

Can We Please Everyone?

We've seen that to be effective among unbelievers, we have to know how to say no gracefully to activities we think are wrong. But how do we decide what's right and what's wrong? What do we do about the other believers who are watching our activities with unbelievers? In this session we will:

- Identify the desire to fit into Christian culture as one of the main reasons we resist involvement with unbelievers
- Come to personal Bible-based convictions about our lifestyle
- Learn how to live out those convictions without alienating unbelievers or sanctioning their behavior, and
- Learn the next step in expressing our biblical view naturally, that is, asking questions of unbelievers.

The Bible says there are three types of activities:

- Those that are right
- Those that are wrong
- Those that are “disputable matters” (Romans 14:1)

1. Define “disputable matters.”

It's an activity that the Bible neither clearly commands nor clearly forbids.

2. In the video, the group developed a list of disputable matters.

- Using “profanity”
- Drinking alcohol “in moderation”
- Dancing
- What it means to be in the world but not of it
- Watching R-rated movies

What are some disputable matters that could be barriers for you for reaching the lost?



3. An unbeliever asks you to an R-rated movie that has sex scenes which you know would cause you to lust. How would you handle it?

I would say something like, "To be honest, the sex in that movie would mess up my relationship with my wife. Why don't we consider another movie instead?" This may open up some common ground for me and my friend since I am able to share a weakness.

Read Galatians 2:11-16

4. What did Peter do when the men came from James?

5. What did Paul think of that decision and why?

Paul called the choice a threat to the Gospel. When we avoid socializing with sinners because we are afraid of what believers will think, we can be compromising the Gospel.

"When Peter came to Antioch, I (Paul) opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

"When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'

"We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ."

Galatians 2:11-16

Going Deeper

Love and Self-Control

The early Christians were constantly forced to make decisions about disputable matters. In the course of dealing with many hot issues, the Apostle Paul prescribed two principles for handling them.

The Principle of Love

Jesus said God's permanent law boiled down to two commands: Love God with your whole being and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:34-40). So Paul told believers, "He who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). Hence, whether evaluating whether to do something not plainly commanded or forbidden in the Bible, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this reflect my love for God? Does it show that I love something else more? Can I thank God for this?

- Does this reflect my love for other people (my family, fellow believers, unbelievers)? Does it show a disregard for them? Does it please me at someone else's expense?

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Paul made it clear that by *love* he didn't mean a vague feeling. So we can ask ourselves, "Will doing this build up my non-Christian friend, drawing him toward Christ, or will it confirm him in a life apart from Christ?"

We must also be concerned with what will build up fellow believers. Paul knew there were weak Christians who, when they see you doing something they think is wrong, will be tempted to imitate you despite their misgivings. For instance, say a friend of yours has

found that he is overindulgent in watching sports on television. He has watched them to exclusion of his family and his walk with God, so now he avoids them completely. Watching TV sports is no problem for you, but it would not be loving to watch them with this friend. We must ask ourselves, "Will doing this build up another believer, or will it tempt him to do what is wrong for himself?"



"Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me'—but I will not be mastered by anything."

1 Corinthians 6:12

"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training ... I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

1 Corinthians 9:25,27

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always preserves. Love never fails."

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

"Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

Romans 15:2

Paul also had run-ins with another kind of weak believer: the Pharisee. When this person sees you doing something he thinks is wrong, he is not tempted to imitate you. On the contrary, he is tempted to complain and judge. Paul voluntarily limited his freedom when the first weak believer was around, but he refused to give into the Pharisee. He graciously explained his conviction to them and pursued peace with them, but he would not conform to their standards. The gospel and the love for the lost was at stake.

The Principle of Self Control

Paul's other principle was self-control or moderation. Paul enjoyed lawful pleasures, but he would not let them take him over. Anything that threatened to become an addiction was out. He wouldn't use a drug that fogged his mind and will. He wanted to be free to give up anything in a heartbeat, if it hindered the gospel in some situation.