheless, there was a social cost. Not attending movies or dancing left me out of the social mainstream. I willingly paid the price.

As a Bible school student I was made aware that some Christians, especially in the South, didn't believe in "mixed bathing;" that is, males and females swimming in sight of each other. I recognized the warrant for the scruple. My reaction was "Oh no, not another one."

Was I prepared to teach another prohibition? The possibility alarmed me.

My practice as a parent was part way. I tended to avoid swimming, but I didn't impose strict prohibition.

Today, if someone were to ask, I would have no reticence in recommending that they avoid a common beach. The enhanced nakedness that prevails there makes it a bad place to be.

I do suppose that God intends for people to enjoy swimming. How best to facilitate that I'll leave for others to decide. At age 69 my parental responsibility is small and my term of service is winding down.

Things change. Billiards and playing cards have lost much of their identification with gambling. If someone suggests we play, I do. On the other hand, the television is increasingly difficult to adequately police.

Our responsibility to "keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27) is sometimes demanding. But the Biblical admonition is very important. Furthermore "let us not grow weary while doing good ...." Galatians 6:9

### **Pro-active Cultural Influence**

Was there a time in your youth when your frequent response to parental instruction was "Why?"

My dad was tolerant of that question if it reflected a genuine search for insight and intolerant if it mainly expressed resistance. I suppose God's attitude is the same. Jesus said not to cast our pearls before swine. Pigs can't appreciate pearls. They just trample them in the dirt. A resistant person may trample truth in the dirt.

Sometimes the parental response to "why" is "You wouldn't understand" or "You'll understand when you're older." Those

answers annoyed me. They didn't fit with my self-image. Of course, such an answer was probably correct.

A major issue stemming from these observations is whether we will comply with Biblical instruction which we don't understand or appreciate. Perhaps we wouldn't understand further explanation. Will our obedience be limited by our understanding?

I suppose God tolerates our "why" so long as our obedience is not contingent on our understanding. I believe that in some cases knowing the reason why is helpful.

I Corinthians 11:1-16 contains instruction that our culture deems irrelevant to modern America. The verses prescribe a head covering for a woman who prays or prophesies. I think that means doing so in public.

The common response to that instruction is that it was only for a culture in which the lack of head covering identified an immoral woman. But the apostle doesn't give that as a reason. Instead he supports his instruction with comments about angels and nature. Angels and nature haven't changed. If I Corinthians 11: 17-34 (directions for the Lord's supper) is not culturally conditioned, why should we think verses 1-16 are?

Recent trends suggest a reason for I Corinthians 11:1-16. Our culture is rapidly adopting the belief that men and women are interchangeable. Many conclude (and impose the conclusion) that marriage can unite any combination of sexes. If one is dissatisfied with his sex, have an operation; to segregate restrooms is unconstitutional; fostering "stereotyped" role models is oppressive; and so it goes.

Could it be that Christians have unwittingly cooperated with the trend? It seems to me that God prescribed an emblem of sexual distinction. Isn't it true that values are caught more than taught?

People generally believe that whatever is common is the way it is supposed to be.

I think God intends that we subtly teach our children that sexual distinctions are valuable and wholesome. I wish it were easier for our young people to associate what they see in church with what they read in Scripture.

I can understand that a Christian woman would not want to draw attention to herself by being the only woman in the room wearing a head covering. That's my reason (or excuse) for not lifting my hands when we pray as assumed in I Timothy 2:8. (Although I inwardly protest when we sing "We lift our hands before You as a token of our love" with nary a hand in the air). Maybe a group of women could agree together to wear a simple head covering to a prayer event. Perhaps they will, after a group of men agree together to lift their hands in prayer.

Am I consistent in my desire for simplistic commitments to Scripture? I don't know. I don't give money to every poor-looking man on a corner who asks for money. I don't give to every Christian organization that sends a letter requesting money, in spite of Matthew 5: 42. I honestly don't think that is what Jesus intended. No doubt many women honestly don't think God wants their head covered when they publically pray or prophesy. "Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." Romans 14:5

What if numerous people in our church took to hair coverings or uplifted hands? Would they be accused of majoring on the minors? Thought of as being "holier than thou?" Would the church split? (Let's hope not. Proverbs 6:16-19 says God hates the sowing of discord among brothers.) Let's decide that such people will be accepted as simple disciples stumbling along in search of God's will. Maybe they can help us.

