

The Biblical Basis for Standards

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Today there is a personal war that is being waged against all traditional standards that have been historically established in the local church setting and in those institutions of Biblical learning, which are geared around assisting the local church ministry. Many churches and Bible training schools have decided to lower or completely remove all standards that were initially established for the sake of unity, discipline of the students and for the purpose of separation. Today many churches and learning institutions have jettisoned all standards so that people can experience what they define as their liberty or freedom in Christ. Standards are viewed as legalism and something that should be shunned. Those who practice standards are looked upon as extremists, unspiritual and hair splitting legalists of the worst sort. The opinion polls of most Christians want us to think that any list of do's and don'ts is the breeding ground of legalism. Standards are viewed as being part of the archaic taboo system of the ancient church of bygone years.

The Decline of Standards

When did this practice of stripping away standards begin and why is there such an adverse attitude toward any kind of standards today? The answer is very simple. The disintegration of standards was a gradual process that took place throughout the last 50 years following the official introduction of New Evangelicalism in 1948. This movement has placed a heavy emphasis on *accommodation*, *infiltration* and a spirit of *cooperation* with the world's culture instead of the doctrine of holiness or separation. In short, the virus of New Evangelicalism, with its goal to repudiate separatism, has infected mainstream Christianity and has caused the repudiation and in some cases the total depletion of standards.

In recent years standards have plummeted to frightening low levels so that most churches and Bible institutions of learning have dropped almost all standards. The modern Charismatic Movement has especially pushed the "no standards" mentality with their unseparated manner of conduct and repudiation of the doctrine of

Biblical separation. They have influenced the great masses of churches and institutes of Biblical learning in an adverse way through television programming, printed material and their giant ecumenical gatherings, which claim to breed success. Multitudes of churches and institutions want to try and mimic the so-called success of this movement and are willing to accommodate the pragmatic philosophy of “anything goes” as a way to attract people and keep up with the present flow of evangelicalism (Rom. 3:8).

If one would investigate the accepted normal standards of many local Bible believing church ministries and institutions forty years ago and compare them to present day ministries, you would likely see a total reversal and neglect of standards within these institutions. We have allowed the erosion of standards to occur because of our softness toward the New Evangelical spirit of compromise, which is trying to accommodate and promote worldly practice in every fiber of church life and ministry. Many churches and institutions do not want to make any waves today by introducing standards to people. They do this out of fear, knowing that they might be disapproved by the majority, looked down upon, and not draw a huge crowd (John 12:43).

The Definition of Standards

What are standards? Webster’s dictionary defines standards as “a degree or level of requirement, excellence or attainment.” Standards are really levels of requirement that we place upon ourselves and which we seek to abide by in our personal lives. However, others within the government, everyday work world, Biblical institutions of learning and the local church setting also have the right to place standards or various levels of requirement upon us. The government has standards that we must abide by. Every business and learning institution has standards that their people must abide by when they link up with that particular organization. Without standards there would be chaos and disorder in any business. Sports teams and computer clubs are expected to abide by certain established standards. No matter where you live and work there are standards that you must learn to follow and obey. However, when it comes to the church and other

Biblical related institutions, the new *mood* and *mentality* is that there should be no standards established.

It's almost a cardinal sin to expect standards in the local church today. When it comes to those places connected with spiritual learning there seems to be the mindset that all standards should be dropped. The fact is this. Many churches are trying to market people and lure them into their ministries today by dropping all standards of normal function, decency and reverence. This appeals to the lost world and actually becomes a pragmatic marketing technique that is designed to get lost people into the church today without obeying the Great Commission, which commands believers to go into all the world with the Gospel message (Mark 16:15). Jesus gave no command to bring the world system into the church.

Dropping all standards is viewed as the way to success. But today's definition of success is different than Joshua's (Josh. 1:8). It is also believed that when Christians possess no standards they seem "less scary" to the average worldly person and can lure them into church life. One must wonder whatever happened to believers being a "savour of death unto death" to the lost (2 Cor. 2:15-16). The church has removed the familiar sign that is displayed on the front of many stores today, "Shirts and Shoes Required." Many in the present day church movement simply want to strip away all standards. They want all the signs removed.

Standards are certain guidelines and rules that we must learn to follow because of God's ordained pattern of authority or His established chain of authority, which He has placed over our lives. As stated above, standards can be viewed as "a degree or level of requirement, excellence or attainment." They are levels of requirement that others in authority can place upon our lives for obvious functional purposes. Standards can also be used by those in authority to help aid Christians in their spiritual discipline and walk. Standards help believers to *apply holiness to their lives, practice discipline, maintain a consistent Christian testimony* and also *promote order and authority* in their own lives and the places they function, such as the local church setting or Christian institution of learning. To fail to have standards is to invite

confusion, disorder, and harm to the cause of Christ (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

The Biblical Basis for Having Standards

The whole principle of an authority base substantiates the Biblical basis for standards. Why would the Bible teach about authority if there was no need for standards to be placed upon people? *The fact that God established authority necessitates the need for standards.* It's expected that standards, or levels of requirement, be placed upon us by others within the family (Eph. 6:1 with Col. 3:20; Col. 3:18), government (Rom. 13:1-7), the everyday work force (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22), Biblical institutions of learning (Gal. 4:1-2) and the local church setting (Heb. 13:17). Paul placed various standards of living upon the saints within the stated gatherings in order to keep order (1 Cor. 14:27-35; 11:20-21, 31-34). Paul also placed various standards and restrictions upon the saints outside their regularly stated assembly meetings so that they could corporately function together as a unified, holy and separate body from the world (see 1 Cor. 10:20; Acts 15:28-29).

Standards have a Biblical basis so that believers might promote courtesy, love and edification (Rom. 14:1-19; 1 Cor. 8:1-13). We also have standards to promote order, decency and reverence in God's House (Psalm 89:7; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40). Standards (levels of requirement) are rules that help set the house of God in order and keep it pure in over all practice and leadership (Titus 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Acts 6:3). We also have Biblical standards to promote and practice the doctrine of separation and declare a holy stand (James 1:27; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

Biblical standards also help us to discipline our lives and walk in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord (Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12; Eph. 5:15). *Biblical guidelines or standards should be applied to our lives in order to prevent us from enjoying pleasures and habits that are designed to lead us astray.* Standards also teach us that we do not have to be conformed to every new type of sound, dress and flashy combo style that comes into the world. They teach us that Christians do not have to follow every culturally accepted norm and strive to conform to the culture of the world (Rom. 12:2).

Standards can help us to stay spiritually focused and teach us that the world's philosophies and cultural practices and fads are passing away (1 John 2:17).

This is why separated Christian schools and colleges do not allow students to mimic many new styles of haircuts and clothing. By eliminating these things they are demonstrating to the students that it is not necessary to copy the culture (Rom. 12:2) for their own fleshly and ego centered gratification and goals (2 Tim. 3:2). Furthermore, as a school or institution of learning, establishing standards can help the school to declare a stand against worldly pragmatism (Rom. 3:8; Isa. 5:20) and also give the statement that an institution of learning will not follow any of the dictates of the world's fashions, dress, philosophies and modern trends which go against principles of Bible separation. It's not that all new cultural styles and trends of dress are necessarily wrong. Any school of Biblical learning would admit to this. It's also true that we have legitimate rights to follow a cultural change if it does not disregard any Biblical principles of separation, decency and reverence (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). However, those who are under authority must yield to the established standards of those who are in authority (1 Thess. 5:12).

Young people must remember that a separated school has a testimony to uphold. The school wants to send the message of being a school that will not bend to the shifting trends of society which many times are worldly, existentialistic, relativistic and pragmatic in philosophy (Col. 2:8). Therefore, standards are set to maintain a sensible and safe level of separation from the world system so that the school can declare a stand against worldly trends that seek to dominate and control the lives of Christians. Standards help an institution to maintain the testimony and unbending position that cultural changes will not affect the Biblical philosophy of separation, which the institution of learning stands upon.

Standards are also established so that the schools of Biblical learning might teach students to discipline their lives and help them to realize that God's people do not have to conform or fashion themselves to every cultural change in society (1 Pet

1:14). *This will help the students to learn that cultural conformity must not become something that overtakes their hearts and lives, which in return creates worldliness in their day-to-day living.* After all, worldliness is really a condition of the heart. All worldly actions stem from a covetous heart that is bound to fleshly and prideful thoughts (1 John 2:15-17).

Many schools today, which are totally sold out to the worldly and relativistic spirit of New Evangelicalism, are actually dropping all their standards for their students. Their claim is that students must learn to think for themselves and make decisions on their own. But in doing this they have forgotten one thing. Students are still students! Students are there to learn Biblical truth, apply God's timeless principles about separation to their lives, and learn the importance of true spiritual discipline. A school can instill or ingrain within the lives of young students the teaching that believers must discipline their lives and learn not to follow those things in culture, whether sinful or non-sinful, which can captivate or control their lives and keep them from doing God's will. Worldly loves and loyalty to the world can keep us from loving God supremely and doing His holy will (see 1 John 2:15).

The fact that believers in the New Testament were told not to attend certain places (1 Cor. 10:20), commit various sins (1 Cor. 6:18, 7:1; Galatians 5:19-23), practice specific disorderly actions (1 Cor. 11:20-21; 1 Cor. 14; 2 Timothy 3:1-7) and dress in a certain immodest or ostentatious way (1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3) would indicate the need for these people to establish both corporate and personal standards that would accommodate these Scriptural teachings. In other words, a believer must not do these carnal things or else they will become worldly and not live a consecrated and holy life as a Christian in various areas of conduct. Furthermore, the Corinthians were chided for wrongly promoting their leaders (1 Cor. 3:3-4) and behaving in a certain carnal manner (1 Cor. 3:3) which would also necessitate the need to establish rules or standards in their lives, so that they could begin to discipline themselves, and make changes in their personal conduct.

The saints needed to establish various standards so that they might stop doing the very things that were carnal and follow the Word of God as was given out by Paul. In addition, the New Testament is full of checklists for Christians that outline the difference between right and wrong, light and darkness and the clean and the unclean (1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Galatians 5:18-21; Eph. 4:31-32; 5:3-4; Col. 3:8-9; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 2:13-20).

God is not against a checklist. And as we effectively use the Scriptures to guide our lives, we will formulate standards or rules that will honor God's Word and uphold God's holiness. These standards will forbid us to engage in worldly lusts, conform to the world, link up with religious unequal yokes, and participate with apostasy in any way. As we adhere to various Biblical checklists, which help to discipline our lives, this will also necessitate the establishing of various corporate and personal standards, which we will need to follow, in order to maintain a pure walk and live above reproach.

Three Kinds of Standards

Personal Standards

There are three kinds of standards. First, there are *personal standards*, which should always be formulated and followed on the basis of Biblically prescribed principles (2 Thess. 2:15). Certain personal standards are mandatory and must be maintained in order to live holy and pleasing to the Lord. *Personal standards have to do with the applications of Scripture to a believer's life.* Whether or not a Christian participates in certain activities and practices will be determined by his personal standards, which are based upon Scriptural mandates. Many personal standards, which a Christian has established for his own life, will be rooted in Scriptural principles. Because of this, most personal standards that he seeks to follow will be based upon the unchanging and timeless principles of God's Word. However, these standards may vary in some measure between believers as God's people grow in grace and their understanding and application of Scriptural holiness to their lives (2 Pet. 3:18).

Other personal standards might be established on the basis of personal conviction in regards to non-essential areas that do not violate Biblical principles. Paul's teaching on Christian liberty covers these types of personal convictions (Rom. 14:22-23). These personal standards might vary in some degree between separated believers as they grow in their understanding of Christian liberty. Such issues as what kind of Sunday activities you promote, personal tastes in modest clothing, makeup, having a TV in your home, accessing the Internet, celebrating Christmas, playing pool and whether or not you attend a Major League baseball game, as a form of entertainment, fall into the category of Christian liberty. These types of personal standards, even among separatist believers, will vary. Thus, it's important to understand that personal standards can fall into the realm of Christian liberty and vary between believers. However, it's equally important to understand that those standards revolving around Christian liberty will never compromise God's timeless Biblical standards, which are applicable to our lives today.

Corporate Standards

There are also *corporate standards* that fall into the realm of Christian courtesy, which are established so that believers can function together in a localized setting (Acts 15:28-29). Sometimes corporate standards are established in order to declare a holy and separated stance, which is expected to be maintained, based upon God's timeless Biblical commands and principles (1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Cor. 14). Corporate standards may include Biblical standards, which are based upon those Scriptural commands and principles that are designed to teach discipline, separation and godliness in the realm of Christian living. *Establishing Biblically based rules or standards in an institution helps to achieve a collective testimony since each person represents the local church or institution in his or her actions.* Both personal and corporate standards can and should reflect those Biblical standards, which are to be followed out of obedience to God's unchanging truth. However, many times corporate standards are *arbitrary* standards that are established so that a church or institution of learning can function together in a cohesive and unified fashion without offending other brethren. It must be

understood that in a church or institutional setting we should be willing to conform to certain arbitrary standards rather than hinder our brother's spiritual convictions.

Romans 14:19-20

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.”

The widespread notion of present day evangelicalism concludes that when Christians curb their liberty they are actually placing themselves under legal bondage. This is simply not true (Romans 15:1-2). This philosophy of our present-day undisciplined and critical generation of Christians goes against all Scriptural revelation. Paul clearly taught that one could have Christian liberty without exercising it for the sake of the other brethren.

1 Corinthians 8:13 says:

“Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”

Personal convictions regarding non-essential or non-biblical matters, which vary among the brethren, sometimes dictate the establishment of various corporate standards for meeting and learning so that God's people are not offended and distracted by the liberty that others might take. Many times we are quick to ask what we are *allowed* to do in a church setting rather than what we *should* do for the benefit of other believers. Yes, corporate standards may contain *arbitrary* rules or standards that are not necessarily based upon Biblical principles but which need to be followed for normal operational function and flow.

Such standards are legitimate, as long as the faculty and students of an institution clearly understand that their conformity is not the result of any Biblical principles but solely for functional purposes. These types of conventional or customary standards are necessary and can be safely followed as long as they are not placed on the same level with the Word of God and as long as God's people understand that they have no bearing on spirituality.

For example, a school may set a standard that every student needs to be in their dorm at 10:00 p.m. There is no Biblical principle to mandate this or nothing spiritual about being in a dorm by 10:00 p.m. But in view of the need for students to remain focused on their work and get the kind of sleep that they need to function the *arbitrary* rule is established. Turning off the lights at a certain time, observing certain eating habits that are not repulsive and not playing music after certain hours are all part of institutional function and courtesy.

There is also nothing wrong with requiring that Sunday School teachers, church members or ushers observe an institutional dress code. But to claim that an *arbitrary* dress standard (all ushers must wear ties) is on the same level with the timeless Biblical standards set forth in Scripture is wrong and misleading to people. It's true that dress code standards might be set in order to maintain the Biblical principles of reverence and modesty in God's House or in an institutional setting. And those who adhere to these standards can do so understanding the underlying premise of these Biblical principles and the need for them as God's people gather together. These standards can be accepted as a way to promote reverence in God's House. They might also help a Christian to consider the importance of modesty in their everyday dress. *In view of the need to maintain a safe level of modesty, decency and reverence in God's House the arbitrary rule is established.* But at the same time we must not lose sight of the fact that there is a certain amount of liberty in the area of modest dress outside the assembly that an arbitrary rule cannot override.

We cannot measure modesty by one inch or declare spirituality by wearing ties. In other words, we should not judge one another outside the assembly for not abiding by the exact dress standards required in a church or institutional setting. Furthermore, we should not judge the spirituality of a person outside a church or institutional setting who does not follow the exact same *arbitrary* rules established in a handbook, which are designed for institutional function. This is always wrong. We must simply understand that we can follow a certain dress standard or code while meeting together with God's people for functional reasons, to help promote a safe level of reverence, because of love for the

brethren, and in obedience to those who are in authority above us. Of course, rules have no power to make one spiritual but their presence can make group living more pleasant.

When it comes to personal and corporate standards there will always be the need to draw necessary lines in order to maintain a safe level from sinful practice and the world system. A line must be drawn somewhere, even if it's an arbitrary line, in order to prevent immoral influences, indecency and irreverence in God's House and many other types of destructive influences the world offers to Christians and the church. *If a stopping point is not made somewhere then worldly influence will eventually establish a beachhead in the church. In time, spiritual disorder and ethical breakdown will occur.* Therefore, making certain arbitrary rules and distinctions will be necessary. Obviously there will be some different opinions and disagreements concerning where arbitrary lines should be drawn on certain issues. But this still does not change the fact that lines must be drawn by those in authority and obeyed in the context of a local church or institutional setting (Heb. 13:7, 17; Eph. 6:5-6; 1 Pet. 5:5). And this needs to be done in order to maintain a level of decency, reverence, functionality and unity.

As we think of drawing those invisible lines we must remember several key things. First, there is no great difference between the numbers 30 and 31 but a line must be drawn somewhere. Second, there is a vast difference between the numbers 21 and 98. To say that there is no major difference is an absurdity. The point is this. The difficulty of making personal and corporate choices, revolving around certain activities and dress, should not cause us to be frightened when needing to make these precise decisions. Nor should the practice of making precise distinctions or drawing that invisible or arbitrary line keep us from making any distinctions. We need the wisdom (James 1:5) to strike a balance between severe restrictions and an atmosphere of leniency that promotes a worldly lifestyle that is many times conducted under the disguise of Christian liberty and sanctified orthodoxy (Gal. 5:13).

We must also remember that some boundary lines are easy to draw and cannot be erased or toggled back and forth because

they clearly represent and uphold the Biblical principle (Prov. 22:28; 2 Thess. 2:15). These types of lines cannot be removed or redrawn or else the Biblical principle or standard will be violated or lost. Another reason why they cannot be changed is because various actions, objects, activities and entertainments have never been created or designed to be neutral or amoral, such as fornication, adultery, music, tobacco, Halloween, ouija boards and crystal balls. Other arbitrary standards that are created might be able to be modified in some measure without losing the Biblical standard or principle stated in Scripture. This is because the arbitrary standards are actually embracing an amoral issue, item or activity, such as cloth, eating, time, TV, sports, hair, makeup, use of candles, etc.

Biblical Standards

There are also *Biblical standards* of church polity that fall into the area of Christian separation which must be followed and maintained in both personal living and church life, to honor God's holiness (1 Tim 6:3 – “the doctrine which is according to godliness”). Biblical standards are formulated directly from the multifaceted principles of Scripture and the clear regulatory traditions set forth in the epistles.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 states:

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”

2 Thessalonians 3:6 says:

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

It must be understood that Biblical traditions are not hundreds and hundreds of minute commands (from A to Z) that appear in the New Testament, which directly state *what* every worldly amusement is or clearly outline *how* we must choose to live in every situation that we might face. Nor does the New Testament directly name those places that Christians should not attend. No amount of commands could ever encompass every area of

questionable conduct, every worldly activity, every seedy place, and every important decision that we need to make in order to uphold God's holiness. This is because amusements change and new issues revolving around moral and worldly conduct are continually arising.

A detailed list of commandments will always fall short of giving completed information for every area of living and decision that needs to be made in relationship to the doctrine of separation or holiness. There is no command that says, "Do not listen to Rock Music" or "Do not attend a Movie Theater in order to watch an R-rated Movie" or "Do not hold a service with the Roman Catholic Church down the street in order to voice your disapproval toward abortion." Therefore, in order to uphold God's holiness in every area of our lives and every decision that we make, God has given timeless Biblical "traditions" in the New Testament, which are designed to govern every facet of our living and every decision that we will need to make in the midst of cultural changes and a morally corrupt and relativistic climate. Should I view this TV program because of this content? Should I read this magazine or book? Should I wear this particular piece of clothing? Should I listen to this type of music? Should I attend this particular church or place as a Christian?

