

Practical Theology
Liberty in Christ vs. Legalism or License

How would you define “legalism” as applied to Christian living?

How would that differ from standards of Biblical holiness?

How would you define licentiousness as applied to Christian living?

How are legalism and licentiousness different from one another and how are they the same?

Read Romans 14:1-15:6; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 8:1-13; 10:23-33, 1 Peter 2:16; Hebrews 12:1-2; 1 John 2:3-6

What general principles can you derive from these passages about how to live a holy life in Christ without falling into either legalism or licentiousness?

SPECIFIC ISSUES

DRUGS

In general terms:

When are drugs always unacceptable for use by a Christian?

When are drugs usually acceptable for use by a Christian?

Case 1: Marijuana usage is now legal in many states. What Biblical principles should guide the Christian regarding the use of marijuana or its by products?

Case 2: How can you avoid becoming addicted to prescription medications?

ALCOHOL

Why is there a difference between the qualifications for an Elder and for a Deacon regarding drinking wine? (1 Timothy 3:3 cf 3:8)

What warnings does the Bible give in regards to consumption of alcoholic beverages?

When does drinking become sinful?

Who and when does the Bible require to abstain?

What are some good Biblical reasons for choosing to abstain from alcoholic beverages?

Case 1: You are at a wedding and are given champagne for the toast. What factors would you need to consider whether you should or not drink it?

Case 2: A couple planning their wedding asks your opinion about having alcohol available.

Case 3: Should wine be used in serving communion?

DANCING

When & what kind of dancing would fit within Biblical parameters?

When & what kind of dancing would be outside Biblical parameter?

Case 1: A couple planning their wedding asks your opinion about having dancing at it

Case 2: You are discipling a young man. What would be your advice / counsel if you found out he liked to go out to do the following types of dancing? A) Ballroom. B) Square. C) Country Line. D) Night Club. E) Hip Hop. F) Ethnic ceremonial. G) Disco

DRESS

Scripture requires modesty in dress (1 Timothy 2:9).

How can modesty be defined by principle instead of specific restrictions such as length of hem line, drop of neck line, etc.?

To what degree does a culture define what is or is not modest?

Can a woman's one piece bathing suit be immodest? If so, what would put it into that category?

Can men dress immodestly?

How does the way you dress reflect the condition of your heart.

Is immodesty in dress only related to being sexually alluring? Explain

What principles should guide you as you dress to attend each of the following: A) Work. B) Home Bible study. C) Picnic with swimming. D) Meet with a banker to discuss a loan. E) Going out on a date to a 4 star restaurant. F) Worship Service.

Case 1. A woman comes to church consistently wearing clothing with plunging necklines / form fitting / high hem lines. It is brought to your attention that it is causing some men to be distracted (or worse). How should she be counseled and who should do it?

Case 2. A man consistently comes to church wearing flip flops, jeans with holes and stained shirts. In talking with him casually you find out he works on Wall Street and has to wear a suit everyday. Would you say anything to him about how he dresses to come to church, and if so, what?

MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT

The GBC Music Policy is a good resource regarding use of music in corporate worship.

Music is powerful and can strongly move our emotions. Musical lyrics can strongly influence thinking and beliefs even while the person is unaware it is doing so. Music can be a great blessing or curse and therefore must be treated with great caution.

How can music 1) Enhance your personal walk with God. 2) Train your children. 3) Lead someone into sin. 4) Set the mood for an activity.

Is there any form / type / style of instrumental music that is inherently sinful or holy? Explain

What factors would make a musical selection sinful?

What factors would make a musical selection sacred?

What factors would make a musical selection neutral - neither sinful nor sacred?

How can you apply the principles of Philippians 4:8 to music?

How does venue and association influence the perception and affect of the music?

What can be good about CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) and what can be dangerous?

Case 1. A visitor comments after the service that he liked the sermon, but thought the worship was dead (it was only hymns with the piano and acoustic guitar that morning). How would you respond? What would you recommend to him?

Case 2. A family comes to you for counsel concerning their teenager who wants to listen to rock and rap due to the influence of friends. How would you advise them?

LEISURE & LABOR

Why did God set aside the Sabbath for man?

What is the danger of being a workaholic?

What is leisure?

When do leisure activities cease to be leisure?

What are the benefits and dangers of sports? games? entertainment?

How do the principles discussed concerning music apply to leisure activities such as sports, games, entertainment, TV, Movies, video, etc.?

What are some Biblical examples of leisure activities?

What Biblical principles should guide you in using leisure time wisely?

What are some good and godly uses of your leisure time?

What is the curse of labor (work)?