It has happened time and again. Orthodox denominations slide into heresy. Christian colleges lose their collective Biblical convictions. Christian organizations become anemic. We need beware lest we do harm by ignoring Scriptures we fail to appreciate.

## Scary

I lived for 68 years knowing next to nothing about Dracula. I would have guessed he was a monster in a 1950's horror movie. In preparation for this article I went to Wikipedia and now I know that Count Dracula was a vampire in a 1897 novel. For many years I could not have described or identified Dracula. But from the references made to him I discerned that he was scary. I'm still seeking definitions for "worldliness," "the world," and "worldly." But from Bible references it's clear that the "world" is something bad that I should avoid.

Titus 2:12-13 "For the grace of God ... teaching us that, denying ... worldly lusts"

James 1 27 "keep oneself unspotted from the world."

James 4:4 "friendship with the world is enmity with God"

I John 2:15-17 "Do not love the world .... For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it ...."

I'm looking for a definition of "the world" suggested by the word itself. Consider this. The "world" is all that exists, minus God, heaven, and eternity. It is a contrast to total reality. If someone loves (sets his affection on) such a limited portion of reality, his dissatisfaction will draw him into an unrestrained appetite for physical pleasure, greed for things, and self exaltation.

How does this description of the "world" fit in the contexts in which I've heard the word "worldly," like worldly dress or worldly movies? The "world" fails to satisfy but worldings keep tugging at it, milking it with a lack of restraint. This leads to movies that feature an unrestrained pursuit of good things. The desire for physical intimacy in marriage is unrestrained so it becomes sensuality. The attraction of adventure is unrestrained leading to unwarranted risks. The enjoyment of laughter is unrestrained, yielding irresponsible jokes.

### **A Speckled Bird**

Apparently speckled birds are rare and odd. My dad said that in order to be righteous in an unrighteous world I must be willing to be a "speckled bird." Being peculiar isn't fun. It makes one uncomfortable. But it is a price worth paying. "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." 2 Corinthians 6:17

The Amish are widely admired, but rarely joined. They are admired for their willingness to be different for a cause. It's also interesting to me that they are granted a great amount of legal freedom; perhaps because they appear genuine and sincere, perhaps because they pay a price to maintain their convictions. They try not to compromise their principles.

Most churches I've been part of, in terms of lifestyle separation, are middle of the road evangelical; not as conservative as I am, but with plenty of godly people. I live near Amish folk and recently read a history of the Amish. One fact that surprised me was how often the Amish have split and formed new circles. It appears that keeping everyone on the same page as to where and how to adjust to modern life is a continual struggle. I sympathize. What's the balance between being holy and being like missionaries who adopt some of the culture where they serve? I may not know the exact best balance, but I'm convinced I know where it lies from where we are now. We lack distinction.

## **Tale of Christian Financial Management**

My net worth is zero. I am the foreman on a large ranch. The owner has numerous ranches; I only manage one. If you just watched my daily activities, you might think I was the owner. I buy, sell, and make daily decisions as if I owned the place.

My compensation arrangement might be considered unusual for our culture. I don't receive any salary or wages. Instead, the owner has authorized me to dip into ranch proceeds for my own well being. I'm careful not to abuse that privilege. I keep in mind that eventually I will give an accounting for how much I dipped and for the profitability of this ranch.

In regard to my personal dipping I've been assured that the owner approves when his foremen "richly enjoy" life, so long as they remain conscious of whose ranch it is and spend in keeping with his priorities.