Biblical traditions are Biblical precepts which consist of general commands and principles that are used to regulate our conduct and overall living. These traditions refer to church polity or regulations that help us in our areas of conduct and holiness as it pertains to the doctrine of separation and the outward practice of Bible separation (2 Thess. 3:6-7). These Biblical traditions encompass the overall precepts and principles of holiness that were taught in the inspired epistles by the apostles. Biblical "traditions" may include New Testament commands, which might teach *general truth* about separation (Rom. 12:2) sanctification (1 Thess. 5:3) or worldliness (1 John 2:15-17). These types of general commands and many other regulatory teachings in Scripture about behavior and godly conduct are designed to aid believers in their holy living (John 15:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). All of the Scriptural regulatory principles of the New Testament are designed as helpful tools to assist believers in making right decisions and

their overall practice of holy and righteous conduct, which pertains to every area of their lives. *In short, Biblical “traditions” will enable God’s people to live godly and help them to make decisions connected with multitudes of areas not specifically mentioned in the Scripture.*

These traditions and clearly stated truths deal with things such as *God’s glory* (1 Cor. 10:31), *church order* (1 Cor. 14:33, 40), *reverence* (Heb. 12:28), *appearance of evil* (1 Thess. 5:22), *being controlled by carnal/fleshly things* (1 Pet. 1:14; 1 John 2:16; Gal. 5:19-21 – “such like” works of the flesh), *the fruit and filling of the Spirit* (Eph. 5:18-20; Gal. 5:22-25), *the temple of the human body* (1 Cor. 6:19), *enslavement* (1 Cor. 6:12; 2 Pet. 2:19), *excess* (1 Peter 3:3-4; 4:3-4; Eph. 5:18), *testimony of light* (Eph. 5:8 with Matt. 5:14-15), *godliness* (Titus 2:12; 1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Tim. 3:12), *reproving evil and darkness* (Eph. 5:11), *lukewarm living* (Rev. 3:16), *graciousness, patience and compassion* (Col. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:16-25), *a forgiving spirit* (Eph. 4:31-32), *priority and stewardship* (1 Cor. 4:2, Rev. 2:4 with Matt. 6:33), *modesty and distinction among the sexes* (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3; 1 Corinthians 11:14-15), *shame* (1 John 2:28; Eph. 5:12), *covetousness* (Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:10-11; Heb. 13:5), *gossip* (1 Tim. 5:13), *honesty* (Rom. 12:17), *fearing God* (Heb. 12:28-29; 1 Pet. 2:17), *the discipline of God* (Heb. 12:5-7), *confession* (1 John 1:7-9), *cleansing* (2 Cor. 7:1; Jam. 1:27), *speech* (Eph. 5:4; Col. 4:6), *discernment* (Heb. 5:11-14), *pride* (1 Tim. 3:6; 1 John 2:16), *humility* (James 4:6; Phil. 2:3-8), *holiness* (1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:15-16), *unholy companionships and mixtures* (1 Cor. 15:33), *conformity to the world* (Rom. 12:2), *renewal or renovation of the mind* (Rom. 12:2), *spiritual contrasts or incompatible realms* (2 Cor. 6:14-16), *association, endorsement and cooperation with evil practices* (1 Cor. 10:20; 2 John 10-11; Eph. 5:7, 11; 1 Tim. 5:22), *philosophical thinking of the world* (Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:20), *fellowship with God* (James 4:8; 2 Cor. 6:17), *hindrance or weight* (Hebrews 12:1), *edification* (Romans 14:19, 21, 15:2), *stumbling block* (Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9), *a sinful base of operation* (Romans 13:14; Eph. 4:27), *priesthood of believers* (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), *giving thanks* (1 Tim. 4:4), *authority and submission* (Eph. 5:21-23, 6:1-5, Heb. 13:7, 17; Rom. 13:1-8; 1 Pet. 2:13), *expediency* (1 Cor.

6:12; 10:23), *offence* (1 Cor. 8:13), *vulgarity* (Eph. 4:29; 5:4), *lawful living* (2 Tim. 2:5), *license* (Rom. 6:1; Gal. 5:13), *liberty* (Gal. 5:1; Rom. 6:22), *legalism* (Rom. 2:28; Gal. 2:16; Rom. 7:11-25), *Christlikeness* (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:10), *uncertainty* (Romans 14:22-23), *idolatry* (1 John 5:21), *excellence or superiority* (Phil. 1:10), *leaven* (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9), *thinking pure, lovely and wholesome thoughts* (Phil. 4:8), *setting our affection on things above* (Col. 3:1-2), *a pure heart* (2 Tim. 2:22), *new life* (2 Cor. 5:17), *reckoning and yielding* (Rom. 6:11-13), *inward corruption and pollution* (2 Pet. 2:14 with Matt. 5:28), *the discipline and motivation of grace* (Tit. 2:11-12) and *God's praise* (Heb. 13:15; Rev. 19:5).

These kinds of multifaceted regulatory traditions will give us ample direction and guidance concerning those areas of conduct not specifically addressed in Scripture. The Biblical traditions of the New Testament will help us to make right decisions as we seek to walk a holy path. Take for instance the teaching concerning how our inner desires, motivations and thoughts can become sinful based upon what we look at or view through the human eye gate (2 Pet. 2:14; 1 John 2:16). What about thinking wholesome or pure thoughts (Phil. 4:8)? These principles alone would eliminate believers from reading scores of books, magazines and watching many TV shows, which are designed to feed the flesh and lead them into sensual thoughts.

The regulatory New Testament traditions of pride (1 John 2:16) and humility (Phil. 2:3) would keep believers from becoming showy and spectacular in the use of their gifts and from grotesquely piercing their bodies in order to become a spectacle before the eyes of people. The New Testament regulatory principles of spiritual contrasts or incompatible realms (2 Cor. 6:14-16), the world system (Rom. 12:2) and striving for excellence (Phil. 1:10) would keep believers from mixing pagan music with Christian words in order to worship God and do God's work. God's principles will give believers guidance concerning every decision that they must face in life and show them the direction and path that they must follow. Following these principles will help us to draw lines of demarcation or boundaries in order to live holy and separate before the Lord.

When examining the Biblical guidelines of the Word of God we can safely conclude that there will be no “gray” (neutral) areas for *holy* Christian living, conduct and service. The Word of God will give us ample direction on what to do and how to conduct ourselves so that we do not walk in the unholy path (Prov. 4:14). These timeless regulatory principles in the Scripture should be the hallmark of all godly living. We must return to the basic Biblical principles and show how they are to be applied in all situations. *The Bible is timeless and its teachings can be applied in every age and in every culture.* The great evangelical disaster among the present generation of Christians is to pass off clear Biblical principles as not applying to certain carnal, worldly or ecumenical activities and practices.

This practice results in jettisoning Scriptural truth and caters to fleshly and disobedient living, which is supposedly practiced in the name of Christian freedom, but in reality becomes disobedience in disguise (1 Sam. 15:22-23). *It would be safe to conclude that the present generation of Christians, for the most part, has abandoned the Scriptural regulatory principles that led to the original rejections of many worldly taboos.* This is why many taboos are no longer seen to be worldly and “off limits” to Christians today.

Many times the so-called “neutral” activities or amusements and list of sins, associated with worldliness of bygone years, still have important moral implications for our lives today. Certain regulatory principles of Scripture should cause many Christians to remove some activities from their “neutral” zone or category and place them in the forbidden column. No amusement or activity that feeds the carnal nature is acceptable to God (1 Pet. 2:11) No amusement or activity that bypasses clear Scriptural revelation can be seen as Christian liberty (Gal. 5:13). The Biblical standards and regulatory traditions of Scripture must be maintained at all times in order for reverence, order, godliness, and holiness to prevail.

Five Practical Points Dealing with Standards

1. We should not place arbitrary standards on the same level with the Word of God.

God has exalted His Word above His name (Ps. 138:2) and we must avoid putting any manmade or artificial standards above God's eternal truth and Word. We have already said that sometimes we can establish an arbitrary rule to maintain a safe level of modesty, reverence and respect for God's House. But we must beware that we do not put arbitrary standards on the same level as Biblical standards. The Pharisees put their standards (Matt. 15:9 – "commandments of men") on the same level as the Word of God. But Christ separated Bible standards from their own personal and corporate standards, which they had established, without expressing any real love for the people, and which also became a tremendous burden upon the people (Matt. 15:1-6; 23:1-4). Sometimes we might have the tendency to elevate certain institutional standards above God's Word and almost worship these standards and allow them to run our lives. New Testament Christianity reiterates that Christians should not allow idols to become part of their lives (1 John 5:21) and that Christian living must revolve around Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20). If we are not careful, we can idolize arbitrary standards and lose focus of our relationship with Christ.

2. We should not judge others by personal arbitrary standards.

Romans 14:10-13 speaks about this kind of wrong judgment. This is exactly what the Pharisees did (Matt. 7:1-2). They judged people by their own personal and artificial standards, which were not based upon any substantial Scriptural revelation. We must be careful that we do not judge others by arbitrary standards when those standards do not square with the teaching of Scripture. If a Christian wants to go out and eat at a restaurant on a Sunday afternoon or play a game of golf, we dare not judge him by our own personal arbitrary standard that we might follow. Our arbitrary scruples should not be pressed upon another Christian when his actions do not violate any Scriptural principle. In other words, we have no right to judge another believer on the basis of our own artificial scruples or standards that we follow. Likewise, if a church or institution of learning does not require the exact same arbitrary standards that another institution of learning requires, we should not automatically conclude that the institution is not a separatist

institution and write them off as compromising God's truth in some way. Matters which deal with having an ice-cream social in the church basement, a fall harvest party to replace Halloween, a sweetheart banquet around Valentine's Day, or whether a church sings Christmas hymns or chooses not to sing these hymns, should in no way cause one institution of learning to assume that another church or institution of learning is no longer following the basic tenets of separation.

The point that needs to be made is this. We must understand that certain artificial standards can vary without compromising eternal truth and holiness. Furthermore, all Christians realize that their body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). At the same time, we should not expect every believer to exercise five days out of the week in order to meet our own personal arbitrary standards or requirements for taking care of the human body, since it is God's possession. Nor should we expect that they eat no meat or only six ounces of meat a day in order to take care of their body (Gen. 9:3; 1 Cor. 8:8). *Where is the exact point where healthy habits begin and end and where is the exact point where modesty begins and ends? These questions are technically unanswerable.*

So there needs to be some personal liberty outside the church in regards to these areas and there can be without causing a believer to lapse into worldly and carnal living. Of course, this does not assume that all eating habits and forms of dress are on the same level. Eating at McDonald's seven nights a week and wearing clothing that is clearly designed to show off the human body defies all Biblical principles dealing with the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit and being used for modesty. The point seems to be this. How we eat should not take us down a clear path of unhealthy living and how we dress should not draw attention away from the enduring pattern of godliness. Nevertheless, we must remember that certain areas do allow for flexibility without compromising Biblical standards. *We must maintain the difference between tradition and text.* In regards to personal arbitrary standards and the related area of true Christian liberty, Matthew Henry wrote: "Rules of practice should not become rules of judgment."

3. We should remain focused on the overall mission and goal of the institution.

We must make sure that standards help accomplish the overall goal or mission of any church and learning institution. We should not become so enamored with regulations and rules that we begin to lose focus on what the church or institution is to be doing – teaching God’s people, edification, spiritual growth and personal soul winning. It is important for organizations to keep before them their general goals and purposes so that they do not become sidetracked by undo emphasis on rules or standards. This is very important to remember. *When the overall mission is forgotten, imbalance and confusion results.* As Jesus taught the Pharisees, the lesser things should not override the more important things (Matt. 23:23).

It’s important to set standards and then apply these standards. At times, it may be necessary to reevaluate certain standards. The point is not to see how many or how few standards a church or institution of learning can have. The real question is this. Do the standards contribute to the overall purpose of the institution or do they detract from the most important objectives of the institution? Martin Von has written this when it comes to standards: “Retain the best, refine the rest!” This is good practical advice and will help keep separatist institutions of learning and churches from becoming sidetracked by placing undo emphasis on rules and regulations.

4. We should never view cold outward compliance to any standards as a sign of inward spirituality.

This will be brought out in the following point about standards. For now we must understand that following a list of prescribed patterns does not necessarily indicate that a person is godly or spiritual and is practicing the fruit of the Spirit in their inner life (Gal. 5:22-23). We might appear clean on the outside by the standards we observe but actually be morally dirty on the inside. Jesus called this type of person a whitewashed tomb full of “dead men’s bones” (Matt. 23:27). We might *legalistically* follow standards and look good on the outside, but inwardly we can be full of uncleanness. In

other words, we *can* become like the Pharisees, who followed all kinds of standards, while at the same time possessing a heart that was far from God (Matt. 15:8). We must draw near to God as we seek to do what is right and as we follow personal, corporate and even Biblical standards (James 4:8). External conformity without internal devotion to God is a sign of legalism. We must guard against the preoccupation with externals at the expense of internals.

5. We should not give the impression that standards or rules provide people with spiritual power to live holy.

It must never be implied that a particular list of standards provides a believer with power to live holy. Some people who live under a rigid set of rules easily fall into sin. As a general rule, this is true and accurate. This is because they do not rely upon the inward power of the Spirit's sanctifying ministry (Rom. 7:6; Eph. 5:18). There is also another observation that needs to be made. *Right behavior because of fear of the system will end when the system has no more control.* However, right behavior that stems from voluntary decisions based on knowledge of Scripture and Biblical principles, with a response to the Holy Spirit's inward teaching and direction (Gal. 5:18), will continue to last even without any specified system.

This is very important to understand. This is why we must learn the Scriptural principles about Bible separation and hide them in our hearts (Ps. 119:11). Pastors and instructors must teach believers God's timeless Biblical principles and how to make good decisions based on Scripture, while possessing a personal relationship with God and the Holy Spirit. The principles must be *internalized* by the Spirit's ministry (2 Cor. 3:3) so that believers can continue to use them throughout their lives and rely upon the Spirit to direct and empower them (Gal. 5:25). The internal work of the Spirit must *soften* their hearts and change their inward attitudes toward various worldly actions and amusements (Ezek. 36:26-27). The change comes from the internal working of the Spirit's teaching and power. It must be stressed that this is what allows a person to live holy. God wants Christians to mature to the place where they can examine God's Scriptural principles and apply them to today's

new and changing circumstances and how they relate to their lives. Each person is responsible to God and they must learn this in their own personal lives and day-to-day routine, as the Spirit softens their hearts toward sin, and leads and empowers them to live holy, obediently and according to truth.

Twelve False Conclusions About Standards

1. Standards are legalism.

This is the most common reaction against standards and the first false conclusion that people arrive at concerning any list of standards. Today all established standards in the church are looked upon as legalism. It is believed that when there are any requirements to fulfill by other Christians that this becomes a form of legalism, since legalism is viewed as leadership establishing rules and then expecting people to follow them. Any kind of conduct list is frowned upon and immediately becomes labeled a form of legalism. Legalism is the buzzword that is used against all church leaders who would preach against certain sins and establish any kind of traditional standards for people to follow. Those who do establish standards are quickly labeled as dictating rule-makers, lording legalists and conspirators who want to enslave others in bondage instead of letting them be free. They are also called grace killers, since it is believed that grace brings freedom from all rules and absolute freedom from any restrictions. Considerable attention will be given to this false conclusion since there is so much confusion about legalism.

The Charge of Legalism

Premise #1: The Galatians were going back to the Law

Premise #2: Returning to the Law (a set of rules) is legalism.

Conclusion: Therefore, to follow a set of standards or rules is legalism.

This sounds good but there are several flaws in the conclusion. First, Paul was talking about a legalism that centered upon the Mosaic Law for final salvation and acceptance before God (Gal. 1:6; 3:1-3; 5:1-9). This is the base form of legalism (Acts 15:1).

Second, Paul was not forbidding the establishment of good Biblical standards. He was not disregarding the establishment of Biblical regulations that would forbid a Christian from attending a rock concert. What he was fighting against was the wrong use of the Mosaic Law as a means of sanctification and final justification before God.

The Galatian believers had received the Spirit's indwelling and saving ministry by faith and started their Christian life and journey by the Spirit's ministry. But they were in danger of reverting back to law keeping (Gal. 5:2; 4:10; 6:3) for spiritual assistance in their Christian lives with the final prospect of justification before the Lord (see Gal. 2:16; 3:2-11). Man tries to be made "perfect" (vs. 3) or reach the goal of Christian maturity and holy living by the principle of law (law relationship), but in the end he always fails. Legalism or the way of human effort, through law keeping, always fails.

Legalism cannot save us or sanctify us. The cold external code cannot correct our lives. It takes the work of the Spirit to challenge us and transform us (2 Cor. 3:18). There is no provision under the law position for the Holy Spirit to do a work of sanctification. If we have "begun" our Christian lives by the Spirit's assistance then we must stick with the Spirit! We can't rely upon a *law relationship* to make us holy (Gal. 5:18). The promise of the New Covenant ministry was the promise of a *personal relationship* with God (Heb. 8:10) by experiencing God's indwelling life through the presence of the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). We must learn the secret of walking in the Spirit and we will grow in our Christian life. Legalism simply does not work!

Understanding Legalism

We must remember that legalism is not the presence of rules but a *wrong attitude* toward any established standards or rules of conduct. Only when a person uses some code of conduct or standards, as their rule of life and sole basis of spirituality, instead of Christ and His power, do they become a practicing legalist (Rom. 7:12-8:4). The problem is not with the Law (Rom. 7:12) or any list but with a person's dependence upon the Law or some other list of standards and requirements to transform their lives.

The Heart of Legalism

Legalism results when a wrong function is ascribed to the Law. It is a misunderstanding and misuse of the Law. *The Law is not legalism. The follower of the Law uses the Law to create legalism in his own heart and life.* Legalism is then a misunderstanding and misuse of the Law or any list of requirements and rules that one must follow. Legalism does not manifest itself in some particular list but in the hearts of people who want outward conformity but no inward purity and true fellowship with God (Matt. 15:8 – “their heart is far from me”).

Myron Houghton said:

“A distinction must be made between lists and legalism ... Legalism is related to why one should obey a list rather than to the rightness or wrongness of the list.”

Legalism is not found in some outward code of conduct. Legalism is actually created in the heart when a person misuses the Law. This misuse of the Law results in the inward corruption of the heart. Legalism manifests its ugly head when rules are followed for salvation (Acts 15:1,5; Gal. 1:6-7; 2:21), sanctification (Rom. 6:14), spirituality, power, victory (Rom. 7:6, 11-25) and self-glory (Matt. 6:5; 23:5), instead of relying upon the grace of God to supernaturally change lives, as outlined for New Testament Christianity and living (Rom. 6:1-14; Titus 2:11-12; 2 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 2:20; Hebrews 8:10-11).

The raw form of legalism involves salvation by human effort or achievement (self-righteousness). In this form of legalism the heart embraces rules for justification before God. This is the legalism that is related to salvation (Acts 15:1, 10; Phil. 3:4-5; Matt. 19:16). But there is also a legalism that is related to sanctification or Christian living which causes a person to live by a law relationship (dependence upon law) for sanctification (Rom. 7:7-25; Gal. 2:20 with 3:3; Ex. 19:8; 24:3, 7) instead of a grace relationship with Christ (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:20) and the New Covenant ministry of the Spirit's power (Gal. 5:25; Eph. 5:18) which reveals God's indwelling life and nature on the inside of a person's heart (Heb. 8:10; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26-27). There is also a legalism related

to rule setting which causes a person to reinterpret God's Law for others by establishing oppressive rules that have no bearing on keeping God's moral Law or code of holiness (Matt. 1-3; 23:4; Mark 7:1-8; Gal. 1:14). This too becomes a wrong use of the Law.