What is the purpose(s) and blessing(s) of labor (work)?

Are there types of work in which Christians should not be involved? Explain

How can your labor be sacred regardless of the means by which you earn your living?

Can a pastor / ministry lose the sacredness of his labor? Explain

How does the prohibition about being unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14) apply to your job?

Case 1. A regular attender at church become very sporadic. When you talk to him about it he says that he is missing because he has too much work he has to get done. What additional questions would you ask? How would you advise Him? What warnings would you give?

Case 2. Same as Case 1 above except the reason for missing church is his felt need for a recreational leisure activity.

Case 3. A man you have been informally discipling began a new job a few months earlier that has the potential to be a career path. He wants your advice on how to handle the pressure that is now being put on him to be a “team player” and misrepresent the product the company sells. What are his options? What advice would you give?

Case 4. A couple comes to you for advice concerning their son’s involvement in a sport league. He has qualified to be on the elite team which travels to play against other leagues, but that is often on Sunday morning or early afternoon. They want to know their alternatives for attending church services given their son’s scheduling. What additional questions would you ask? How would you advise Him? What warnings would you give?

Case 5. A young man comes to you for advice in dealing with his friends from church who like to go out to see movies. Problems usually start when he asks what movie and what is in it since he does not want to subject himself to blasphemous language or sexually explicit content. His friends claim liberty to see what they want, that it will not affect them, and that he is legalistic. How should he deal with the situation? How can he help his friends?

Case 6. It is early Summer and you overhear a teen complaining they are bored and have nothing to do. What suggestions would you give them to alleviate their boredom and use their time wisely? Same complaint except it is coming from someone who recently retired.

DATING, COURTSHIP & MARRIAGE

What is God’s definition of marriage?

What are the purposes of marriage according to the Scriptures? (Genesis 1:28; 2:7-24; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9; Ephesians 5:22-33, etc.)

What restrictions does God place upon Christians on whom they can marry?

What are some Biblical examples of ways in which God brought people together for marriage.

Define dating. What is the underlying assumption and purpose in dating? What are its dangers and advantages?

Define courtship. What is the underlying assumption and purpose in courtship? What are its dangers and advantages?

What qualities should a godly man be looking for in a potential wife?

What qualities should a godly woman be looking for in a potential husband?

What advice would you give to a young man or woman about how to find a marriage partner? What warnings would you give?

What are your thoughts about internet matchmaking businesses? What are their dangers and advantages?

What advice would you give a couple that is courting to make sure they do not violate scriptural prohibitions concerning physical contact / sexual intimacy?

What advice would you give concerning pre-marital counseling to an engaged couple?

Case 1. A couple that met a month ago ask if you will officiate the wedding they are planning for next month. What questions would you ask them? What cautions would you give them? What reasoning would you use to decide whether to say yes or no?

Case 2. A single woman is approaching 30 and expresses her frustration that there are so few men around that are eligible for marriage much less that she would want to marry. What kinds of questions would you ask her? What advice would you give to her?

CHILDREN

What is God's purpose and design for having children?

What are common cultural ideas about the purpose(s) for children and design for the family?

Children are supposed to be a blessing (Psalm 127:3-5), but they could be a source of grief and bitterness (Proverbs 10:1; 17:25) and a curse to others. What makes the difference?

What are some of the major reasons many parents now regret having children? Whose fault is it?

What are the blessings of having a large family? What negatives might there be?

What are the blessings of having a smaller family? What negatives might there be?

What are some of the ungodly reasons a couple may limit the number of children they have?

What are some godly reasons a couple may limit the number of Children they have?

What is the balance between trusting God and presuming upon Him (putting Him to the test)?

What kinds of birth control methods are always unacceptable for Christians to use?

What kinds of birth control methods could be an option for Christians to use?

What are the basic requirements that God places upon parents in rearing their children?

Where / to whom should parents go for advice in raising their children? Explain

Case 1. A couple with two children comes to you for advice about whether the husband should have a vasectomy. What questions should you ask in order to give godly counsel?

Case 2. A couple in your church is strongly pushing the idea that using any kind of birth control is a sin and upsetting other couples. How will you deal with the situation?

Case 3. The couple in Case 2 has seven children whom they love, but they often complain about not being able to do things other families do because of finances and logistics. How can you correct their wrong understanding of trusting God and learn to be content?

Case 4. The children of a couple in your church are often out of control. How you help them bring their children under control without unnecessarily causing them to leave?

CULTURAL TRADITIONS

What Biblical principles would you use to determine if a cultural tradition is acceptable for a Christian to practice?

What is the meaning and application of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23?