Even though the owner has spelled out those priorities, he doesn't micromanage the operation. Some of my fellow foremen (Remember, the owner has many ranches.) have the impression that the owner has prescribed that a certain percentage (10%) of the ranch proceeds go to a church or para-church activity. That's not my understanding. I just try to keep in mind that 100% of the money belongs to the owner and that I should distribute the funds according to his priorities. My mindset is that I own nothing, but I can trust the owner to provide well for me. Luke 14:33

(By the way, this story could be told differently. Suppose I had a similar arrangement as a trust administrator.)

### **Music and Discord to Avoid**

Good music is good for us. It is so good and helpful that we ought to make provision for being affected by it. Music can affect one's mood; one's mood can affect what he thinks, says, and does. Music can

bring valuable thoughts to one's consciousness, both when the music is being performed (in person, CD, whatever) and in unexpected moments subsequently. I believe that worshiping God should be a major part of each life and that music is a normal part of worship.

The benefits of good music are so significant that it can be worthwhile to sing by yourself during your "quiet time;" to buy equipment for playing music in your home; for church members to spend time preparing for music ministry; for parents and other instructors to carefully choose which music will influence young people; for people to spend hours each week, for years, preparing to minister in music; for some people to have a career in music ministry; to thank God for my hymnbook, for hymn writers, for the musicians who have worked diligently, and for my CD player.

It seems to me that if music is important, then the type of music one listens to is important. At this point my opinion diverges from many other Christians. I realize I could be wrong. I realize that sometimes it is not edifying to share a right opinion. But because I believe these thoughts contain truth - truth that is edifying, I have looked for a right time and place to promote these ideas. I believe three factors should be considered in selecting music: (1) the truth and value of the words, (2) the intrinsic effect of the music, and (3) the effects of the music due to association. I want to discuss the latter two.

**Intrinsic effects.** I was taught not to smoke cigarettes because smoking harms the body. Since a Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19) he should care well for his body. The same logic suggests that music over some number of decibels in volume should be avoided.

It appears to me that a lullaby is inherently conducive to relaxation. Notice I did not say that a lullaby will CAUSE someone to relax or sleep. But if someone is at all receptive (physically and/or volitionally), the music is conducive to relaxation. That effect is not due to the words or the cultural connotation. A baby need not

understand the words or be subject to the cultural connotation to be influenced by a lullaby.

Apparently march music is inherently conducive to brisk activity. Again, march music will not cause me to march, exercise, or scrub the wall energetically. But if I am at all inclined to do such things, the music is conducive.

In order to recognize the effect of a lullaby on myself and others, I need not be able to define the musical elements precisely. Is it the melody, the harmony, the rhythm, the volume, or some combination of these that brings the effect? If melody, exactly what combination or quality of notes does it? Some musicians may be able to better define the musical elements, but most people can recognize a clear lullaby.

If there is music that is intrinsically conducive to relaxation or brisk activity, can there be music that is intrinsically conducive to adoration or cheerfulness? I think so. And, can there be music that is intrinsically conducive to frustration, anger, rebellion, agitation, violence, irritation, confusion, or sensuality? I think so. I cannot define very well a lullaby - music that is conducive to relaxation. There may be music with subtle lullaby qualities that I would not recognize. But I recognize a clear lullaby. And I imagine that some musicians can better recognize subtle lullaby qualities. I cannot musically define music that is conducive to sensuality. But I think I've heard it.

If we listen to music with negative or inappropriate intrinsic qualities; then, of course, the affects are harmful. But some may say that our response to music is simply a matter of taste. Again, I refer to the lullaby and the march music. I do not believe the common reaction is simply a matter of taste. Perhaps music is similar to color in this regard. I think our appreciation of color is somewhat a matter of taste. Nonetheless, I would believe an interior decorator who said that certain colors or shades are cool, or warm, or exciting. In music,

as in colors, it may be difficult to establish exact boundaries between one effect and another or between taste and inherent quality. But if I acknowledge the existence of the inherent qualities, then I should try to recognize those inherent qualities and take them into account in my use of music.