The legalists of Jesus' own day followed the outward Law, which became concealed in multitudes of manmade traditions, in order to convey a sense of spiritual maturity, pride and holy living. At the same time, they had no inner desire to maintain true purity, walk in victory, and fellowship with God (Matt. 15:8). In this form of legalism and law relationship, the heart clings to rules for assistance in holy living. When we possess a wrong heart attitude and relationship toward rules, thinking that rules will change our lives and become the basis for salvation or sanctification, then we become a legalist and commit the error of legalism. Likewise, when we follow rules, while possessing a heart that lacks true fellowship with God, we place ourselves in the camp of the legalist (Joel 2:13 - "rend your heart, and not your garments"). *Legalism is a heart problem – not law problem.*

Is God a Legalist?

Legalism results in shiny shoes with dirty hearts, mechanical living without a loving relationship with the Lord, and performance without reliance upon God's power for victory. *However, if listing specific sins and spelling out commands is wrong and constitutes legalism, then God is a legalist!* God gave 613 commands in the Old Testament! If listing sins and the existence of Law constitutes legalism, then God has obviously encouraged legalism in every conceivable form. If legalism involves implementing a list of rules or standards, warning against worldly environments and pointing out that certain programs on TV are "off limits" because of unholy content, then parents become practicing legalists when they forbid their children to watch certain TV programs, attend certain amusements and stay away from various social functions and parties which foster and encourage permissiveness. It is not wrong nor legalism to list sins, which we should avoid (Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:8). Lists in themselves are not legalism. It is our *wrong attitude* toward any list or code of conduct (rules) that creates legalism in our hearts (Acts 15:1; Ex. 19:8; Rom. 7).

Are You a Legalist?

A Christian who lives within the commands of the New Testament and according to Biblical principles is not necessarily a legalist. He may be – but it's very wrong to assume that all those Christians who seek to follow standards are legalists. This is an absolute travesty that is being promoted today against many sincere believers who are seeking to live a holy and clean life before the Lord.

We must understand that there is a difference between living by rules in the Christian life and having rules in the Christian life. There is also a vast difference between legalistically following standards to produce victory and using standards as an aid to help us in our Christian walk. Are we relying upon some list of rules for final salvation, personal power, and ultimate spiritual living or victory? Our reliance for victory should be on Christ and His inward power instead of some outward code of conduct or list of do's and don'ts (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20).

We must remember that Christ's power is unleashed through the Spirit's ministry (Rom. 7:6 – “newness of the spirit”). However, it must be understood that a list of sins and standards can be an *aid* to discipline our lives without hindering the work of the Spirit in our hearts. After all, sin and worldliness are outlined in the Bible and we are sanctified and made clean through the Word of God (John 17:17; 15:3). Therefore, Biblical standards are a necessary part of helping and aiding us grow in our Christian walk (1 Pet. 2:2). *Biblical guidelines or standards can be applied to our lives in order to prevent us from enjoying pleasures and habits that are designed to lead us astray.*

The legalistic problem arises when we develop a list and forget about the Spirit's internal work and power to help us accomplish what God has told us to do. *Traffic lights in themselves do not change individuals, but our lives are safer because traffic lights exist.* In a similar way, any Biblical regulatory list, without the Spirit's assistance, cannot bring change in our hearts and lives. Rules themselves cannot change us. But when coupled with the dynamic of the Spirit's power, these Biblical commands, rules,

promises, guidelines and principles can bring effective change into our lives and become a helpful and needful part of our Christian growth process (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:4). In the end our lives will be much safer and more stable because of the traffic lights of standards.

A right heart attitude toward all commands, rules and standards is what keeps us from legalism. People will not become a victim of legalism just because they have certain rules that they follow. There is definitely a proper place and Biblical basis for standards and rules within families, organizations and institutions of learning. A person can place himself under a code of conduct or standards and follow New Testament Christianity by experiencing Christ's inward victorious power and fellowship (Phil. 1:21 – "For me to live is Christ"). *We must remember that the Christian life is not outward conformity to a list of behavior patterns.*

The Christian life is the Christ life. It involves living and experiencing close communion and contact with the Lord (Phil. 3:10). Any code of conduct or church list of standards, which we have today, is a *means to an end* but not the end. In other words, no list guarantees that we will live godly and under the Spirit's control by experiencing the indwelling power, presence and fellowship of Jesus Christ in our lives. Many non-Christians do not drink alcohol, smoke or dance. They abstain from movies, do not cheat on their wives and do not swear. This would tell us that mere outward conformity to a certain list of do's and don'ts does not assure people of genuine spirituality. This is because they can do all the right things outwardly and still not have a right relationship inwardly with the Lord.

On the other hand, we can safely conclude that all true Christians possess certain Biblical standards that are based upon Scriptural commands and principles, which they adhere to and follow, without making themselves practicing legalists. There is a general consensus among believers in the Lord that committing adultery, fornication, taking drugs, robbing banks, cheating, lying and selfishness is wrong. The fact that all Christians can and do follow these Scriptural standards by the Spirit's enabling power, without becoming practicing legalists, should be an indicator that following

Biblical standards, which are formulated from the principles of Scripture, does not make one a legalist. In fact, if Christians keep a right relationship with the Lord and rely upon the Spirit's in-working power and fruitful ministry, while submitting to a list or code of conduct, they will not commit legalism in their hearts. The argument that legalism is automatically embraced by following standards is simply a straw man argument and false conclusion.

The Core Teaching of Legalism

Legalism primarily emphasizes outward conduct without any real inward relationship with God or desire for inward purity (Matt. 23:27-28). It's the mentality that God is satisfied with our human attempts to obey some outward code through human willpower and that outward conformity to a particular list creates true spirituality and maturity. Legalism occurs when human ability and effort tries to use laws, rules and outward behavior to produce spirituality instead of relying on God's work of inner grace to change the lives of people from the inside (Phil. 2:13). The legalist is the person, who by his own human effort, uses rules or standards and even valid restrictions to produce an *artificial sanctification*. A legalist misuses something that is good, whether it's Biblical standards, valid restrictions or arbitrary rules, and uses these regulations as his sole basis for spirituality and Christian living. As a result of his personalized quest for sanctification or holiness, he prevents himself from discovering the new life that he can have through Christ and the Spirit's ministry of inward change and power (Rom. 7:14-25).

Instead of serving God out of love and delight the legalist will serve God out of drudgery and miss the real meaning of Christianity, which involves experiencing the inward power, provision and personal fellowship he can have with Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:21; 3:10). Legalism within the realm of Christian living can be defined as the tendency to reduce Christianity to a set of rules or a law relationship with God rather than maintaining a close internal and personal relationship with the Lord (Heb. 8:10-11). Reducing the Christian life to a set of rules or legal relationship with God, without possessing an internal walk and relationship with God, becomes a misrepresentation of true Christianity.

The legalist will often want only a *minor obligation* to God. His desire is to follow a short list of requirements and do the absolute minimum to please God. This is because his heart and treasure are somewhere else (Matt. 6:21). His heart and ambition is not really interested in the contest of living the Christian life and walking with God (1 Cor. 9:24-27). His heart is not in tune with God (Matt. 5:18) and he is not really thirsting and hungering after righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Legalism in its most simple and underlying form involves earning salvation through human achievement (Acts 15:1; Gal. 5:1-9), depending upon human achievement for sanctification (Rom. 7:7-25), and setting oppressive rules that have no remote bearing on holiness or living according to God's moral code (Mark 7:1-8). In addition, the underlying symptoms of all legalism (human effort or self reliance - Ex. 19:8 - "we will do") and the character of legalists (cold heart and competitive spirit) can leak over into Christianity and become a person's whole approach to life.

Understanding the Primary Issue of Legalism

The whole point is this. We cannot simply define spirituality in terms of what we should not do – drinking, smoking, swearing, lying, stealing, dancing and committing adultery. If this is the case, even an atheist might pass the test! A person might do these things and not be walking in newness of life and experiencing the Spirit's inward power, provision, fruit and the abiding life of Christ (John 15:4). When Christianity is simply reduced to a list of do's and don'ts it falls dreadfully short of what God intended it to be! We should not give the impression that just because people refrain from certain activities that they are living a holy life (Matt. 5:28). On the other hand, outward conformity to good standards does not indicate that a person is failing to fellowship with God and walk in newness of life through the Spirit's inner work and power (Rom. 7:6). A person may have good and legitimate standards that they are following and be joyously walking with God and relying upon the power and ministry of the Spirit to operate in his life. In fact, the very reason he has standards is normally a sign of the Spirit's internal work in his heart and life.

Legalism – What About License?

We might also add at this point in our study that when a person has no standards, which are derived from the Scriptures and through the Spirit's sanctifying ministry, he becomes antinomian and is in danger of turning his liberty into license (Rom. 6:1; Gal. 5:13; 2 Pet. 2:14, 18-20). This has been proven in the present day drift of New Evangelical Christianity. Many no longer stop to evaluate worldly amusements or actions and abandon all taboos as a sign of liberated Christianity. *They have no more spiritual basis for their conduct.* All that they know is what was wrong in the past is now right and what is wrong even today might be right tomorrow. This is the antinomian mindset of present day Christianity. As standards sink the Christian community sinks with them and everything becomes buried beneath the debris of a relativistic philosophy, which has no boundaries.

Legalism and Liberty

The idea is being propagated today that the teaching of New Testament grace releases believers from all rules and gives them a freedom to live without any kinds of regulations. Today we are free to embrace what was once deemed as worldly living (social drinking, smoking, listening to rock music, attending the theater, listening to swearing and watching nudity on TV, dancing in the church, etc.). Today grace is looked upon as freedom from any regulations where people can “do their own thing” and choose their own path to take without ever being confronted by others concerning their actions. Somehow freedom from Old Testament dietary restrictions and freedom from the Sabbath days of the past (Rom. 14:1) are construed to mean freedom from all rules and regulations.

Of course, this is unjustified application concerning what Paul is saying in regards to morally neutral things such as meats and days. The perverted grace teaching of today instills in the minds of Christians that we can be free to choose our own lifestyle, express ourselves as we want to, and find out for ourselves what is right, without having any leadership or authority over our lives. This is a misconstrued understanding of grace that in many ways sidesteps

God's clear commands for Biblical separation from the world system and God's call for holy living (1 John 2:15-17). New Testament freedom does not mean freedom from all rules, regulations and authority but freedom from sin's power and rule over our lives (Rom. 6:11). In fact, our freedom from the Law cannot be interpreted as meaning freedom from all rules.

In respect to salvation, liberty points to the believers release from the condemnation of the Law (2 Cor. 3:17) and the Law as a way of legalistic salvation and acceptance before God (Gal. 2:4; 5:1). Christian liberty is the freedom to choose to do right without the ever-present authority of a system of rules forcing you to do right and live right - or else! In respect to living the Christian life, liberty points to the believer's freedom from sin's bondage and practices while living under the Law (John 8:36; Romans 6:18; 20-22; 7:4-11; 8:2; 1 Cor. 7:22). Christian liberty or freedom grows out of our "newness of life" in Christ (Rom. 6:4) and the "newness of spirit" or the Spirit's inner transforming ministry in our lives (Rom. 7:6). *True Christian freedom is God's enablement to do His will. Christian liberty is the privilege and power to become all that God wants us to become in Christ.*

Freedom is not an open invitation to do anything one wants to do. *Liberated living is not unrestricted living. Liberty is not only "freedom to do" but also "freedom not to do."* Biblical freedom is the joy of living free from sin's power through the divine influence of God upon the life. It's a freedom to live without the shackles of sin that we were once bound to in Adam. Freedom to live for God and freedom from sin's bondage is something that we could not possess before we were saved (Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Peter 2:18-19).

There is a fable of a kite that once said to itself, "If I could just get rid of that man who is holding me back, then I could fly above the clouds and kiss the stars." One day the string broke. Now at last the kite was free to fly without any restrictions and soar to heights that it never had gone before. But much to its surprise, it did not rise above its present height. The kite had not realized a fact of aerodynamics: *the string holding a kite down is the same string holding it up.* In a similar way, good Biblical standards, which are formulated from the timeless principles of the Word of God, do not

hinder our Christian liberty or freedom simply because they hold us down. On the contrary, good Biblical guidelines or standards, when applied to our lives and coupled with the Spirit's power, can keep us from collapsing in our spiritual walk. *Good Biblical standards actually hold us up while at the same time they hold us down!*

The separation or holiness practiced by the child of God is true freedom! To be able to live holy in *every area* of our lives is God's true gift of freedom. Separating from all sin unto God is a liberating response to the loving Master who has freed us from all sin and iniquity (2 Tim. 2:21; 1 Cor. 7:22-23). We now are at liberty to give our lives to God (Rom. 12:1-2) and serve Him as our Master since we have been set free from the old spiritual forces that once ruled our lives (Eph. 2:1-3). *Before we were saved we were running to sin. After we are saved we should find ourselves running from sin!*

The Christian has the liberty or freedom to run away from sin and no longer be controlled by its domination or power. Paradoxically, we are a free slave to another Master. In fact, we now are to live under the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), which was a particular precept, regulation and summary of the Law that Jesus taught during His earthly ministry, concerning our absolute love and loyalty to God (Mark 12:30-31). The law of love should be most important in our lives and result in wholehearted loving obedience to God and govern all of our relationships with people (Rom. 13:8). This is because loving our fellowman was part of Christ's law of love.

Love for God and others rejoices in truth (1 Cor. 13:6) and seeks to restore (Gal. 6:1) instead of condone and cooperate with sin (Eph. 5:11). Because of these aspects of true love, there will always be a natural obedient response to all of God's truth from the believer, who is living under the law of Christ and making this law his highest ambition in life. The Bible says elsewhere that we are "enlawed" to Christ (1 Cor. 9:21) and speaks of this same truth of being under the law of love that Jesus spoke about during His earthly ministry. Paul would practice the customs of either the Jews or Gentiles, depending upon where he was ministering, because he loved them. However, Paul qualified his statement by saying that he was not free to live as he pleased among the Jews and Gentiles but was bound to the law of Christ. Since loving God and

others is the royal law of love (James 2:8) that Jesus spoke about during His earthly ministry (Matt. 22:37-40), it would suggest that we are bound to honor, serve, and please the Lord Jesus by always following the law that He gave. In other words, uncompromising love for God and love for others, as Jesus taught, should govern all of our actions, decisions and relationships and result in believers striving to live a pure, holy and righteous life before God and others. This is because love always aligns itself to truth and what is holy and righteous (Rom. 12:9-10; 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 13:6). Furthermore, love always seeks to restore people in the path of truth (Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

The whole point is this. Since the believer lives under the law of Christ, which involves loving God supremely and loving his fellowman, Christian liberty does not involve license to live as one pleases. *The Christian's loyal love toward God prevents both the attitude and actions of rebellion and carnality from overtaking his life.* It results in the child of God loving and serving God out of a newfound freedom. The law of Christ (loving God and others) prevents sinful license from occurring. Instead of license there will be genuine love for God and others that will keep the believer from being bound to their old manner of living and lifestyle in the flesh.

Love for God and others wins out over the flesh! And serving the Lord out of love is the very core of New Testament Christianity (John 21:15-17; Rom. 7:6; Eph. 6:24; 1 Cor. 16:22). I love you Jesus! I love you God! Christian liberty and liberated living from sin stems from a loving slave/Master relationship with Christ (Rom. 6:1-11; 20-22; 1 Cor. 7:22) and becomes the believer's loving response to God (Luke 10:27), which results in the believer's freedom to do what is right and pleasing to the Lord (Rom. 6:6; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Thess. 4:1). *Disobedience to Scripture is bondage. Obedience to Scripture is freedom!*

True Christian liberty is not freedom from Biblical standards (the world's perspective on freedom) but freedom to be what God wants us to be (Heaven's perspective on freedom). Freedom is the privilege and power to become all that God wants us to be through Christ! Freedom is experienced through knowing and obeying the Word of God (John 8:32; James 1:25; Ps. 119:45 – "I will walk at

liberty: for I seek thy precepts”), through the death of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:15; 1 John 3:8), through the indwelling risen life of Christ (Rom. 6:4-5) and through the ministry of the Spirit of God that applies “all of the above” to our lives and confirms to our hearts this newfound freedom (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Legalism and New Testament Christianity

The hallmark of New Testament Christianity is the internal teaching and filling ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; Rom. 7:6; Eph. 2:22; 5:18; Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Cor. 6:19). But this internal work of the Spirit in our lives does not mean that a list of guidelines or standards to follow will work contrary to His New Testament ministry. *A list of standards can be of value but we must understand that following some outward list of conduct will not assure us of spiritual maturity nor provide us with the inward power and transformation that only the Holy Spirit can supply our lives with as Christians.*

New Testament Christianity stresses the need for inward fellowship with God and dependence upon Jesus Christ for companionship, power, personal victory and inward purity of heart as the Spirit makes the life of Christ relevant to our own lives (Phil. 3:10; Phil. 2:13; Rom. 8:2-4). There needs to be inward fruit and dependence upon the Spirit’s ministry which reveals the life of Christ to our own lives (Gal. 5:22-25). However, as we *apply* the Word of God to our lives (2 Tim. 3:16-17) there will be *necessary boundaries and standards* marked off, which *aid* as a disciplinary and guiding mechanism that the Holy Spirit can use to clarify all sin, uncleanness and compromise (John 15:3; 17:17).

We must simply remember that a list of boundaries is only a means to an end and will provide us with no inward power or inner assistance for daily living. Cold compliance to a list without inward power and a loving relationship with Jesus Christ falls dreadfully short of what true Christianity is all about! Our life must revolve around the Person of the indwelling Christ (Gal. 2:20). New Testament Christianity is an intimate loving relationship with Jesus Christ who makes His life known and available to each one of us

through the Spirit's work and assistance (John 14:18-20; 15:1-14; James 4:8).

When Legalism Begins

We must then state our case very clearly. It is not wrong to have standards in a church or institution of learning. Standards themselves are not legalism. However, we should never think that outwardly observing or keeping any rules or standards will make anybody spiritual on the inside or become the evidence that they are spiritual (Rom. 7:24). *The yeast of legalism can very easily begin to grow in our own hearts if we only look at spirituality as an outward compliance to rules and regulations.* Before long we can become *proud* of our outward spirituality ("puffed up" - 1 Cor. 5:2) and this is exactly what the yeast of legalism does. It puffs up on the inside of us and creates pride in our hearts. Of course, pride feeds the flesh and grieves the Spirit and we no longer are walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

It is possible that legalism can occur in our lives. The danger of legalism is always lurking around the corner and is very real. Legalism occurs when we only focus on rigid outward compliance to rules and regulations, without possessing an inward pure heart and reliance upon God for power and victory. However, it is the old nature or flesh that creates legalism in our hearts and lives as we seek to promote ourselves in a prideful way (1 John 2:16) in light of some standard and rely upon the standard for victory (Rom. 7:15).

The point is this; *legalism is not automatically generated by some list of rules or standards of conduct.* If this were the case then all of us would be legalists when we seek to follow the primary moral and ethical teachings of the Ten Commandments and the many other direct commands stated in the New Testament epistles. *Legalism is not created in our hearts by following commands or standards of conduct.* Legalism is created when we begin to view spirituality as something that can be achieved by the human effort of complying to certain commands, to some code of conduct list or regulatory standards. *Legalism is living by rules, depending upon laws or rules to change your life, instead of relying on the Spirit's*

inner work of transformation, fruit and power (Gal. 5:22-25). Legalism allows pride to eventually be established in our hearts and we will seek to elevate our lives above others by outward performance and ability (see Luke 18:9-13).