What do you do if a cultural tradition is clearly against Biblical precepts and principles?

Can a cultural tradition with a pagan origin be adapted for godly use? Why or why not?

What are the benefits and dangers of using (or starting) a cultural tradition to teach about the Lord?

How might you be able to use cultural holiday traditions to open a conversation with a non-Christian and turn it to an opportunity to evangelize? Give an example.

Case 1. Some parents in your church think it is okay to teach their children cultural holiday myths such as Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny while others are strongly against it. How will you help them to love each other while resolving the conflict?

Case 2. A man in your church is upsetting families by proclaiming that is sinful to have a Christmas Tree since its origin is pagan. How will you deal with the situation?

Case 3. A recently saved couple in your church is under a lot of family pressure to participate in cultural traditions which they are not sure they can do any more. How will you help them think through the issues to determine their actions, including looking for ways to use the situation to create witnessing opportunities.

HOLY BODIES

Scripture teaches that man is a unified whole made up of both a material (physical) and immaterial (spiritual) parts. Philosophies that emphasize one part or the other can cause problems both theologically in the manner of life.

What does it mean that man is made in the image of God? Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7

When used metaphorically in the Bible, what do the words “heart” and “bowels” represent? How do each differ from the mind? How do each interact with each other?

What is the conscience? What are some things God programs into the conscience of every person? How can the conscience be trained for either good or evil?

The body is made for the Lord (1 Cor. 6:13, 19; Romans 12:1, etc.). What general principles should arise from this on how we treat our physical bodies and what we use them for?

Many religious sects place dietary restrictions upon their adherents.

What Biblical principles guide the Christian in what they should or should not eat?

What medical considerations might guide them in what they as an individual may or may not eat?

What cultural considerations might guide a person to restrict certain foods or practices? (1 Cor. 10)

If an individual determines it is wise for them to abstain or restrict certain foods, how should they react with others regarding those restrictions?

Is there a relationship between godliness and making reasonable efforts to stay healthy? Explain

Sensuality (pleasure that comes through our various physical senses) can be good, neutral or evil.

What would characterize the boundaries moving between godly enjoyment of pleasure and sinful hedonism?

Case 1. A woman in your church has figured out that she generally feels better if she does not eat gluten. After doing some internet research she is trying to convince her friends to also become gluten free and will not eat at other people’s homes anymore because of fear of cross-contamination. What advice and warnings would you give her?

Case 2. A man you consider to be godly has been declining in health. In talking with him you find out he rarely exercises, pays little attention to his diet and has not had a physical in many years. What advice and encouragement would you give him concerning care of his body?

Case 3. You go out to a restaurant on a Friday night with a couple new to your church that were recently saved and have a Roman Catholic background. Both of them order first telling the waitress that they would like the fish plate. You are considering ordering the steak when he says that they always order fish on Fridays because it would be sinful to have meat. What will you order? How will you direct the conversation in order to deal with the issue of their religious dietary restriction?

HOLY DAYS

Read Exodus 20:8; Mark 2:27-28; Romans 14:5-12 and Colossians 2:16-23

What responsibility do Christians have in keeping the Sabbath?

What responsibility do Christians have in keeping a Sabbath - a day of rest and worship of God?

What restrictions, if any, should there be on activities carried out on a day set aside for worship?

Why might you restrict some activities even if not required?

Why do most Christians meet for worship on Sundays instead of Saturdays? Why are worship services usually set for mid-morning?

What other days do Christians meet for worship in other places around the world?

How often should Christians meet during a week?

What is the problem with the Seventh Day Adventist doctrine of the Sabbath?

Holiday is derived from Holy Day - are there any such days a Christian is required to observe? Are there any a Christian might want to observe even if not required? If so, what would be the proper attitude in observing such holidays?

Must Christians from Jewish backgrounds observe any of the Mosaic holy days? Why or why not?

Could they do so without becoming bound by Mosaic law? Why might they do so?

What relationship if any should Gentile Christians have with any of the Jewish holidays.

Case 1. Tension has built up between a group of friends at church and they want your advice. They usually do something together after church, but one of them has become increasingly uncomfortable with going to movies or shopping. How can you help them resolve the issues involved and fulfill the "one another" commands?

Case 2. You develop a friendship with another professing believer at work / social club / school. It is not long before you find out your new friend insists that churches that meet on Sunday instead of Saturday are in sin. What additional questions might you ask to find out his level of spiritual maturity? How will you help him overcome his unbiblical view and learn graciousness?

Case 3. You invite a family over to celebrate a holiday / special day with your family, but they tell you that they do not observe that day and so will not come. How might you respond?