**Effects from association.** Some affects of music are based on connotation or association. We can learn from an analogy to language. I assume that most phonemic units are intrinsically meaningless. The utterance "up" may mean one thing in our language and something completely different in another. That does not mean we can effectively ignore the meaning assigned by our culture to a particular word. I believe that in our culture certain music is associated with sensuality, or rebellion, or throwing off of restraint, or various youthful lusts. I think those associations are related to the inherent qualities of the music. But even if they are not, we cannot wisely ignore the connotations. If I wear overlapping yellow arches on my jacket, people will think of McDonalds, regardless of what I say they represent. I believe it is a mistake to think that the Christian minority can change the well-established negative connotations of certain music. I believe the Christian community has erred in adopting musical sound that is laden with negative connotations.

Some may continue believing that negative connotation and harmful intrinsic characteristic are matters of subjective opinion. My verdict that Janice Ann Rohne would be a good wife for me was obtained subjectively. Nonetheless and appropriately, I acted upon that verdict. Suppose the verdict that some music has harmful characteristics rests on subjective evidence. Such a conclusion should be acted upon.

Will all Christians have the same sense of the connotation of certain music? No. Therefore, large measures of forbearance and mutual acceptance are required. But the fact that our discernment cannot be perfect does not warrant not attempting to accurately discern.

Does this mean all Christian music should be old? Definitely not! Vibrant Christianity will produce fresh sermons, fresh mission efforts, and new songs. Mature Christians should produce new songs with edifying words and helpful sounds.

## **Fishing For Men**

Twice in the New Testament (Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17) it is recorded that when Jesus called Peter and Andrew to be His disciples, He said "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Don't you suppose it is the same today? That if we follow Him, He makes us fishers of men; that not being a fisher of men indicates deficiency in my following.

I've fished a couple of times in my life; that doesn't make me a fisherman. A fisherman fishes often.

I think that describing the effort to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19) as fishing for men as opposed to hunting for men is significant. In hunting the hunter is totally responsible for the pursuit. The hunted one can flee, yet the hunter can pursue and prevail. In fishing, the fisherman does take initiative. He goes to where the fish are. He casts a hook or net. He may offer an attraction (bait). But then he waits. He can't force the fish to bite the hook or swim into the net. The sought one must cooperate. A lack of any catch doesn't necessarily mean the fisherman hasn't fished right.

We should take initiative; like Jesus, we seek the lost. We should do so often. But eventually we wait. Only the Holy Spirit can produce a genuine catch. That doesn't mean there is nothing to be learned about fishing. Being trained by a fisherman is helpful. But ultimately our part is to go to where the unsaved are, present the gospel, then wait for the Holy Spirit to move the will of men

Make fishing for men part of your lifestyle.

## When Our Church Meets a Stranger

Dear friends,

Probably you know the story of Hudson Taylor surprising his fellow missionaries in China by switching to Chinese clothing. I'm guessing that most Christians my age would consider that a good decision. I've read of missionaries living in primitive housing in order to avoid an obstacle to ministry. Paul said "to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews ... to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak." I Corinthians 9: 20-22 These things strike me as promptings for "cultural hospitality."

But there are balancing considerations. Cultures are not morally neutral. One culture required wives to die when their husbands did. In some cultures multiple wives are a sign of prosperity. In some cultures women are the leaders. The Waodani people were often naked. Missionaries made heroic efforts to reach them, but the missionaries kept their clothes on. Obviously there should be limits to our identification with a culture.

But what if the Bible doesn't address an issue? I think Biblical education is far-reaching. It leads to insights and excellencies not clearly cited in Scripture. It changes cultures; it makes them different. The Bible doesn't specifically condemn 19th century American-style slavery. And Southerners felt they needed it. But Christian influence prevailed, changing the culture. In some cultures people are illiterate. The Bible doesn't specifically prescribe reading education. Yet Christian values include literacy. Should a mission family forgo reading education lest they be considered elitist?

Should we surrender our minority excellencies in order to be more "relevant" to our audience? We are truly relevant when we offer life-changing truth, benefits, and improvements not available elsewhere. Let's not try to disguise the fact that we think differently than the mainstream culture.

I favor learning the native language, understanding the cultural differences, and trying to "scratch where it itches." But we must be very selective in our cultural accommodations. Cross-cultural communication is not easy.