Of course, adhering to a list of separated and regulatory standards, which an institution or church places before us, does not automatically and magically generate legalism. So how is legalism generated in our hearts? Legalism occurs when our inward ego and heart becomes inflated with pride (1 John 2:16 – “the pride of life”). We begin to believe that we can follow some list of standards by our own human determination and willpower. We begin to think that by simply following some particular list or code of conduct that we will be assured of spirituality and can elevate ourselves above others in some way.

Yes, this prideful attitude will bring a curse upon the lives of believers and eventually bring them to their defeat (Prov. 16:18; Rom. 7:15). Legalism occurs when we forget about humble submission to the Lord’s authority over our lives and His transforming power (James 4:10). Legalism occurs when we ignore the Spirit’s inward fruit and power to transform our lives (Gal. 5:22-23) and make us more Christ-like (2 Cor. 3:18). Legalism occurs in our hearts when we begin to place confidence in our own fleshly compliance to some forbidden list of sins or mandatory code of conduct to transform our lives (Gal. 5:19-21). Legalism occurs when we begin to think that by mere outward conformity we can become spiritually mature, victorious and spiritual.

Facing the Facts About Legalism

If all the facts would finally come in we could write a book and conclude that even those Christians, who do not possess strong standards, can be outright practicing legalists! All of us can be guilty of the marks and symptoms of legalism. Any believer can live for self and exalt self (Luke 18:11). They can find themselves putting on an outward religious show and glorying in their own outward appearance so that others will see them (Matt. 23:4-7). Every believer can present a false view of spirituality before others

(Matt. 6:16). They can forget about the true condition of their heart and life before God and seek to live out their own lives of inward rebellion (Matt. 23:27-28). None of us are exempt from hypocrisy in our daily living (Matt. 23:13-33). All believers can struggle with pride, outward showmanship and greed (Matt. 6:1-2, 7; 23:14). All Christians can lack a caring or loving heart for others (Matt. 23:4). Any Christian can grit his teeth and depend upon the flesh for victory or his own human power and strength (Rom. 6:14; 7:14-25; John 8:33-36). *Human effort and ability can for a time masquerade itself as the Spirit's power in our lives.*

In our Christian lives we can very easily become over confident and neglect the assistance of the Spirit's ministry for daily living (Eph. 5:18). Any believer can live in a mechanical fashion where they pass through regular religious routines such as morning devotions, giving and following certain church regulations without possessing a clean, loving and intimate relationship with God (Mark 7:3-4; Matt. 15:8). Let us face the facts. Any Christian has the potential to allow the marks of legalism to occur in his life. There are no exceptions. We are all in danger of possessing a legalistic heart or bent to living, whether we are a practicing separatist adhering to Biblical principles of separation, or a modern evangelical believer, who is tolerant of the world in his life.

Results of Legalism

The result of practicing legalism is that we reduce Christianity to merely living by rules and conformity to a certain behavior pattern instead of experiencing our intimate life and union with Jesus Christ (John 15:1-17). *Legalism takes believers away from the Christ-life (Phil. 1:21) and places emphasis on the self-life (Luke 18:11-12 & Rom. 7:15 – note the reoccurring word - "I").* Self becomes the determining factor for spirituality and living becomes focused on the person instead of Christ. Legalism ultimately brings cold formality into the lives of God's people because of a misplaced emphasis on rules and also because they possess a wrong attitude toward certain rules and regulations. It must be understood that legalism always begins in the heart. It must also be repeated for emphasis. Legalism is a heart thing – not a rule thing!

Legalism and the Adverse Reactions to Standards

The present day thinking being promoted today is this. If standards foster legalism, then let's get rid of all standards. This is where the trouble lies.

a. The negative reaction to all standards.

Some react in a negative way to all lists or standards since they see the danger of legalism occurring in the lives and hearts of people whenever a list is placed in front of them. Faced with the difficulty of legalism they mistakenly conclude that all rules should be dropped so that they do not foster legalism in the hearts and lives of people. They develop a "liberated syndrome" and conclude that it is unnecessary to be subject to any restrictions. But this is an unwarranted reaction and smokescreen of present day New Evangelicalism which has systematically tried to jettison all separatist teaching and doctrine. ***We cannot solve the problem of legalism by abolishing all standards and laws!***

If we are afraid of legalism occurring in our hearts and the lives of people, through cold conformity to some stated list of standards, then we had better tear out those pages in the Bible that promote lists of sins and those lists that promote areas of righteous conduct (Exodus 20:1-17; Prov. 6:16-19; Gal. 5:19-23; Col. 3:8-25; Eph. 4:26-32). God has not relaxed His standards! God has not changed His moral standards and those timeless standards that govern all godly living, holiness and conduct even though we might adopt new styles and change our conduct and cultural practices. God has not called 21st century believers to relax their standards so that they can become what is termed as a "liberated Christian." God has not liberated us from standards. What God has liberated us from is legalism.

It's true that a believer might attempt to live morally pure outwardly but at the same time be out of fellowship with God on the inside of his heart and even be practicing adultery in his heart (Matt. 5:28). A believer might not outwardly murder somebody but God knows what is really in his heart (1 John 3:15).

We must understand that Christ's definition of sin penetrates deep within the realm of the human heart. Sin occurs in the heart. Sin is not simply failing to conform to an outward list of standards or code of conduct. God looks at the heart. *The key to abolishing legalism and turning away from legalism is to realize that the attitude of our hearts must correspond with our outward conduct.* What Christians do outwardly must be done inwardly and come from a heart that is in love with Jesus Christ and surrendered to His lordship over their lives. Whatever is practiced on the outside must result from Christ's inward power operating in our lives. When the inward is in conformity with the outward legalism can be prevented. But when the outward is cleansed and the inward is dirty we fall into the same pharisaical error of legalism which was practiced in Christ's own day (Matt. 23:25). To be adorned outwardly but sinful inwardly becomes the hallmark of legalism (1 Peter 3:3-4).

- b. The negative reaction that the New Testament standard of Christianity is lost through the outward practice of standards.

New Testament Christianity is a radical transformation calculated to change us from the inside out (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:13; Eph. 2:22; 2 Cor. 3:18). It's assumed that if any standards are followed that this somehow reduces New Testament Christianity to something less than what God expects for Christians today. Many Christians want to object to any list of standards or rules because they want to elevate Christian conduct to what they feel New Testament Christianity is all about – liberty and freedom instead of rules and regulations. Because of this mentality they would like to lower their personal standards to the level of their friends and copy the changes in the Christian community and feel accepted within the normal range of so-called “free Christianity.”

This is why we have Evangelical Free churches springing up all over the countryside. The “free thinkers” teach that the church for centuries has been inundated by legalistic archaic taboos and that today it must break out of its shell and be released from her past strongholds of legalism and begin to practice what is termed as New Testament freedom. Because of this present day freethinking philosophy many Christians have actually mistaken the Holy

Spirit's conviction, concerning various worldly amusements and sins (Rom. 8:4), as some kind of legal bondage or barrier and 21st century form of opposition that they must overcome.

Some Christians seem to confuse the true inner conviction of the Spirit, concerning various worldly practices, as some kind of legalistic influence that is trying to overtake their lives and keep them from experiencing the New Testament life of liberty and freedom. *Christians are confusing the Spirit's true sanctifying work with the unsanctified work of the "spirit of the world" (1 Cor. 2:12).* Sadly, true Holy Spirit conviction in the heart of many believers today is sometimes mistaken as the inroads of legalism, which is trying to bring their lives under bondage. Thus, believers are being told to fight off the ancient church traditions, which have supposedly placed "heavy burdens" upon the past generation of Christians, who have sought to follow the standards of law instead of grace. *In other words, in a mad attempt to extinguish all rules and Biblical standards, standards are now being viewed as something that works contrary to the Holy Spirit's inner work and conviction.*

Sadly, as a result of this mentality, many believers pass off the Spirit's inner conviction and sanctifying ministry, through Biblically based standards, as burdens of law that they must fight off and which no longer must be obeyed for the sake of discovering the liberated living that New Testament Christianity offers. But there is a word of caution that must be shared at this point. It's very easy for carnal saints to misconstrue the true inner conviction of the Spirit, as legalism and burdens of law, which they no longer must bear, and actually miss the Spirit's true inner leading and become numb to some sanctifying change that needs to be made in their own lives (2 Pet. 1:9; Rev. 3:17).

Another point must be stressed about Holy Spirit conviction. ***Many times Christians are miserable because God is trying to convict them!*** It's not the devil trying to wreck their lives or the preacher's Pharisaical convictions being pushed upon their lives or the spirit of legalism attempting to overtake their freedom. It is actually the sanctifying and transforming work of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 6:8).

This “free-thinking” philosophy that all commands or standards become burdens of law is a giant smokescreen, created by Christians today, who do not want God to have full control over their lives (1 Cor. 6:19) and who do not want to forsake certain carnal areas of enjoyment that are influencing their lives (2 Cor. 7:1). In the first place, when we are yoked to Christ His commands are light – not a burden (Matt. 11:30). Christ has freed us from the yoke of bondage (the old life of slavery to the Law) so that we can wear the liberating yoke of Christ!

Second, we must understand that Biblical New Testament liberty involves freedom from the Law’s curse and condemnation (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 3:19) and freedom from using the Law as a saving and sanctifying measuring stick for salvation and Christian victory (Gal. 5:13; Rom. 6:14; 7:14-25). *We have been set free from the condemning sentence of the Law (Gal. 3:13) and any saving, enslaving, and sanctifying relationship to the Law (Rom. 7:4-11).* New Testament liberty also involves *freedom from the strongholds of sin* over our lives through our identification with Christ (Rom. 6:1-10). Christian liberty does not mean the absolute freedom from all rules but the freedom to live free from sin’s power. Paul is not dealing with rules but with sin in Romans chapter six.

The New Testament never paints the picture that present day Christianity has no commands or laws and that laws or commands somehow become a stumbling block to Christians and the Spirit’s internal ministry in the present dispensation. Living “under grace” (Rom. 6:14) instead of living “under the law” (Gal. 5:18) does not mean living without laws or restrictions. *Somehow many present day Christians have come to the conclusion that we are lawless and need no restrictions or standards since we live under grace instead of Law.* There are always those who interpret freedom as spiritual anarchy (Gal. 5:12). This is not the case at all. Living “under grace” means to experience our union with Christ and the dynamic influence of Christ’s resurrection power operating in our lives through the Spirit’s ministry and assistance (Rom. 6:11-14; 8:4). It involves experiencing the internal working of the Holy Spirit in our lives as the Spirit seeks to communicate the resurrection life of Christ to our own life (Rom. 6:4; 8:2-3), teach us about the gracious death of Jesus Christ on our behalf (Titus 2:11-12) and

conform us to Jesus Christ through His sanctifying and freeing ministry (Gal. 5:15-26; 2 Cor. 3:18). In short, grace frees or liberates us from sin (not rules and standards) so that we can live a godly life that is pleasing to the Lord in every way through the internal influence of the Spirit's ministry.

The personal dimension of the Spirit's internal ministry and work is the key feature of New Testament grace. This internal working of grace points to God's new dispensational order and the dynamic provision for the lives of His New Testament saints (Eph. 2:22). In the present economy the Holy Spirit performs the inner grace and work of revealing the glory of Christ's abiding presence to believers, through helping them to experience their union or vine relationship with Christ (John 1:16-17; 14:16-21; 15:1-14; Gal. 2:20). New Testament freedom does not speak about freedom from all standards, commands and laws but the freedom we have to live by God's inwrought and inworking power (Phil. 2:13) so that we might experience His gracious provision for victory, which is something the Law could never provide (Rom. 8:3).

True Christianity is an inside-out job; it's not an outside-inside job! Never! However, the fact that we are delivered from the Law as a way of salvation and sanctification does not mean the Law and all laws or standards become invalid and useless for New Testament living. Why would God give hundreds of N. T. commands to follow if this were true? *Freedom from the Law simply means that we must experience the power for Christian living from the inside and never rely on any external law relationship or legalistic manmade compliance to commands, standards, or laws, as a means to produce sanctification.*

The Law shows us how to live holy but provides us with no assistance or power to live in such a manner (Rom. 8:2-4). Therefore, it takes the indwelling ministry of the Spirit to provide us with the power to live godly and holy (Rom. 15:13; 1 Pet. 1:22; Acts 1:8). There is no sanctifying grace in law keeping. If you are seeking to live by law as a rule of life then you are on your own! In fact, you will fail in your attempt to live holy. Outward conformity to any law or standard does not make us holy. It takes the inward working of New Testament grace, which is lavished upon us

through the presence of Christ, as His life is revealed through the working of the Holy Spirit and the new nature, to bring inner and lasting change into our lives (2 Pet. 3:18). Believers must learn to depend upon the Holy Spirit to produce the inward change in their hearts and attitudes. This will result in a joyous outward conformity to Scriptural commands, principles and church standards. The Holy Spirit can soften the stony or calloused places of the heart so that all of God's eternal truth is happily and lovingly embraced (Ezek 36:26-27; Heb. 10:16).

C. The negative reaction that standards do not make people spiritual.

The spirit of legalism attempts to make standards the only gauge of spirituality. Legalism says, "Keep the rules and you will be spiritual." Of course, this is certainly not the case. Someone might say, "I don't smoke or chew or go with the girls who do!" Sometimes the characterization of ungodly living is confined within the limitations of several rules. And eventually a person can find themselves thinking that they can somehow be spiritual if they simply keep refusing to smoke and chew tobacco, or keep the hair off of their ear by one quarter of an inch. But spirituality is much more than this. It involves allowing the fruit, power and control of the Spirit to operate in our daily lives (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:25) and developing a close personal walk and relationship with the Lord (Phil. 1:21; 3:10).

It's very true that cold outward compliance to any regulatory list or code of conduct will not make a Christian spiritual in relationship to the Spirit's internal work and fruit bearing ministry. Nevertheless, a believer's attitude toward any code of conduct or regulatory list, which includes Biblical standards to follow, can tell a lot about his own spirituality. Christians might point to a particular list that includes Biblical regulations and say in an arrogant manner: "This list will not make me spiritual; it will make me a legalist." This kind of common reaction usually becomes another giant cover-up and conveys the message and mindset that a Christian does not possess a submissive attitude toward the general teaching about separation and various truths that must be embraced in order to walk a holy path. This type of reaction usually sends the signal that

a Christian does not want to make certain changes in their living or conduct because they want to hang on to certain areas of carnal enjoyment.

Here are the general reactions about spirituality from three different perspectives:

New Evangelical Reaction #1: Refusing to smoke will not make me spiritual. I can refuse to smoke and still allow lust or envy to rule my heart and not allow the fruit and power of the Spirit to change my inward life. Therefore, smoking is not the only sin that Christians need to worry about (somehow this gives him permission to use tobacco).

Legalistic Reaction #2: If I conform to the rule of not smoking I can consider myself to be spiritual and superior to others. I can have the confidence, through my refusal to smoke, that I will live more spiritual and be superior in my Christian walk and life (this mentality brings a dependency upon outward conformity to law for spirituality).

Balanced Reaction #3: I don't smoke possessing an attitude that refusing to use tobacco will automatically make my life spiritual in all areas. I don't smoke in order to compartmentalize sin and use my nonsmoking status as an absolute standard and measuring stick of my whole spirituality. I don't refrain from using tobacco so that I can forget about other important areas of spiritual living. I refuse to use tobacco simply because it's addictive and wrong to do so and because I love My Master more than cigarettes.

The point is this. A list of simple regulatory standards is usually a *threat* to those believers who still want to embrace certain areas of worldliness in their lives and engage their lives in various social vices - social drinking, smoking, playing the lottery, grotesque body piercing, etc. This *defensive* attitude toward any regulatory list demonstrates that a believer is not interested in having any base of authority in his life. This *adverse* attitude toward any list of regulations also conveys the message that Christians want to be spiritual in their own way without considering additional carnal and compromising areas that may need correction and removal from

their lives (2 Cor. 7:1). Many times adverse reactions and sarcastic attitudes, which Christians possess toward a general list of Biblical based restrictions, conveys their own inner heart attitude or rebellion and unwillingness to change in certain areas of their living. It demonstrates that they no longer want to be teachable in certain areas of their lives (2 Tim. 2:2). Consequently, a persistent rebellious attitude and spirit toward truth does eventually become an issue of spirituality in any Christian life (1 Sam. 15:23). Consistent open rebellion demonstrates an overall lack of spirituality in the believer's life.

Something must be stressed at this point. *A general list of standards does not become a threat to a Christian's spirituality; it normally becomes a threat to their own carnal living.* It's true that no list will internally make a person spiritual, but it's also true that a sarcastic and arrogant attitude toward Biblical regulations and standards indicates a person's overall disobedient spirit toward God and those areas that they do not want to change in their lives (2 Cor. 5:17).

The negative reaction that spirituality cannot be achieved by following a list of standards also has another underlying skewed philosophy, which assumes that spirituality can somehow be achieved and maintained without being obedient to high and holy standards. *It is sometimes suggested that spirituality is something that only takes place on the inside of the heart. This is dangerously misleading.* In short, this negative reaction to standards seems to promote the idea that a sincere heart is more important than outward obedience and that spirituality can be maintained on the inside of the heart without obedience to Biblical commands, principles and standards.

Many Christians have the philosophy that God is pleased with the life of every believer who is truly *sincere* in whatever he does, even if the believer lacks important Biblical convictions, standards and obedience. It's assumed that if a man claims to love God on the inside of his heart, he is automatically spiritual, and God will be pleased with his life and overlook those areas within his life that may be questionable. Somehow if a believer claims to love God he automatically becomes spiritual and God endorses his life and

actions. God winks at his areas of rebellion and overlooks those worldly practices that he may openly embrace and promote. After all, the man loves God. Therefore, he must be spiritual and God must be pleased with his life.

In response to this modern day mentality, we must remember what Jesus said. Jesus proclaimed that true love is demonstrated by obedience to His Word (John 14:15; see also 2 John 6). Furthermore, if the heart is inwardly sincere and spiritual, then outward conformity and obedience to God's holy ways will always be the result. And this obedience will occur through the Spirit's inner assistance and ministry (Romans 8:4, 13). Jesus said in Luke 6:46, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" The obvious point that Jesus is making is this. *Spirituality on the inside will inevitably be manifested on the outside. It's a smokescreen to only confine spirituality to the inside of the heart but not apply it to outside holy actions of separation.*

The view that speaks of spirituality as something that is *only* internal is a false view of spirituality, which dismisses responsibility and obedience. The Scriptures verify that a right heart and spiritual heart results in holy obedience to God's truth (Psalm 119:2, 36, 69, 112, 145). The internal (heart) and external (obedience) cannot be separated. Psalm 119:10-11 says, "With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Remember this. *An inadequate view of one's own sinfulness is spiritually debilitating.* It can create deception in the heart to the point that God's people choose to not lay aside certain sins (Heb. 3:13).

God looks on the heart and is interested in a clean heart (1 Sam. 16:7). The inner being of man's existence must be holy before God (Jer. 4:4-14; Joel 2:12; Ps. 19:14; 24:3-4; 51:10) and when this is true there will be an outward manifestation of this inward cleanliness in day-to-day practical holy living. God is not only concerned with the inner heart (Prov. 4:23; 2 Cor. 7:1) but also with external living that is holy in His sight (James 1:26-27; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; John 13:17). The idea that God is more interested in the heart and not the externals of consecration and holy living is a

contradiction since the externals will many times reveal what is going on internally with ones relationship with God (Mark 7:21-23; Luke 6:45). The internal and external many times overlap (1 Peter 3:3-5).

Not long ago a Christian mother shared with me how she wanted her daughter to withdraw from a fundamentalist institution of learning so her daughter would learn to place more emphasis on internals instead of the externals. This sounds like a very spiritual comment but it lacks good Biblical sense. In the first place, I don't know of any fundamental institution that does not place emphasis on the internal condition of a believer's heart or their internal relationship, fellowship and need for the Lord. Second, the idea that rules and regulations *in themselves* cause a student to become sidetracked from possessing a spiritual heart that walks with God and one that depends upon Him for victory is simply a false assessment that lacks Biblical evidence. Third, the idea of getting away from all external Biblical standards will eventually reveal the true condition of the heart which is one of insensitivity toward sin and a desire for fleshly pursuits (Jeremiah 5:31).

It's true that *legalistically* following some specified commands or particular Biblical standards on a code of conduct list will not guarantee your spirituality, within the realm of your inner heart, or in all areas of your Christian life. Nor is a list of standards designed to compare spiritual lives among God's people and promote spiritual competition among God's saints (2 Cor. 10:12). However, the refusal to follow clear commands, Scriptural principles, and the failure to lovingly curb your liberty when meeting together with the saints, promotes disobedience to truth and authority and disrespect for other believers.

As previously stated, this does say something about the overall spirituality of those believers who want to do away with all standards, which call for obedience and separation. Modern evangelicalism unanimously concludes that there is a lack of true spirituality evident in those believers who possess standards and live a separated life. But in view of how disobedience is always a sign of lacking spirituality, we must conclude by saying, "If the shoe

fits, wear it!” Disobedience is always a sign of a person’s spiritual condition.

It’s also maintained that a list of standards cannot make one spiritual if followed or adhered to because the list does not include other sinful areas of living that should be forsaken. Such things as a lack of love for God’s people, service toward others, helping the poor, failing to help a brother who has fallen, overeating and many other sins, which are normally overlooked or neglected in a list, are just as sinful and wrong. Therefore, it’s concluded that a list of worldly taboos or standards is too narrow and not comprehensive enough for the Christian life and should be discarded. *Somehow this kind of rationale gives certain Christians the approval to continue to practice those things that they are doing which are wrong!* The whole point of a list of standards is not to intentionally overlook any sins or compartmentalize sin. Christians are in general agreement over the need to love, serve and help others and not to openly embarrass Christians who have sin in their lives but to lovingly encourage and restore them (Gal. 6:1). They also recognize that there needs to be temperance in relationship to the body in every area of living (Gal. 5:23).

What must be understood is that a general list of Biblical standards will many times emphasize those dishonorable worldly habits which are actively being promoted, popularized and glamorized by Christians and which will sour the overall testimony of a local church or institution of learning if not kept in check (1 Cor. 5:1). These are disobedient actions, such as participation in ecumenical practices, social drinking, listening to unholy pagan music, and other worldly actions that are being promoted in open rebellion and defiance against the Lord and His Biblical principles and holy standards (2 Thess. 2:15). Many times they are actions that are trying to be accepted and sanctified by mainstream Evangelicalism.

By way of contrast, not all sinful habits or actions, such as failing to be a Good Samaritan to our neighbor or over indulgence while eating a meal, are trying to be purposely pushed, promoted and popularized into the mainstream of Christian living. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to single out worldly trends and habits that

are being openly practiced in rebellion against the Lord within the church (1 Cor. 11:20-21). It's these types of worldly attitudes and actions that many times need to be addressed to maintain an overall testimony in the local church and institution of learning. They are actions of open rebellion that can spread like a prairie fire and cause a worldly bent in a church or institution of learning (1 Sam. 15:23).

Of course, every area of our lives needs to be placed under the scrutiny and critic of God's Word (Heb. 4:12) so that we might cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). This may include cleansing our lives from the worldly habit and addiction of smoking, while at the same time freeing our lives from possessing a covetous spirit toward fame or money. It may include no longer attending the movie theater and watching shows that feed the flesh as well as freeing our heart from an angry and unforgiving spirit. There will always be areas in our lives that we need to address as we grow in grace and allow the Spirit to sanctify our lives through the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16).

The attitude and defensive argument that says standards cannot make us spiritual usually takes another rabbit trail and concludes that standards are not necessary and can be dismissed because there is no perfect church, which is completely spiritual. It's true that there is no perfect church since the church is made up of imperfect Christians. But there are churches to this day that do not compromise sound Biblical principles in their ministry or openly endorse worldliness and practice unholy worship and associate with end-time apostasy. Everybody knows that there is no perfect Christian who has arrived and can claim perfection (Phil. 3:12). But the imperfection of Christians is not an excuse to drop church standards. This is because church or corporate standards are not designed to compare the perfections and imperfections of Christians. *Standards are not designed to compare one Christian with another Christian.* Standards are not erected to try and compare the degree of spirituality or holiness that one Christian has over another Christian. This is because we all have areas that we are still working on in our Christian lives.

2 Corinthians 10:12 says:

“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”

The false teachers belonged to a “mutual admiration club” that set up their own set of standards and measured everybody by them. Of course, those inside the group were successful; those outside were failures. Paul was one of the outsiders, so he was considered a failure. Unfortunately, they did not measure themselves by Jesus Christ (see Eph. 4:13). If they had, it would have made a difference! Nevertheless, we should beware of trying to compare our degree and level of spirituality among each other as Christians. We dare not do it! Generally speaking, we are all at different levels and no person can accurately declare what level another person is at in their lives. Therefore, we are not to “make ourselves of the number” (elitism), or “compare ourselves with some that commend themselves” (competition) which involves nothing more than “measuring” and “comparing” ourselves among each other.

Of course, this does not do away with proper Biblical judgment toward the unholy actions of sin, which are committed in the lives of other believers (1 Cor. 3:3-4; 5:11; 11:17-21; 14:1-40; Gal. 2:11; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 4:10; Jam. 5:19), and proper analysis of their lives in respect to service (1 Tim. 3:1-13) and conduct (1 Thess. 5:21; Eph. 5:10). It simply means that on a whole, when a person is seeking to do right, we cannot determine the *overall* spirituality of that person - nor should we try. Issues of apparent carnality and clear sinful patterns do communicate a message that one lives on a lower plain of spirituality (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Nevertheless, it's always wrong to compare ourselves with others and possess a competitive spirit toward God's people lest we should think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). We must compare ourselves to Christ. He is our standard of measurement (Eph. 4:13).

Many freethinkers insist that all separatist Christians, who follow standards, are constantly comparing themselves with other believers and looking down upon the rest of God's saints with their

arrogant noses, while their own prideful display of peacock feathers are flying in the wind. This is simply a façade or illusionary statement designed to communicate a false message concerning those saints who want to honor separatist teaching and practice nonconformity to the world (Rom. 12:1-2). Let's get something straight. *The issue of corporate and even personal standards does not revolve around comparing spiritual lives; it revolves around obedience to God, reverence for the Lord's House, and love for the brethren.* When standards are viewed in this way they do not become an exclusive issue of spirituality but one of loving obedience and servanthood to the Master and to His people.

It's true that failure to follow clearly revealed Biblical standards is a personal issue of spirituality between you and God, but it does not mean that the standards become a way to promote a "holier than thou" mentality and comparison among believers. It's also true that there are carnal Christians and spiritual Christians (1 Cor. 2:15-3:1). Likewise, there are degrees of spirituality among God's people, which varies according to their level of obedience to truth (Rom. 6:16), and their own personal walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Nevertheless, we are still left with the inescapable conclusion that there is no perfect church since Christians are not perfect (1 John 1:8). However, this is no excuse to eliminate Biblical standards that stand for righteousness and holiness. Let's state it clearly. ***There is no perfect church but there are churches that do not compromise!*** It's interesting how many times Christians will try to jettison many Biblical standards in their lives, and put on a false sense of spirituality with other Christians, in order to somehow condone and sanctify their own disobedience toward clearly revealed truth.

d. The negative reaction that standards always change and are not reliable.

It has also been suggested that yesterday's forbidden standards become today's acceptable practices. The "sin" of today becomes acceptable tomorrow. Time is viewed as the great sanctifier of all worldly amusements. Many claim that one generation of Christians always condone what the past generation condemned and use this as an excuse to not evaluate any standards and seek to abide by

any particular code of conduct. This particular reaction is designed to give Christians a clear conscience about worldly attractions and amusements, which they are presently engaging in and which are fleshly in nature (1 Pet. 2:11).

It's true that the modesty of a previous generation, where elbows and ankles had to be covered, may not be the modesty of today. There is some flexibility in the general acceptance of modest apparel. Standards of modesty do vary in some respect from country to country and from the 18th and 19th centuries. But this analogy can in no way blur the issue or do away with the fact that modesty is still a Biblical principle (1 Tim. 2:9) and that certain lines must be drawn in order to promote modesty. The fact that a perfect or exact line is not drawn in Scripture to indicate where immodesty begins does not do away with the fact that there is a vast difference between a miniskirt and the hemline of a skirt which might reveal the knee.

It's also true that Scripture teaches the principle that a woman should not wear the apparel of a man (Deut. 22:5). The moral teaching of this passage and others (1 Cor. 11:14-15) is that God's people should maintain a distinction among the sexes and keep themselves from following a unisex philosophy in clothes, hair styles and other unisex trends. Of course, different cultural areas of the world and time itself does bring about a certain amount of change in regards to the kind of apparel that is worn by men and women. However, we are never given permission to violate God's divine order in any cultural setting (1 Cor. 9:20) or blur the obvious distinction among the sexes with the passing of time and forsake God's timeless principles. Thus, an obvious distinction among the sexes must be maintained even among the shifting cultural trends of a society. *Clothes and hairstyles still do communicate sexual identity between men and women.*

The whole point is this. Trying to build an argument on the assumption that all standards have changed over the years, such as certain standards revolving around modesty and dress, is a straw man argument. In the first place, not all standards of past generations have been discarded as being antiquated or old-fashioned as so many suggest – attending the godless movie

theater, beholding nudity and sex perversion, mini skirts, social drinking, gambling, worldly dancing, etc. These things are still wrong, based upon the regulatory principles of Scripture, even though Christians might become desensitized to them over the years and make them acceptable to Christianity. There are still many standards that are applicable to our present generation and time, which were applicable to past generations. The present day notion that there is a vast sea of changing standards simply is not true. Distinctions between good and evil (Heb. 5:14) did not vanish away with the horse and buggy generation!

With new forms of amusements continually on the rise there will always be the need to evaluate acceptable Christian conduct in light of Scriptural principles. A list of regulatory standards could never be exhaustive nor should it try to become exhaustive. *There is an important need to teach God's people to live by Biblical principles instead of by lists.* This is because no restrictive list can be exhaustive. There will always be the need for believers to apply God's unchanging regulatory principles to their Christian lives in many practical ways and multitudes of areas that a standard list could never possibly cover.

Every day we are confronted with the need to make personal choices and decisions. When it comes to new activities and amusements, many times there will be the need to simply *regulate* these new activities and amusements in light of New Testament principles (1 Cor. 6:12). Other times there is the need to totally *shun* certain activities and places because of the over all thrust of evil being promoted there (1 Cor. 10:20; 1 Pet. 4:4). Secondly, one must understand that new forms of entertainment which were introduced in the past, such as television and the Internet, are now deemed acceptable to most Christians, if they are used within their acceptable boundaries and prescribed limits (Phil. 4:8).

Many times the initial adverse reaction to new forms of entertainment such as TV, the Internet, sports and even the invention of cars, was done out of a heart for God's holiness and desire to do what is right, even though Christians may have had the liberty to purchase a TV, a car or attend some particular sports game. Furthermore, the initial adverse reaction to the introduction

of new forms of worship enhancement in the church, such as microphones, the playing of organs and musical instruments, was done out of reverence for God's house, even though these additional forms of worship were Biblical, neutral and acceptable by God in the assembly of the saints. However, the past reaction of saints to various new advancements and changes in technology should not be used as proof that all standards change over the years and that Christians temporarily condemn new things but eventually accept them with the passing of time. That's like saying the past generation of Christians condemned Playboy magazines but the present generation of Christians should expect to eventually accept Playboy magazines as a worthy amusement. This reasoning is absurd. *We must remember that God's Biblical principles have not changed, which were used to formulate many important standards.*

Even though there was nothing wrong with playing organs and instrumental music in a church service, we must never forget that the same principles, which were used to deter the church from originally using these items for worship, have not changed! Therefore, we must simply learn to *correctly apply the Biblical principles* to our present day worship scene and our own personal lives so that we keep our worship and individual lives pure and holy. The principles of decency, order, reverence, holiness, unholy mixture, spiritual contrasts and conformity to the world must still be applied to our present generation of believers (1 Cor. 14:33, 40; Ps. 89:7; Lev. 10:10; 11:47; 20:25; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; 2 Cor. 6:14-16; Rom. 12:1-2).

When these regulatory principles are applied to modern forms of contemporary worship, which are being introduced and practiced in the church today (CCM, interpretive dancing, power teams, etc.), we find that these types of actions are clearly condemned. *God has not ordained paganism and a party spirit in the church (Acts 2:42).* Nor will present day believers, who have a high regard for God's holiness, sanctify contemporary pagan worship and socially acceptable taboos that are clearly sinful and which will never become acceptable in God's sight and deemed worthy of Christian involvement, conduct or worship. The taboo argument is simply this – an argument that does not hold water. *The oldness of*

a taboo does not make it sanctified for today. Rather, the sinfulness of a certain practice still makes it sinful for today (1 John 3:4). We should never sanctify sin! Not all of the past taboos are completely behind us unless we want to put them behind us and legalize sin under the disguise of contemporary liberty (Gal. 5:13).

The Application of Man's Traditions

It must be understood that legalism does base spirituality upon *manmade traditions* that do not square with Biblical teaching and which have no basis for Christian living. Mark 7:1-13 speaks about “the tradition of the elders” (vss. 3, 5); “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (vs. 8) and the legalistic desire to “keep your own tradition” (vs. 9). Mark 7:13 also conveys the legalistic tendency of “Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.” Some of these things involved strict manmade Sabbath rules, which became a false display of religious piety – (see also Gal. 1:14). In Matt.12:1-2 and Mk. 2:23-28 the legalists chided the disciples for picking corn on the Sabbath. They reprimanded Christ for healing a man on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:10-14; Mk. 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-11).

In Matthew 15:1-2 the legalists were concerned about washing themselves up to their elbows before eating and taking a ceremonial bath after entering the marketplace. In Luke 15:1-2 and 19:7 the legalistic rule forbid eating with sinners (see also Matt. 9:9-13 and 11:19). In Mark 11:15-18 we see how their temple rules were contrary to God's holy plan for the temple. In John 18:28 we see how entering any Gentile building brought defilement to the legalist, while at the same time they were plotting to kill Jesus! Mathew Poole remarks, “Nothing is more common than for persons overzealous about rituals to be remiss about morals.” Such was the case with the legalists that led Jesus to His death in John 18:28. Speaking of the legalists, Hall commented: “Pilate hath more cause to fear, lest his walls should be defiled with the presence of such prodigious monsters of iniquity.”

The modern legalist basis his spirituality on following traditions or manmade ideas, rules, methods and preferences, which have

nothing to do with spiritual living. Things such as no shopping or eating out on Sunday, no jewelry or make-up on women, no TV or Internet service, no swimming at any kind of public beach or pool, no pants on women, no buying products in a store that sells alcohol or tobacco, no radio, no attending sports games, no light bulbs, no electricity, no rubber tires on tractors, no tractors, no red cars, no chrome showing on cars, no cars, etc. Of course, these personal practices and preferences are not necessarily legalistic unless they become a basis for spirituality and when they are imposed on others as absolutes for godly living.

Manmade traditions are not the same thing as Biblical traditions, which are based upon clear Scriptural commands and principles given to govern or regulate our conduct (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). *The Pharisees of Jesus' day were worried about obeying the Law but they did not base their religious decisions and so-called godly actions on any true regulatory principles found in the Law.* Rather, they created hundreds and hundreds of minute details of living that had absolutely no Biblical foundation or support in relationship to obeying the Law.

The sad thing is that the Pharisees looked at these manmade traditions (Mk. 7:2-3) as a way to follow the Law when in reality they were driving the people and themselves away from the true understanding and practice of the Law (Mk. 7:9). The legalists of Jesus' day created lengthy lists of unreasonable and outlandish rules which had no relationship to the Law that God had originally given. The prohibition against work on the Sabbath was never intended to apply to the service of God (Matt. 12:5), deeds of necessity (Matt. 12:3-4), or deeds of mercy (Matt. 12:11-12).

Clear regulations that are based upon Biblical foundational principles are important. However, multitudes of petty regulations that are based upon manmade traditions, and which are viewed as a sign of spirituality, can cause us to lose sight of God's real commands about separation or holiness. We must seek to remain balanced. The legalists created traditions and manmade measurements of spirituality based upon these traditions. They produced a truckload of minor regulations that had no bearing on Christian living. The ex-cathedra oral traditions of the legalists,

later to be recorded in the Jewish Talmud and Mishna (an exhaustive collection of laws and guidelines for observing the Law of Moses), burdened the people down with many minute details of living (Matt. 23:4). They became a dizzying array of regulations that kept people under strict adherence to traditions instead of God's commands and true Biblical principles.

The original intent of the Pharisees may have been good as they sought to properly apply the Law to the lives of the people. They wanted to make the commandments practical and applicable to their lives. But eventually the application became outlandishly stretched to the point where the Talmud forbid walking more than 2,000 cubits on the Sabbath except between one's own personal possessions! The Babylonian Talmud is so comprehensive and detailed that an English edition of this work fills 36 volumes and almost 36,000 pages! *The extremes to which the rabbis went bordered on the insane.* Josephus records how it was forbidden to stuff a little piece of wax in the hole of a container to stop the liquid from running out since this was viewed as working on the Sabbath. Nor could a person wipe a wound on the Sabbath. A man could not move a sheaf in his field on the Sabbath but he could lay a spoon on the sheaf and in order to remove the spoon, he could also indirectly remove the sheaf on which the spoon lay.

Of course, these were manmade laws which had no application or bearing on God's true Law or moral code of holiness. The very rules of the legalists, which were presented as a way to please God, were actually leading people away from the Lord into a law relationship full of burdens and weights (Matt. 23:13-15) instead of a personal relationship with God (Matt. 11:28). The legalists built a *fence, hedge or safety net* of oral traditions and regulations over the years that were created to supposedly keep people faithful to the Law. They added many safeguards, fences and guidelines that were to be like a *buffer zone* for people who earnestly intended to follow the Law. In time, these traditions became the focal point and more focus was put on the fence than on the Law. And the numerous traditions that comprised the fence became increasingly difficult for people to keep. *The religious system of the legalists overproduced laws and rules, which had no bearing on living the*

Christian life in a holy manner. Minute details of living were emphasized (“many such like things” - Mark 7:13).