A second issue. Which local subculture shall we target? Some of our neighbors would feel more at home if we were more liturgical. Some are most comfortable with classical music. Others would pick country & western, classic rock, hard rock, easy listening, or jazz.

Some may think a preacher in jeans to be unpretentious and representing real life Christianity. Others may think he is failing to honor the worship occasion. Herein I salute our congregation's maturity: some wear jeans, others continue in suits. And I've not heard any grumbling on the issue.

I believe our leadership team is devoted to godly priorities. I want us all to be on the same side, even if some of our lifestyle choices differ.

### **Returning to a Fork**

Is this book ten, twenty, forty years too late? Am I visualizing a fork in the road long passed? To say "Yes" dishonors members of the body for whom these are current considerations.

To others I urge: turn back. The Protestant Reformation was not a thousand years too late. The Great Awakening was not decades too late.

"Now there was a famine in the days of David .... And the LORD answered, 'It is because of Saul ...because he killed the Gibeonites.'"

So David reached back in time to address a past failure. "And after that God heeded the prayer for the land. II Samuel 21:1-14

## Falling In Love

"There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand... the way of a man with a virgin."  
Proverbs 30:18-19.

We are fascinated with "falling in love." I can't nor want to eliminate all its mystery. But I can offer some insight.

"Falling in love" describes an entrance into the enjoyment of romance. Romance is good; not the same as sacrificial love or affection, but good. It is a mood and a feeling. A person can never have a girlfriend or boyfriend and never marry and still enjoy romance. There is romance in beautiful scenery, in quiet moments, and family gatherings. Romance is the sense that I am in the midst of something wonderful. Romance then may be experienced more often by those who are sensitive, unhurried, and grateful. And the "way of a man with a virgin," that's so exotic that most anyone can catch the romance of it.

Romance should be the beautiful accompaniment to a blessed relationship. It should prompt us to praise God. It can stimulate us to prepare to serve loved ones. And romance is just plain enjoyable.

But relationship romance can be dangerous. It is sometimes generated when a suitable relationship doesn't exist. Someone can mistakenly identify a live person as the daydream person with whom he or she "fell in love" long before. Then the romance is taken as grounds for a serious relationship.

Daydreams, like guesses, should be educated. Learn from wise people the qualities you'll need to sustain a healthy, pleasant relationship. Let them help you identify those qualities in others. Take time for a mature knowledge of yourself, time to adequately know another person, and time for the "fruit of the Spirit" to grow in you.

It's humorous to realize that "falling in love" is like "falling asleep." Falling asleep seems to be an unconscious, somewhat involuntary activity. We cannot cause it to happen instantly. It sneaks up on us. We are not conscious of the moment it takes over. But falling asleep generally happens to people who want to be asleep, at approximately the time they planned for it to occur, and it is most likely to occur when the person enters conducive conditions (darkness, warmth, soft pillow, etc.). Also, the process can be resisted and postponed (Ever stay up all night?).

Likewise "falling in love" seems to be an unconscious, somewhat involuntary activity. It doesn't happen instantly. It seems to sneak up on us. We may not be conscious of the moment it takes over. But "falling in love" generally happens to people who want to be "in love," near the time they assumed it would, when one enters conditions conducive to its occurrence, and the process can be resisted with amazing success.

The point of this analogy is that you must accept responsibility for your romantic involvement. Do not become romantically involved with the wrong person. Should you find yourself slipping into an inappropriate relationship, take steps to end it.

Romance is like the aroma of meat on the stove . That aroma is splendid along with tasty meat. But it is not sustaining. If the meat burns, the aroma leaves disappointment.

A sweetheart relationship makes for romance. But romance by itself doesn't make a good relationship. Caution is required because it's possible to have a romance without the framework of a healthy relationship. Romanticizing a poor relationship is like eating globs of frosting without any cake. It's sweet for a while, but you will be left unnourished, unfulfilled, and maybe with a stomachache. Make sure the "cake" (the relationship) agrees with you, then enjoy the frosting as part of the cake.