The Mishna itself would come to contain thirty-nine kinds of work forbidden on the Sabbath. The Law of Moses contained no commandment advocating the washing of one’s hands before eating (Matt. 15:1-3) or forbidding the picking of corn on the Sabbath for food (Matt. 12:1-2). The elders had added tradition to the cleansing rituals. For example, the legalists insisted that before a Jew ate, he should put his hands through an elaborate cleansing process, washing not just the hands, but also the arms up to the elbows. If he had been in the marketplace, he was supposed to take a ceremonial bath. Thus, the Pharisees criticized the disciples for failing to observe the intricacies of the washings prescribed by Jewish tradition. These were oral commandments that lacked Biblical basis and which did not reflect any Scriptural principles for holy living. But the legalist oversteps what the Word of God teaches and tries to create his own manmade traditions, which have no bearing upon Scriptural truth. He creates regulations that have no Biblical basis and tries to fence people into an arena, which he has created. Thus, manmade tradition is placed on the same level as truth and tradition becomes the measuring stick of spirituality. This is the danger of elevating manmade tradition on the same level as truth and placing tradition above Scriptural mandates.

The Application of Scriptural Traditions

2 Thessalonians 2:15 says:

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”

As previously mentioned, the regulatory traditions of Scripture will keep us from creating manmade traditions. We must apply the traditions of Scripture to our daily conduct and lives so that we might walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord (Col. 1:10). *The free thinkers have actually labeled those Christians who adhere to separated standards as “traditionalists” and they are looked upon as Pharisees who root themselves in law and traditionalism instead of freedom from traditions and traditional standards.* But

this label is a serious misnomer and misunderstanding about traditions. There is a vast difference between the traditions of Scripture (2 Thess. 2:15) that seek to uphold God's holy standards and the manmade traditions of the Pharisees (Matt. 15:3, 6) which transgress the truth of Scripture because they have no bearing on the actual Law or any lasting holy principle in Scripture. To equate the tradition of the Pharisees with the Scriptural traditions of holiness is an error of the worst sort and is another smokescreen designed to eliminate all holy standards of reverence and separation from church life and ministry.

I've taken some time to explain about the minute details and manmade traditions that the true legalist in Christ's day tried to impose on others. I've done this in order to convey that a list of Biblical based and regulatory standards, which might be required for church membership or institutional acceptance, in no way reflects the legalistic bent and attitude of Pharisaical Judaism in Christ's day. It is simply an overstatement, exaggeration and distortion to classify standards, which forbid addiction to cigarettes, gambling, swearing and involvement in ecumenical practices, as being of the same nature as those standards which burden people down with Sabbatical rules of conduct, the eating of certain foods, the washing of hands in ceremonial ways and hundreds of intricate regulations that have no Scriptural base. It's also shameful to conclude that a young convert cannot be disciplined in the school of grace to understand that certain places or practices are heathen, unhealthy and carnal and must be shunned because of what they stand for and represent (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Cor. 10:20).

As mentioned above, many "free thinkers" will try and compare the traditions of the Pharisees with the Biblical position of separation, which Fundamentalism embraces today. They will quickly conclude that any person who practices any kind of separatist standards becomes a hair splitting legalist who is trying to bring people under the same kind of bondage which revolves around intricate laws that have no bearing upon Christian living. Of course, this is another smokescreen designed to free people from clear Biblical commands that call for separation (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Rom. 12:1-2; James 1:27) and those regulatory principles of Scripture that call for change in behavior and actions (2 Thess. 3:6). Following

Scriptural traditions and applying absolute truth to our lives in no way reflects the same attitude and practice of the legalists of Jesus' day, who enforced erroneous, intricate and meticulous rules, which had no Scriptural basis, in order to determine the actual spirituality of people. At the same time their own hearts were far from God (Matt. 15:8) and full of spiritual corruption (Matt. 23:27-28). A basic checklist of standards that are recorded in a church policy handbook or institutional handbook, which speak against social vices and ecumenicalism, cannot be regarded as being of the same nature as the intricate and minute Sabbath laws overproduced by the Pharisees. It is simply ludicrous and a complete overstatement to come to this conclusion. Comparing a basic standards list for church membership or a policy handbook for a Bible institute of learning to the Pharisees intricate rules and regulations for living is a giant façade or allusion designed to free people from the practice of all standards. Modern grace teachers make exaggerated remarks, unwarranted claims and unjustified application of the Pharisee lifestyle to those who set good Biblical standards today. In doing this they do a great disservice to many godly Christian leaders, the teaching ministry of grace, and the holiness of God.

It can also be stated that practicing Christian courtesy and love among God's people in a church or institutional setting, by setting certain corporate standards, even some arbitrary standards, reflects a different heart attitude than the Pharisees possessed. The Pharisees set standards while possessing no true love for people and concern for their well-being and spiritual growth (Matt. 23:4). Setting standards can promote love among the brethren. Setting standards among the brethren does not necessarily mean that a leader is trying to manipulate or control people for selfish reasons. The Scriptures say that we are to "by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13) as we meet together as believers. We can possess a totally different non-legalistic attitude than the Pharisees demonstrated as we seek to follow some basis Biblical standards designed for love and unity among the brethren. We can follow standards, even arbitrary corporate standards, because we love other Christians and do not want to offend them or hinder the work of God as we meet together.

Romans 14:19-20 says: "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence."

2. Standards keep us from experiencing the grace way of living.

Many will conclude today that when Christians incorporate standards into their lives they become sidetracked from living the grace pattern of life that God expects believers to live in the present economy of grace. Christians who follow holy standards are seen as "grace killers" or "joy killers" and even "freedom killers." It's assumed that believers need a "grace awakening" in order to liberate themselves from archaic standards that bog down the internal ministry and work of the Spirit in their lives, which involves the Spirit writing the law of God upon their hearts (2 Cor. 3:3) and then leading, empowering and controlling their lives through His inner work of grace (Rom. 7:6). It has been said that God's people need to be released from the legalistic bars of church tradition and worldly taboos and be awakened to this new inner work of the Spirit. Standards of separation are generally viewed as a legalistic threat upon the lives of 21st century believers and the claim is made that standards stifle the internal grace work of the Spirit in the heart.

One must wonder if the Puritans, John Bunyan, and men like R. A. Torrey, D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Harry Ironside, Vance Havner, Bob Jones Sr. and other giants of the past, could live according to the pattern of New Testament grace, since in bygone years worldly vices were preached against and believers were expected to abide by holy standards. Did not these men and multitudes like them experience the gracious inner teaching ministry and liberating work of the Spirit in their lives? The rationale that Biblical standards of separation stifle the Spirit's ministry is both illogical and bizarre. The distinct impression is given by many today that the inner work of the Spirit replaces all external regulations. The argument goes something like this:

Premise #1: The OT saint was under law (a set of rules or standards).

Premise #2: The NT saint is led by the Spirit instead of laws.

Conclusion: Having standards is to reject the Spirit's power and work.

It seems that most believe today that the inner work of the Spirit replaces all external regulations or standards. According to many New Evangelical writers we are left with only two options. We can live without standards and be led by the Spirit or live by standards and not be led by the Spirit. There is no middle ground. We are left with only these choices. This is absolutely false and misleading to many Christians today. *The establishing of personal standards does not rule out the work of the Spirit in our lives. Rather, the practice of standards may be the very evidence of the Spirit's work!* The idea that a general list of standards is legalistic and driving believer's away from the Holy Spirit's ministry is ridiculous and outlandish.

In response to this false conclusion, we must concur that New Testament believers do live "under grace" (Rom. 6:14) instead of law (Gal. 5:18) which means that believers have been delivered from the old legal, condemning and powerless relationship they once had with the Law, in their unsaved state, and have now been given a new grace relationship which consists of an internal victorious delivering power to live for God through the Spirit controlled life (Eph. 5:18). The grace feature of the internal work and power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed and revealed to every believer through the indwelling resurrection life of the Son of God (note the context of Rom. 6:1-22).

This is the new principle for living in the present economy. *Grace is the method or way that God deals with the believer in relationship to service and sanctification.* Grace living in the present dispensation is doing whatever we do to the glory of God, out of a new love for God and by the Spirit's enabling power and leading (Rom. 7:6 – "newness of spirit"). *The Spirit gives us a new love, new attitude and new power to serve the Lord and do what is right.* This is because He writes the righteous character of the Law upon our hearts in contrast to the tables of stone (1 Cor. 3:3) and then

empowers us to live according to God's righteous ways. The "newness of the Spirit" speaks of the new life that the believer lives "in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9). It is an *internal* work as opposed to the external work of the Law (Rom. 2:29 – "circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter"). The internal work stresses a life of inward power, fruit, victory, leading, teaching and transformation that starts on the inside and progresses to the outside (Phil. 2:13).

The grace walk of the New Covenant stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling and empowering Christians to fulfill the will of God out of a loving and willing heart. This "newness of the spirit" is contrasted to the "oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6) which portrays the individual trying to live by a cold informal relationship to law, attempting to find help and assistance through an outward inflexible code, and acting out of a legalistic sense of duty instead of love. The inner presence and work of the Spirit will bring true inner conviction and transformation to our lives (2 Cor. 3:18). A careful review of the grace contexts of Romans chapter six and other passages dealing with Christian freedom or liberty does not deal with the absolute exclusion of all rules but the victory we have over sin's condemnation and power because of the working of grace in our hearts and lives.

The grace feature of the "newness of the spirit" will keep us from legalism in all of our relationships at home, church fellowships and outside jobs. Furthermore, this new grace feature of walking in the Spirit's presence, inner power, teaching and control (Eph. 5:18), will direct Christians to make decisions for their own personal lives. These are decisions that pertain to many multifaceted areas of living, which are not covered by a basic list of corporate guidelines or standards embraced on a church or institutional level. This is because a basic checklist of standards cannot possibly cover all the new amusements and areas of concern that will arise over the changing moral climate of our generation. Nor can a list of some basic standards solve all the sticky questions revolving around every amusement, habit or life-style.

The problem arises when Christians claim that standards will hinder and suppress the Spirit's internal work in the lives of His

people. To claim that some checklist will hinder the Spirit's internal work of leading, control and power in the life of Christians is simply erroneous. A simple checklist, covering some basic separated standards to abide by for personal and assembly life, can *aid* (not replace) the Spirit's inward teaching ministry and unify believers. After all, the Spirit helps believers only as they are sanctified through the teaching and proper application of the Word of God (John 15:3; 17:17). Do not falsely elevate a misconception of the Spirit's work that is somehow devoid of the Scriptures. *Being under the grace walk of the Spirit's inner leading, filling and power does not mean that we do away with the Word of God as a ruling factor to help assist us in our everyday living.* We still need the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17) operating in our lives and the promises of God's Word working in connection with the new dynamic ministry of the Spirit and internalized nature of God (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

The grace ministry of the Spirit upon our lives is directly related to the ministry of the Word of God upon our lives (compare Eph. 5:18-23 with Col. 3:16-23). God holds His Word above His own name (Psalm 138:2). This makes the Word of God higher than any other rule or standard and more important than any other dispensational grace feature! *It's the Spirit and the Word and the Word and Spirit. The grace way of living is still the Bible way of living!* The dual emphasis of the Spirit and the Word must always be maintained even in the grace dispensation.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said:

"Nothing is more dangerous than to put a wedge between the Word and the Spirit, to emphasize either one at the expense of the other. It is the Spirit and the Word, the Spirit upon the Word, and the Spirit in us as we read the Word."

God has not scrapped His Holy Bible for the Holy Spirit! In today's economy God has given us the Word with the Spirit and the Spirit with the Word. The Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. He uses the Word to sanctify our lives (John 15:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). *The dual emphasis of the Spirit and the Word must always be maintained even in the grace dispensation.* The inward code and the Spirit's inner leading and direction are harmoniously tied together with truth and always correspond to Biblical truth. ***The Spirit serves as***

the rule of life for the Christian as they live according to the standards that the Spirit sets in the revelational dimension.

The ministry of the Word of God becomes an important tool in the hands of the Spirit for developing spiritual Christians. This is why the disciples were told to go and teach all nations even during the new grace stewardship of the Spirit's ministry (Matt. 28:19-29). The Spirit would not work independently of the teaching ministry of the Word of God. Someone has said: "The Author of the Book will never lead us contrary to truth of the Book!"

The New Testament is filled with many commands (John 14:15, 21; 15:10; Rom. 12:2, 9-14; 13:13; 1 Cor. 7:10, 19; 10:27; 14:40; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; 7:1; Gal. 6:2; 5:19-23; Eph. 4:26-30; 5:3-4; 5:22; Col. 3:21; 4:6; Phil. 4:8; 1 Thess. 4:1-3; 5:16-18, 19; 2 Thess. 2:4, 6, 12; 1 Tim. 2:9; 4:6-10; 6:11; 2 Tim. 1:8; Titus 2:4-7, 15; Heb. 10:25; James 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 Peter 3:9; 2 Peter 3:1-3; 1 John 2:3, 6, 15-17; 3:22; 5:2; 5:21; 2 John 1:6, 10; Jude 3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 22:14). Therefore, grace living does not mean that we have no commands to follow. But what is needed with the commands of God in the New Testament and all the timeless commands (Ex. 20:1-17) and regulatory principles of the Word of God (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6) is a right relationship with Jesus Christ through grace. *We must always follow God's commands and the rules and principles established from the doctrine of separation in the context of grace.* The new grace feature highlighted in the New Testament involves the permanent and dynamic internal ministry of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and lives (John 14:17; Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:1-3, 18).

It is another overstatement to conclude that some basic Biblical standards, forbidding worldly taboos, will hinder and stifle the Spirit's internal ministry and His work of grace in the lives of God's people, and create an eerie Pharisaical spirit in a church, where the Spirit can no longer work and move in the hearts of people. This is absurd! This is nothing more than New Evangelical jargon that seeks to promote a lackadaisical attitude toward separation and holiness. It is a total distortion and unwarranted conclusion toward true Fundamentalism. *What the church needs today is some old-fashioned Holy Spirit conviction and discernment!* If the church would become more discerning God's people would stop

such things as listening to fleshly or worldly music, dancing, social drinking, watching nudity on television, ecclesiastically cooperating with apostate organizations and many other worldly habits and practices, which clearly sidestep all principles of governing conduct and church polity. Many today want to talk about the inner leading and conviction of God's Spirit, and rightly so, but they don't want to hear all of God's truth and allow the Spirit to convict them about their worldly living and conduct. *Many want grace truth today but they do not want separated truth.* This conclusion is contrary to the Spirit's inner leading, working and transformation. The inner work of the Spirit, who reveals Christ to our lives, always leads to godly living instead of lawless living (Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:1-4).

Many Christians have a lopsided and warped view of grace. They have forgotten that grace not only liberates them from the laws condemnation and bondage (Rom. 7:6; 8:15; 2 Cor. 3:17) but also enslaves them to another Master that they must obey (James 1:1; Col. 4:1). Because believers are Christ's slave when living under grace they are restricted by the wishes of their Master. *Many want to celebrate the liberation that grace brings into their lives but forget about the purification that grace is to have upon their lives (2 Cor. 7:1).* Grace places a constraint and control over our lives and teaches us to live godly and righteously in the present world (Titus 2:12). Grace reforms our lives (Rom. 6:1-14).

Ernest Pickering has wisely said:

"The New Testament is not all about what we **can** do, but it is also about what we **cannot** do."

The instruction and discipline of grace does not grant us a free for all lifestyle. Living under grace results in believers practicing holiness (1 Pet. 1:14-16), respecting their bodies as the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20), repudiating fleshly lusts (1 Pet. 2:11), refusing to conform to the world (Rom. 12:2) and proving all things (1 Thess. 5:21). ***Holiness is the outgrowth of grace. A believer can violate the principle of grace when they engage in ungodly living and lustful practices.***

Yes, rules and standards can be followed within the context of New Testament grace living! *Living under grace does not mean*

the absence of law (1 Cor. 9:21) but it means that we can now possess the right attitude toward any law, since we are nurtured by the internal working of the Spirit. The Spirit provides freedom or liberty from following the law\works way of salvation and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:17). The Spirit seeks to conform us to Christ (2 Cor. 3:18), creates unity in the assembly of believers (Eph. 4:3), and curtails the self-exaltation of the flesh (Gal. 5:23). The Spirit's internal ministry and work on the inside of our hearts in this unique dispensational manifestation of grace also empowers us for daily witness and living (Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:13), leads us to love Jesus (1 Cor. 12:3) and experience God's love (Rom. 5:5).

The ministry of the Spirit upon our hearts will also cause us to yield to the truth about separation or holiness instead of the flesh (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 5:17, 25). We must remember that the Spirit is called the Holy Spirit not only because He is holy in His eternal being and nature, as the third person of the Godhead, but also because He leads the child of God in all manner of holy living (Rom. 1:4; Eph. 4:30-32; 1 Pet. 1:22). The Spirit's internal ministry will also direct us to obey local church standards that are established for unity among the brethren (Rom. 14:15-17; 2 Cor. 13:14) and compel us to live for the glory of God in all that we do (John 16:13-14; 1 Cor. 10:31). The internal working of the Spirit will keep us from practicing both license (Rom. 6:1) and legalism (Rom. 7:6).

When grace is misunderstood license is the result (Rom. 6:1-2; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16). When grace is understood holiness is the result (Titus 2:11-14; Rom. 6:14; 2 Cor. 3:3,18). When grace is ignored legalism is the result (Acts 15:1; Romans 7:7-25).

3. *Standards impose judgment on other people.*

Yes, in some cases, the erection of Biblical standards does indirectly impose judgment on other people. Perhaps this is why so many detest standards today. They do not like the idea of being judged. The modern evangelicalism of today specializes in making people feel comfortable. Therefore, and appeal to be nonjudgmental is being promoted today so that a sense of accountability before God and truth can be lost, and as a result people can feel comfortable in whatever they are doing. The

attitude abounds which says, “Live and let live.” It’s taught by modern day grace teachers that when grace works upon our hearts, as believers, that we will become tolerant and “nonjudgmental” in every possible way. It is then assumed that standards are wrong because judging others in any way is wrong and unloving. But once again we must counter such an argument and false conclusion by saying that not all judgment is wrong nor is it unloving.

Jesus spoke about righteous judgment (John 7:24 – “judge righteous judgment”) which involves judging on the basis of what is right; judging with true Biblical standards instead of by hypocritical, unwarranted and unbiblical judgments (Matt. 7:1-5). It’s always wrong to judge others when we have no correct and Scriptural principle by which to judge. However, the Bible approves of personal judgment (1 Cor. 11:31; 1 Pet. 4:17), judging between truth and error (Heb. 5:14-15), judging all false teachers (Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17), judging corrupt patterns of living (Matt. 7:16-20); judging worldly and unruly actions of brothers (2 Thess. 3:6-7, 14; 1 Cor. 3:3-4; 5:11; 11:17-21; 14:1-40; Gal. 2:11; 2 Tim. 4:10; Jam. 5:19) and judging what is being taught and promoted as truth (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1; 2 Tim. 2:15).

We will also have to judge between disputes and actions that arise between believers (1 Cor. 6:1–8), judge serious sins of church members and take appropriate action (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:9–13). We will have to discern or judge if others are believers in order to obey Paul’s command in 2 Corinthians 6:14. We will have to judge which men have the qualifications necessary for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-13). Generally speaking, righteous judgment involves a natural and constant assessment of what is right and wrong in daily living (1 Thess. 5:21 – “prove all things”). As we go through life we will, out of necessity, make assessments of what is right and pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:10 - “Proving what is acceptable to the Lord”). This kind of judgment is right and spiritual (1 Cor. 2:15). Righteous judgment is to be a natural part of daily living, as discerning believers live and go through their normal day-to-day routines (Phil. 1:10 – “approve things that are excellent”).

This judgment does not necessarily involve personal confrontation with every person that we come in contact with whom we might disagree. Nor does it necessitate the inward attitude of trying to compare the overall spirituality of one person to another (2 Cor. 10:12). Rather, discerning judgment manifests itself as a settled conviction in our own heart as we walk with the Lord in the light of His holiness and Word (1 John 1:7). Psalm 119:66 says, "Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments." There is a place for righteous judgment. It can be done in grace and with uncompromising allegiance to truth and holiness. Nevertheless, when Biblical standards of separation are erected which bring judgment and conviction upon others - then so be it. There is a place for righteous judgment and when we feel judged by various standards that are clearly supported by Scripture we need to investigate our lives to see whether or not we should make changes and conform our lives to God's truth in some greater way.

4. Standards are unloving.

Some suggest that if certain standards are imposed upon other people that this action becomes unloving and an outward demonstration of a critical spirit toward people. It is further suggested that when standards are imposed on others that the pastor or instructor implementing them possesses a prideful "holier than thou" attitude. Of course, this is certainly not the case and is yet another cover-up by Christians who do not want to follow Biblical principles and abide by any standards.

The old saying is still true: *Beware of a strong head and a cold heart!* The marks of love, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 3:4-8, call for strict adherence to truth ("rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth") while at the same time love will not possess a boastful and proud heart ("vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up"). Love does not manifest any of these attitudes or actions. It's interesting that true love is balanced in that it can adhere to truth without becoming boastful and proud. This tells us that a pastor or instructor, who implements good Biblical standards or a code of conduct for people to follow, does not necessarily have to manifest a proud heart. He may very well have a genuine love and concern

for people and the church ministry and want to see God's people grow together in truth and unity. *The idea that a leader is proud and unloving because he seeks to enforce certain standards in a church or institutional setting is an illusionary conclusion that many Christians possess today as they seek to run away from all standards.* The bold claim that pastors and instructors are unloving and egocentric, when implementing standards, allows authority figures to become open target practice for those Christians who want to find an excuse to become lax in all standards and commitment. It gives them the so-called liberty to go attend some generic church or institution that has no standards or very few standards that promote discipline, order, reverence and godliness.

The problem is this. Many today equate love with tolerance and the willingness to accept different viewpoints on doctrinal issues and worldly philosophies in the church. *Today love is reduced to tolerance, a spirit of ecumenicalism and a willingness to practice broad parameters of fellowship.* And the pastor or instructor is automatically deemed unloving since he exercises Biblical judgment, discipline and discernment over various doctrinal, ecumenical and worldly activities or actions within the church or institution. He is seen to be unloving because he uncompromisingly defends the truth at all costs and speaks with conviction and without apology (2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 4:13, 29).

Was the apostle Paul unloving when he rebuked Peter publicly for his compromise (Galatians 2:11) and forbid the believers from associating with idolatrous practices (1 Cor. 10:20)? Was Paul unloving when he confirmed the worldliness of Demas (2 Tim. 4:10)? Was Paul unloving when he named in the Pastoral Epistles false teachers, compromisers and troublemakers such as Hymenaeus, Philetus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:14)? Was Paul unloving when he forbade women to preach or to usurp authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12)? Was John unloving when he spoke out against Diotrefes (3 John 9-10)? Was Jesus unloving when He condemned the Pharisees and called them snakes and warned them about eternal damnation in hell (Matt. 23:13-33)? Was the glorified Christ unloving when He expressed His hatred toward the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6)? I

doubt that any of us would be willing to charge Paul or Jesus of failing to possess Christlike love toward people.

There is something that we must understand. *Love is not simply an emotion. It is not broadmindedness. It does not mean that I will never possess a judgmental spirit. Love is not a non-critical acceptance of every doctrine and practice.* Love embraces the truth that God has given to us and says that it will follow truth without compromise. Love does not sweep the dirt under the carpet. Where there is love, there must also be truth (“speaking the truth in love” - Eph. 4:15); and where there is truth, an honest dealing with all sin will occur. Hating various forms of sin is frequently mentioned in Scripture (Ps. 97:10; 119:104, 128, 163; Prov. 8:13; 13:5; 28:16; Heb. 1:9; Rev. 2:6). This is the other side of love that nobody wants to talk about.

Present day evangelicalism says that Fundamentalism is an unloving movement. The separatist is considered to be an unloving Pharisee because of his unwillingness to budge in his separated stance and because of his refusal to compromise with worldly music and pragmatic programs. He is deemed a hair splitting, unloving legalist because of his failure to accept doctrinal differences and participate with ecumenical evangelism or associate with liberal Protestantism. But this is an unwarranted conclusion and distortion of true love. The Bible says that I need to love God and His truth first (Mark 12:30). If we do not submit to the authority of God’s Word we cannot love God with all of our heart (Deut. 6:5). *Love for God is always expressed through obedience to truth* (John 14:15, 23; Phil. 1:9-10; 1 John 5:3). In 2 Thessalonians 3:4-6 the message about loving God is taught between two other verses that declare obedience to God’s Word.

Del Fehsenfeld Jr. said:

“We are never to relinquish the demands of God’s holiness in the name of love; for the greatest evidence of love is our obedience to His commands.”

This means that I will obey the Bible and avoid those who are committed to error and not openly engage in worldly practices. A

genuine love for God requires that I care more about His Word and His will than the feelings and opinions and programs of man.

The Bible says that love is discerning and results in approving excellent things (see Phil. 1:9-10). Paul is praying not only that the Philippians will continue in the display of Christian love, but also that their love will be exercised in full knowledge and all discernment so as to honor obedience to God and His Word. *True love clings to absolute truth and purity in all of its actions, activities and outward expressions.* A Spirit-produced love in the heart and life of the saint is something that sharpens the moral and spiritual perceptions and produces discernment in relationship to all Christian conduct – even the finer points of Christian conduct (“the things that are more excellent” - Phil. 1:10). This is an aspect of love that is totally forgotten by present day evangelicalism. Divine love does not simply condemn wrong in those who are loved but seeks to cleanse them from it (Eph. 5:25-26). We love people but we love God more than people (Luke 14:26). Love does not mean that I must compromise with people and become a partaker with their sins (1 Tim. 5:22). Loving others does not mean that I must agree with them on everything or go with them every place and do everything with them. This is an unbiblical conclusion and expression of love.

Other marks of love operating in the heart would be graciousness (Col. 4:6, “ Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt...”). Grace speaking is a kind and transformed manner of speaking which effects the way we communicate with other people. *Nevertheless, great care must be taken that we do not mistake grace speaking for compromise, leniency and lack of conviction.* The very same passage concludes that we are also to possess a manner of speech that is “seasoned with salt” – Col. 4:6. This means we will preserve truth and make others thirsty for truth by proclaiming what is holy and righteous and true. Salt prevents corruption and the Christian’s speech should act not only as a blessing to others, but as a purifying influence within the decaying and decadent society of the world.

The idea that a pastor or instructor cannot be loving and humble in heart when implementing standards is the biggest hoax this side of

Heaven. Or should I say it's the biggest hoax this side of hell! I personally know many men who have taken a bold stand against worldliness and apostasy who would give the shirt off of their back for you or me. It's simply an unwarranted caricature to assume that those who implement standards are unloving and unkind. I have seen unsurpassed love and humility demonstrated in the lives of many fundamental or separatist instructors and teachers, whom I have sat under throughout my years of training. And I can verify that they have expressed love for me much more than the pastor or instructor who might say to his people in his own half-baked, sheepish and careless way, "It's up to you. Try it and find out for yourself, whether it's right or wrong for you." I have found out that a man can love me much more when he is willing to stand for something and speak the truth to me, tell me what is right and wrong, and then expect me to follow the right path through godly discipline.

A pastor or instructor can manifest a loving gracious spirit even when implementing a list of guidelines for his flock or school to follow. He can also manifest a loving humble spirit toward other people, which is expressed in outward acts of kindness, generosity and consideration toward others, while expecting them to follow a list of standards (2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 6:1; Gal. 5:23). He can also manifest loving patience, compassion and gentleness while expecting a group of Christians to follow a code of conduct (Gal. 5:22). Gentleness in outward actions needs to be a prerequisite and common practice for those who possess a strong desire to recover people from error, false doctrine and worldly practices (2 Tim. 2:16-25). A gentle spirit will many times give opportunity for correction and reproof whereas a caustic or harsh spirit closes the door for any reproof. Vance Havner once said: "A preacher is to have the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros.

5. Standards keep people from thinking for themselves and making their own personal choices.

Little space must be taken for such a weak and vain argument as this. A general list of standards that is implemented and expected to be followed by church members or students in no way means

that a pastor or instructor is depriving these Christians from learning to think and function for themselves in society. *What is assumed by many today is that all standards are simply personal choices that need to be made in the heart of every Christian and that no Christian pastor, leader or instructor has the right to impose any outward standard or code of conduct on others, since all standards are personal choices brought on by the Spirit's internal ministry upon the heart.* This sounds spiritual and convincing but in reality it becomes another sweet sounding platitude that has no Scriptural merit.

First, preachers and those in leadership are given the authority to promote various regulatory standards and expect their people to uphold them (Acts 15:29; 1 Cor. 10:20; 1 Cor. 11:20-21; 1 Cor. 14; 1 Timothy 2:9-12; 1 Timothy 3:1-12; 1 Peter 3:3; 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:2; 2 Cor. 13:10; Heb. 13:7, 17). *There is no such thing as radical individualism (autonomy) seen in New Testament living which rejects and neglects church authority, discipleship training and godly example.* The very fact that leaders are responsible for the spiritual and moral training of the believers (2 Tim. 2:2) necessitates practical instructions and guidelines for personal holiness. Living under grace does not mean that “every man is for himself” and that he makes all of his own decisions about every spiritual decisions without receiving godly discipleship, spiritual training and considering Biblical authority.

Second, the Holy Spirit can use the teaching, discipline and wisdom of spiritual leaders, within a cultural setting, to instill Biblical and “necessary” standards in order to aid other believers in their walk with the Lord and create unity among the saints (Acts 15:28). The Bible says that in the multitude of counselors there is much safety (see Prov. 11:14; 24:6). Pastors and instructors seek to give out counsel and wisdom as they teach and apply certain Biblical principles to the lives of Christians. After all, wisdom involves the *right application* of truth to our lives and learning how to apply truth to our lives is part of the growing process (Col. 1:9).

Instead of depriving people of how to think for themselves the application of certain standards to the lives of Christians can actually become an important learning experience for God's

people, which can enable them to make many more detailed decisions that revolve around the issue of holiness and decency (“that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect, will of God” - Rom. 12:2). A general application of Bible principles to the lives of God’s people will not dwarf the minds of Christians and keep them from being able to think for themselves and make decisions in their every day lives (“prove all things” - 1 Thess. 5:21). The fact that some choices are made for Christians does not mean that all choices are made for them in every area of their Christian lives and in all areas of conduct. Separation does not standardize all decisions.

Third, the Holy Spirit does guide people in the truth and application of God’s Word to their lives (John 14:26; 16:13) as He writes the righteous character of the Law upon their heart (Rom. 8:4; 1 Cor. 3:3). But this New Testament grace feature of the Spirit’s inner teaching ministry does not do away with the necessity for sound Biblical teaching (2 Tim. 2:15) nor does it overrule the establishment of any standards based upon the truth of God’s Word, which is part of our instruction in righteous living and growth (2 Tim. 3:16-17). *Biblical standards, which uphold the truth of Scripture, can be confirmed in the heart of Christians through the Spirit’s inward teaching ministry.* In fact, both Biblical and arbitrary standards can be followed in the context of grace, as the Spirit confirms upon the hearts of Christians their need to maintain unity among the saints – a unity based upon truth, humility and love (Eph. 4:3).

We here so much talk today about the inner leading and confirmation of the Spirit but forget that the Spirit only leads according to truth (1 John 4:6 – “spirit of truth”) and approves truth and righteous actions in our hearts - not carnality (Gal. 5:16). Christians today want to use the argument that all standards are personal choices through the Spirit’s inner leading in order to release themselves from following church authority and any regulatory Biblical principles. *Many times this argument is simply an excuse for someone to walk in the flesh instead of the Spirit.* Instead of the Spirit leading Christians the “spirit of the world” is leading them (1 Cor. 2:12).

As stated earlier, confusion exists today between the Holy Spirit's leading and the spirit (philosophy and orientation) of the world system. In the mind of modern day "free thinkers" the idea of following the Spirit's inner leading means that no concrete standards must be embraced within the Christian life or else legality will set in and the Spirit's internal teaching ministry about liberty will become quenched through compliance to legalistic standards or rules that bind our lives to the fetters of legalism. This kind of froth and fuzzy talk lacks common sanctified and Scriptural sense. It must be understood that a basic list of regulatory standards instituted for holy conduct and fellowship among the saints in no way stifles the Spirit's internal teaching ministry. Standards can compliment His inner ministry as the Spirit agrees with the written Word and promotes purity and love among the saints.

Fourth, many have forgotten in this age of tolerance and fleshly freedom that *the Holy Spirit still does inwardly direct God's people to follow church authority*, and any regulatory standards that are placed upon them by those who watch for their souls.

Hebrews 13:7 states:

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

Hebrews 13:17 adds:

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

Most have forgotten that those in local church authority do "have the rule over" the lives of believers underneath them and that Spirit-taught obedience to God ordained local church authority is necessary and right. When various standards are implemented they should be happily embraced by the sheep so as to honor God's design for local church authority. Furthermore, the idea that says local church authority and the Spirit's internal ministry cannot

work together is simply erroneous. If this were the case then why have local church authority?

As stated already, there is no such thing as radical individualism or autonomous living in New Testament church life and discipleship training, which neglects local church authority and instruction. Many Christians need to learn to place themselves under local church authority (“submit yourselves”) and at the same time allow the Spirit to teach them as they obey God’s command to follow spiritual leaders who follow the Lord (1 Thess. 1:6), and as they begin to open their hearts to necessary changes in personal areas of conduct. The problem today is that many Christians have developed the mindset that they want no authoritarian intrusion into their lives in any way. But this approach is neither practical or Scriptural.

It’s falsely assumed that when a list of standards is embraced Christians will no longer think for themselves and be led by the Spirit. In other words, it’s suggested that Christians will sit around and list every possible sin that they can think about and place it in their “standard book of sins.” It’s then speculated that Christians, who follow standards, will record on a piece of paper every sin that they cannot commit and keep a long list of sins in their back pocket that must be observed daily to make sure that no sins will be committed which are placed upon the commandment list. It’s then inaccurately concluded that Christians begin to live by endless lists of commandments and not by the Spirit’s internal power and leading. This is simply an absurdity and unrealistic argument, which is designed to manipulate the minds of Christians concerning the practice of Biblical based and well-balanced standards, which reflect righteous living and holy conduct.

6. Standards bring Christians under bondage.

It is nonsense to conclude that following Biblical standards becomes a form of bondage in the lives of Christians and keeps them from being free. In fact, just the opposite can be true. Following good Biblical standards, which promote separation and holy living, can actually become an outward practice of the newfound freedom that believers have in Christ. This is a freedom

from sinful and fleshly practices that we never possessed before salvation (John 8:36). As stated earlier: *True Christian freedom is God's enablement to do His will. Christian liberty is the privilege and power to become all that God wants us to become in Christ.* To be able to live holy in every area of our lives is God's true gift of freedom. Separating from all sin unto God is a liberating response to the loving Master who has freed us from all sin and iniquity (2 Tim. 2:21; 1 Cor. 7:22-23). We now are at liberty to give our lives to God (Rom. 12:1-2) and serve Him as our Master, since we have been set free from the old spiritual forces that once ruled our lives (Eph. 2:1-3). Commands and principles revolving around separation keep us from worldly lusts and associations that would in some measure rob us of our freedom in Christ (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

Freedom is not an open invitation to do anything that one wants to do. *Liberated living is not unrestricted living.* Liberty does not mean that the believer can creatively and individually determine how he wants to live without Biblical restraints and restrictions. Biblical freedom is the joy of living free from sin's power through the divine influence of God upon the life. It's a freedom to live without the shackles of sin that we were once bound to in Adam.

Freedom to live for God and freedom from sin's bondage is something that we could not possess before we were saved (Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Peter 2:18-19). Therefore, a code of conduct or regulatory list of commands and Biblical principles, designed to promote true freedom from worldly lusts and contamination with the world (James 1:27), in no way brings a believer under the bondage of rules and regulations and keeps him from experiencing his liberty in Christ. *On the contrary, following good Biblical standards can become an outward expression of displaying the believer's newfound freedom that he has in Christ.* A right understanding and attitude toward rules and standards do not bind believers in shackles. They can actually become a beautiful expression of their freedom from moral corruption (2 Pet. 1:4). This argument is so weak that no more space is required to refute it.

7. Standards divide the body of Christ.

This has been another ongoing argument designed to eliminate all standards from churches and institutions of Biblical learning. It's assumed that a list of standards creates too much friction and this results in dividing the body of Christ. Therefore, standards should be stripped from the hallowed halls of the church and any institution of learning when those standards bring division among God's people. Here is another argument that sounds very spiritual on the surface but in reality has no weight or Biblical merit.

In the first place, the Bible teaches that we are to "mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). This tells us that division must take place ("avoid them") because certain infidels, who are outside the true church, are preaching false doctrine and error. This kind of division is not dividing the body of Christ since unbelievers are not part of the body of Christ. Many times division is necessary and right because of spurious doctrine that is being promoted by apostate denominations and preachers who represent apostasy. Standards that deal with ecclesiastical separation from apostasy and unbelievers in religious settings are Biblical and right even when division does occur (2 Cor. 6:14-17; 2 Tim. 2:19; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 John 9-11; Rev. 2:2).

Second, true unity is always centered upon the truth (Eph. 4:13; 2 John 1-4). Remember: We are never told to make unity. Rather, we must "keep" the unity that we already have in Christ as a result of the Spirit's baptizing ministry (Eph. 4:3). This is done by upholding truth at all cost while possessing humility and love toward the brethren. *Obedience is more important than an artificial unity built on disobedience and compromise.* Biblical unity means having one mind in areas of doctrine and holy living - not "unity in diversity" as so many are saying today (Phil. 1:27). Biblical unity is expressed when total commitment to all the Word of God is maintained (Acts 2:42). The New Testament faith is not many separate doctrines, but is one unified body of truth into which all doctrines fit (Jude 3).

Third, the true "schismatics" are the false teachers and "any man" who seeks to divide the saints by false teaching and worldly actions in the church (see Titus 3:10 - "heretic"). Those who introduce new doctrine and worldly entertainment and worship into the church are the ones who have changed and become divisive in

the body of Christ. Worldly and fleshly actions in church gatherings bring division among God's people (1 Cor. 3:3-4; 11:18-22). This is why we have "worship wars" taking place among God's people today.

Fourth, the Bible also teaches that believers will need to "withdraw" (2 Thess. 3:6) from those Christians whose lives become openly disorderly and defiant to truth and godly living. There comes a time when we must part company with a brother as we seek to serve the Lord and do the Lord's work in the local church setting. This need arises because of a brother's consistent disorderly conduct outside the church and even within the church gatherings ("have no company with him" – 2 Thess. 3:14 and "not to keep company" – 1 Cor. 5:11). When our loyalty to Christ comes into question we must always remember that we are a disciple of Christ and must follow Him at all cost (Luke 14:26-28). If division in the body of Christ takes place over doctrine and disorderly acts of worldliness – then so be it. Loyalty to Christ must prevail over any artificial unity that is not based upon truth and holiness.