Most any heart can taste romance. It takes wisdom to (1) recognize the potential, and (2) construct the framework for a good marriage. A major source for this wisdom is parents. It is wise to establish dating relationships under their guidance. Parents should try to establish the assumption that they will help guide relationship choices. Young people should seek parental guidance.

Relationship romance: maybe so, maybe no, take it slow. Sweetheart romance is one of the many and varied gifts God gives. Think of it like the ability to carry a tune, which is a gift - calling for praise to God. But don't treat it as the key to a happy life. Don't feel sorry for yourself if you don't have it. You have too many other good things to enjoy to lament over one you don't have.

As a matter of fact, although I have a high regard for the ability to carry a tune and have sometimes wished I could more consistently, it has occurred to me to be glad that I can't. For my time and attention has often been crowded with trying to utilize to the fullest the opportunities and capacities I have. Another capacity could add to a sense of unfulfilled possibilities and distract from specializations appropriate for me. This, it seems to me, is akin to the message of I Corinthians 7: 32-35.

Be cautious about romance attached to premature and inappropriate relationships. Try to avoid prompting someone to give you his or her deep emotional devotion unless you are prepared to return that devotion in marriage. Be slow to express special affection. A young person typically "falls in love" with the idea of marriage long before he or she is ready to select a mate. During the intervening years of maturing, the young person should be learning more about himself and about the opposite gender. During these years he or she may decide that he(she) prefers one kind of person. However, his specific favorite may change periodically. That is typical and should be harmless. But announcing the identity of the current favorite can be more trouble than it's worth.

Even when a mutual attraction is obvious to all concerned, don't make the relationship binding or "steady" unnecessarily or prematurely. Be slow to turn attractions into proclamations or friendships into alliances. Savor the romance that comes with a good relationship. Don't lick the frosting before the cake has baked.

## **Truth Troubles**

I have found church history interesting, enlightening, sometimes pleasant, and often disappointing. I'm heartened to find doctrinal kinfolk of old, but disappointed to find early evidence of wayward teaching.

A repeated sad element is harshness attached to disputes. My kindest explanation is that people are ardent in their defense of perceived truth. But the battle wounds hurt and the harm is long-lasting. How can we be zealous for truth yet not "bite and devour one another?" Galatians 5:15

Step 1 "Beware." Galatians 5: 15

Step 2 Ask for wisdom; specifically wisdom that is "peaceable, gentle, willing to yield ...." James 3:17

## **Forgiveness Heals**

On some issues we disappoint one another. But forgiveness allows for happiness in spite of hurt. Deep disappointment is mourning. In the midst of mourning happiness seems lost forever, but it usually isn't.

Sometimes both parties feel mistreated. Accurate or not, warranted or not, the pain is there. Forgiveness allows for happiness in spite of hurt.

## Moral Minors?

Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled a Grecian kingdom centered in Syria. The kingdom included Judah. Antiochus wanted his entire kingdom to be "Hellenistic" (that is, to have a Greek culture and religion). Eventually, in 168 B.C., Jews were prohibited from reading Scripture, circumcising their sons, observing Biblical feasts, and honoring the Sabbath. The Jerusalem temple was raided, a pig sacrificed on the altar, and an image of Zeus installed. It seems that Daniel 11:21-35 compares Antiochus IV to the Antichrist.

During the years prior to that religious devastation some Jews resisted Greek culture and religion while others welcomed them. Walter K. Price writes, "Many Jews in Jerusalem had already yielded to the Greek Pantheon .... They had also given up the distinctive marks of the covenant religion, such as Torah reading, abstinence from certain unclean foods, circumcision, and the Sabbath observance."<sup>1</sup>

I am concerned that many believers today are giving up some distinctive marks of Christian religion. We should be marked by lifestyle purity, with an aversion to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...." I John 2:16

Some issues seem minor. However, our lifestyle decisions are one indicator of our sensitivity to God's values.

<sup>1</sup>Walter K. Price, In the Final Days, 1977, Chicago, Moody Press, p. 128.