There are actually healthy divisions in the body of Christ that must occur and be maintained even though they are not always easy to implement. These divisions will keep a church or institution from becoming tolerant toward error and compromising with worldly practices for the sake of popularity and acceptance among the mainstream of evangelicalism. *Biblical standards that promote basic Bible separation will keep various compromising men, wayward movements, and disloyal ministries from participating with those stronger institutions and churches that want to remain pure in doctrine and practice. This division is needful and required by God.* However, division and discord that occurs over personalities (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:3-4), petty human conflicts (Phil. 4:2), social status of people (Rom. 12:16; James 2:1-4), gossip (James 4:11; Numb. 14:36-37; Prov. 6:16-19), true Christian liberty (Rom. 14:1-5) and the principle of less weightier matters (Matt. 23:23) is always wrong and carnal.

8. Standards promote a faulty view of the holiness of God.

It's assumed that the person who upholds and practices any kind of standards is actually hiding behind the holiness of God and is using the holiness of God as some kind of shield or defense mechanism for practicing standards. It is also suggested that separated Christians use the teaching about God's holiness as a way to justify and practice standards. In other words, those who practice standards are actually legalists who are disguising their legalistic practices as the path of true holiness. It's presupposed or taken for granted that when God's people follow standards and regard any outward obedience to standards, as true acts of holiness, that these Christians have misunderstood about the true nature of holiness, which is really an internal condition of the heart. After all, it's commonly presumed today, "God only looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Thus, modern evangelicalism concludes that those Christians, who view the following of standards with the practice of holiness, have adopted a faulty view of holiness.

This is simply another straw man argument that lacks any common sanctified sense. In the first place, the true separatist does not attempt to use the holiness of God as an excuse or some kind of scapegoat mechanism in order to observe and practice Biblical standards. Holiness is the key purpose (not the scapegoat) of all true separation and observance of holy standards (1 Peter 1:15-16). The separatist wants to uphold, honor and vindicate God's holiness in all of his actions and decisions. Second, as we have noted already, following certain standards does not automatically make a person legalistic.

It is a wrong attitude toward any list or code of conduct that constitutes legalism. Third, holiness is not simply confined to the inner heart as so many suggest today. This has become some kind of spiritual cliché that lacks Biblical sense. Obedience is a key part of our holy response to the Lord (Rom. 6:16-22). Lack of obedience proves that the heart is not right before the Lord. The Scriptures are very clear that a right heart is a willing heart, which is ready to obey God in every area that relates to holiness (Rom. 6:17; 1 Sam. 15:22). Furthermore, to assume that the heart is always holy, while claiming freedom from all standards, would be a dangerous allusion in view of what Jeremiah said about the heart (Jer. 17:9). In fact, those who claim to be free from all standards

today had better take a closer look at their own heart and walk before the Lord (1 John 1:5-7).

9. Standards hinder success.

Yes, standards might keep us from experiencing success – success in the world’s eyes. The world has its own view of success. But God’s view of success is much different than the world’s view of success. Many today within the market-driven church and philosophy of evangelical consumerism are caught up in the “success syndrome” and view the success of a church ministry or Biblical institution by the world’s standards of bigness, large numbers, prosperity, sales and acceptability. Some feel that standards hinder a Biblical institution of learning from being successful because they stunt numerical growth. In short, it is assumed that standards inevitably hinder the work of God. On the contrary, standards can enhance the work of God in many ways by establishing reverence (Heb. 12:28), purifying the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:11), retaining order and decency in the church (Titus 1:5; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40) and creating unity by not causing strife over non-essential issues (Rom. 14:20). Standards do not strip a ministry of being successful in God’s eyes.

We also must remember that God views true spiritual success as remaining true to His Word and reaping the true spiritual blessings and harvest that flows from being obedient to His Word (Joshua 1:8). God does not measure success by numbers but by faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2). If large numbers in a church service or Biblical institution is an indication of true success, then one must conclude that a convention hosting 1,500 Jehovah’s Witnesses with their false doctrine is also a success! God warns us about declaring success by comparing ourselves with others who are using human standards to measure success (2 Cor. 10:12). Rather, we are to compare ourselves to the divine standards of God and His holiness (Hab. 1:13).

Jesus is our greatest example of someone who was not concerned about the world’s view of success. He consistently refused to conform to the pattern of the world for fleshly and prideful reasons (Hebrews 7:26; Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus kept saying, “It is written”

instead of asking, “Is it popular or successful?” Jesus counteracted the culture and the view of human success. He was not concerned about fitting into the mold of society or accommodating the cultural trends and ways of living. Jesus was not concerned about being successful from the world’s viewpoint. Rather, Jesus sought to do the Father’s will instead of being overcome with the world’s culture and idea of success.

Gordon MacDonald said: “I think we need to be constantly reminded that Jesus, by the standards of cultural success models, was a miserable failure.” True success and blessing from the Lord can only come when we are obedient to God’s Word. James 1:25 says, “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” God will always bless and reward obedience to His Word but He will not bless or give reward for those actions of disobedience (Gal. 6:7-9). Remember: Not all that passes as God’s blessing is God’s true blessing and a sign of genuine success.

10. Standards shelter young people and keep them from functioning in the real world.

This is like saying that training our children to not have sex before marriage or take drugs shelters them from having sex before marriage and taking drugs. Yes, standards of discipline keep us from functioning like the rest of the world. My reaction to this is very simple. So what! We don’t want our children to act like the world and be overcome with the world system (1 John 2:15-17). Good standards of discipline will not cause our children to become dysfunctional in the real world as so many suggest today. Standards can become an aid or teaching tool to help our children face the real world and also assist our children from becoming like the world. As we teach our young people about the importance of Biblical standards and the inward power of the Holy Spirit, we will be doing them a great service.

The Bible teaches that parents should *lovingly shelter* their children from the world system, teach them the principles of truth, and reprove them when necessary (Prov. 1:15; 2:1-4; 3:1-4, 11-12;

4:10-15, 20-23; 5:1-3; 6:20-23; 7:1-3; 23:15-17; 23:26; 24:21-23; Deut. 6:6-9; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; Heb. 12:7). This sheltering (not smothering), teaching and reproof ministry is a necessary part of parenting so that children will be able to face the world without mother and father as they grow to maturity. This is one of the most basic and needful ministries that parents are expected to do for their children as they grow and mature. And yet the modern mentality of evangelical freethinking has blind sighted many present day Christians to this timeless aspect of parental sheltering and love.

The whole principle of training and discipline argues for standards so that those children who are trained do not become like the world system. It is ludicrous to assume that Biblical standards will keep our children from operating or functioning in the real world. Our children get enough contact with the so-called real world in their everyday normal lives. As our children mature they will know what's going on in the real world. Furthermore, what they don't know in their younger and more innocent years certainly won't hurt them. Innocent children are those who have been well taught, loved and sheltered from harm and corruption (Ps. 17:8; 57:1; 61:4; 91:4; 1 Thess. 2:7).

People say today, "Our children should find out for themselves what is right and wrong and be able to cope with society." One man told me that he was sending his children to public school so that they can learn to deal with real problems and cope with the real world. This kind of thinking and philosophy is absolutely unscriptural and is resulting in much tragedy among our young people today. Young people do not *find out* what is right and wrong. They must be *taught* what is right and wrong. *It's the God-given responsibility of parents to teach their children the difference between right and wrong and provide a stable environment that will be conducive to godly living in their early formidable years.* Parents must take great care to teach their children (Prov. 22:6) what is "fleshly" and what is "after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1) and attempt in every way possible to place their children in the right kind of environments that will not hinder their spiritual learning and walk (Ps. 119:63).

11. Standards result in pastors or instructors becoming dictators over the lives of people.

The preacher who speaks with rebuke will make various applications of Biblical texts to everyday normal living so that saints will be reminded to be “doers of the word” (James 1:22-25). Paul and other apostles applied the doctrine of separation to the lives of the saints by telling them that they could not attend certain places (1 Cor. 10:20; 1 Pet. 4:3-4), practice certain actions (Galatians 5:19-23; Eph. 4:26-32; 1 Cor. 5:11) and behave in certain ways (2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Cor. 11:20-21; 1 Cor. 3:1-4). Paul also humbly invited the people to follow his example or manner of living as he had lived and walked according to the truth (1 Thessalonians 1:6). This would obviously include some form of standards. The Scripture also commands preachers to preach the Word of God with conviction, authority and rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2; 2 Cor. 13:10; Titus 2:15) which surely involves application of Scriptural content to everyday living (see Acts 2:22-24, 37; 17:22-34).

The Bible, Peter, Paul, and church history itself demonstrate that it's not wrong for preachers to speak out against social vices and social issues of their time. *The idea that standards of separation are all personal choices, which believers should pray about, and make for themselves, and which the preacher should never openly address or condemn, is simply not Biblical.* This New Evangelical mentality simply does not wash with what the Bible says. God gives preachers the authority to openly condemn those places, people and personal actions which clearly violate Scripture and those things that do not square with God's holiness.

It must be understood that a pastor can be a leader and promoter of righteousness in this way, among his people, without becoming a dictator over their lives and keeping them in fear of reprisal. People need to be challenged to live holy today and the preacher cannot be afraid to apply the doctrine of holiness to the lives of his people (Prov. 4:14-15). Many preachers are cowards when it comes to speaking out against sin. They speak in generalities and fail to apply the teaching of Scripture to the lives of God's people. *We must beware of the modern day thinking that says preachers*

cannot apply the doctrine of separation to the lives of their people! All preaching without application is like eating a pancake without syrup. Paul left room for 21st century preachers to apply the “such like” (Gal. 5:20) works of the flesh to their people. In respect to listing sins, it could be said that any believer who refuses to conform to the commands and separated principles of Scripture, or a general list of guidelines that applies these separated principles of God’s Word to his life, will reveal that he does not have a right attitude toward God and His holiness.

On the other end of the spectrum, some Christians want their pastor to make every decision for them when it comes to the area of separation and holy living. Of course, no pastor can do this and if they attempt to do this they become “lords over God’s heritage” (1 Pet. 5:3). The preacher as a shepherd must lead the people but not spy on the people. He must teach the sheep and not fleece the sheep. However, every pastor has the right and responsibility to preach and apply separation to the lives of God’s sheep and give good sound advice and rebuke (2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15; 2 Cor. 13:10). God expects pastors to lead their sheep in the way of truth and apply truth to their lives (Gal. 5:19-21 – “such like”).

But the preacher can’t be with his people every moment of every day. Nor is it the business of the preacher to spy on a person’s household once a week to see what they are doing and what they are listening to on TV or the radio. *A pastor is not your baby sitter. The Holy Spirit is your baby sitter!* Therefore, believers must be sensitive to the teaching ministry of the Spirit upon their hearts. God’s people must be open to the Spirit’s inner teaching and leading so that their day-to-day separated decisions and practices will not be meaningless, insincere, mechanical and legalistic. As they grow in their understanding of separation and practice the principles of Bible separation they must do so with a teachable spirit and surrendered heart (Ps. 119:34). This will keep them from cold compliance with no heart for God and righteousness (Matt. 15:8).

Every pastor or instructor must give God’s people the commands, teachings and principles of eternal truth and then let them start on a journey of growth and understanding, as the Spirit teaches them

and forms them into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Nevertheless, we must refuse to accept the notion that the preacher becomes a lording legalist, trying to dictate every decision and move in the life of a person, just because a simple code of conduct is expected to be followed for church membership or institutional testimony (1 Pet. 5:3). We must also avoid the popular conclusion that says all preachers, who preach about separatist standards and who preach with conviction and rebuke, are preaching out of the flesh. *Many saints mistake bold and challenging preaching (Acts 4:29, 31; 2 Tim. 4:2; 2 Cor. 13:10) as fleshly preaching because it has become convicting preaching to them (Acts 2:37; 5:33; 7:54).* These are unwarranted conclusions of many lackadaisical Christians today, who simply want *to escape personal conviction, avoid change and who want no commitment or level of authority over their lives*, whether it's church authority, institutional authority, parental authority, or even God's authority (2 Tim. 3:2).

Today those who boldly denounce and preach against sin and set godly standards for people to follow are labeled as harassing preachers instead of grace preachers. This is because they seek to bring guilt and shame upon the lives of others instead of encouraging their hearts. But this conclusion is contrary to preaching and living under grace. Grace preachers will not only encourage ("exhort") but also "reprove" and "rebuke" with all longsuffering (see 2 Tim. 4:2). Both elements are needed in grace preaching and living since grace reforms the believer as well as encourages the believer (Titus 2:11-12). In addition, the preaching and Biblical based standards which godly pastors seek to establish in the lives of others are viewed as "joy-killers" which take away the saint's freedom to have fun and experience joy.

Of course, this is contrary to what the Scripture reveals in connection with days of Ezra when the people "separated themselves" from the world (Ezra 6:21) and had great joy in doing so (Ezra 6:22). True joy can only come when one experiences freedom from sin (Psalm 51:12) and joy in the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is not stolen away when a person chooses to follow a list of standards. Killing a person's joy or fun depends upon what a person considers to be fun entertainment? So-called fun

entertainment may indeed be sinful entertainment that is filled with lust and pride and is contrary to God's Word. The idea that convicting and rebuking preaching turns a preacher into a legalistic kill-joy is simply erroneous and absurd.

The point is this. If believers are willing to submit or yield to God's teaching, and allow the Spirit to open their hearts and write the sensitivity of God upon their hearts (2 Cor. 3:3), concerning various worldly actions, then the believer will have no problem with a very basic checklist that forbids various worldly and fleshly actions (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 5:17). They will be willing to surrender to the authority of the local church (Heb. 13:7, 17) and allow the Spirit to work in their hearts and eventually give them inner conviction, direction and assurance about not engaging in various worldly amusements and apostate associations. In fact, when believers submit to church authority they can do it to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31 - "do all to the glory of God") and keep themselves from following regulations without reason and purpose, which tends to foster legalism instead of living to glorify God.

In other words, believers can safely follow a code of conduct, as they grow in their understanding and application of certain Biblical regulatory principles to their lives, without creating legalism in their hearts. *If believers are practicing certain standards for God's glory their heart will remain right as they learn the importance and relevancy of applying key Biblical principles to their lives.* Believers can rely upon the Spirit's inward guidance and leading ministry, at the same time they accept and follow basic standards, which a code of conduct list considers worldly and compromising, knowing that they will grow in their understanding of why certain standards are followed and understand the significance and connection that certain standards have to holy living (1 Pet. 2:2). And most of all they can follow these standards in order to bring glory to God in the world and among His people. The heart is the important matter. We can follow standards for the glory of God. What a difference the heart makes!

12. Standards practiced in assembly life but not in the home life become a form of hypocrisy.

This is not necessarily the case. When a Christian follows various arbitrary dress standards, which might be stated in a code of conduct list for church gatherings, they can do so out of love for God's people and possess a gracious spirit of *preferring* one another and *servicing* one another (Rom. 12:9-10; Gal. 5:13). This practice and attitude is not hypocrisy. Rather, saints who possess this attitude are practicing genuine Biblical love. A Christian can also follow Biblical standards out of respect for God's House (1 Cor. 14:40). In addition, a Christian can follow both arbitrary and Biblical standards out of obedience to God's ordained authority, which has established specific standards for conduct (Heb. 13:7).

In following these standards, God's people are not acting as hypocrites but as obedient brethren to the authority that God has established above them. Practicing various standards in the church or assembly life, while not practicing all of them in the home, does not qualify as hypocrisy. Rather, it becomes a *loving* and *caring* response to the brethren while meeting together in assembly life and an *obedient* response toward those in authority. There is not one ounce of hypocrisy in this kind of living! Practicing corporate standards for worship in assembly life and even submitting to a code of conduct, which in some measure reaches outside assembly practice (Acts 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 10:20), will not breed hypocrisy in a person's life (Jam. 3:17) when their heart is truly submissive to God's pattern for church unity and authority and when their heart is geared around those Biblical regulatory principles which are designed to guide their everyday living (Ps. 119:33-34).

Those who suggest that standards are a form of hypocrisy usually do so in order to excuse themselves from attending church faithfully (Heb. 10:25) or following any kind of separated standards for their own Christian living. God knows their true heart and reasoning for rejecting all standards (Prov. 21:2). It could be said that many Christians want to free themselves from all separated Biblical standards because they want to live for their own fleshly endeavors in life (1 Pet. 1:14). The lackadaisical and carefree attitude toward all standards today reveals that God's people want to do what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

Ten Reasons Why We Should Obey Standards

1. Because God has established local church authority (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24; 1Tim. 5:17).

A Christian's understanding of local church leadership and authority will determine both his attitude and submission to all authority and standards. The reason why so many Christians have problems with rules or some list of standards is because they do not want to have any authority over their lives, whether it is the local church, Scriptures or God Himself! Many believers desire to have the preeminence (3 John 1:9). They don't want anybody else telling them what to do! Many young believers need to learn the secret of placing themselves under God-ordained authority.

One chapel speaker, at the Bible Institute where I attended, made the comment that students should be willing to empty an orange garbage can if that is what the instructor asked them to do. Why? Because we have placed ourselves under his authority and want to be obedient to those who are above us in the Lord and who are teaching us discipline, humility and lessons that we will never forget for the rest of our lives. Church and institutional standards are to be obeyed by those abiding under the authority of the church or institution. It must be reiterated. There is no such thing as a radical individualistic lifestyle or freethinking spirit, promoted among New Testament Christianity, which seeks complete independence from church authority. Rather, there is great blessing when we will just learn to place ourselves under God's ordained plan of authority. The wonderful thing is that we can be submissive to those above us and at the same time do it as an act of obedience rendered unto the Lord (Col. 3:22-23). What a difference this makes!

2. Because of love for other brethren (1 Cor. 10:32-33).

Many times we must learn to be submissive to group standards simply because we do not want to offend other brethren. There is a kind and loving response that we should extend to others as we serve one another in assembly and institutional life and learn God's Word together. We should be able to lovingly abide by

standards for the sake of not offending the convictions or scruples of others in the realm of non-essential matters (Rom. 14:15; 15:1-2; 1 Cor. 8:1, 12-13) and hinder the work of the Lord from moving forward (Rom. 14:19-20). *Love limited liberty* is very important in the work and ministry of the Lord. We should seek to serve one another by limiting our liberty (Gal. 5:13-14). We are told to live for others and their own spiritual wealth and not for our own selfish pursuits (1 Cor. 10:24).

This should be remembered in connection with dress codes and other standards that are established in a church or institutional handbook where codes of conduct are outlined for members and students. *Many times these codes or standards are designed to promote love and courtesy among the saints and maintain a common ground and consensus among the saints concerning modesty, decency and distinction among the sexes.* Setting standards to comply with the scruples of other believers is sometimes necessary.

This may involve curtailing our liberties revolving around the matters of dress, displaying Christmas trees in church, supporting certain Sunday activities and limiting our liberty in other non-essential matters, as we dwell together. And many times this is done simply because we love other people in the body of Christ and do not want to offend their personal preferences and scruples (1 Cor. 8:13). This certainly is not a legalist attitude. In fact, it is not legalism at all – it is love. Many today mistake legalism for love! The practice of Biblical standards is an obedient response to God's Word (James 1:22-25) and the practice of any arbitrary standards (Acts 15:29; 1 Cor. 8:13) in an institutional setting can be done out of love for God's people and concern for the work of God (Rom. 14:20).

3. *Because God wants us to dwell together in unity (Phil. 1:27; 2:2; Ps. 33).*

Standards can help maintain a spirit of unity among God's people and keep the focus on the main issues of learning and growth instead of division over non-essential matters (Rom. 14:20) and issues revolving around worldliness (Rom. 12:1-2). The

establishment of various corporate rules has a way of keeping a balanced approach toward both ends of the standard spectrum, the essential areas dealing with Biblical separation and the non-essential areas dealing with personal scruples. In other words, the establishment of some corporate Biblical standards can declare and maintain a Biblical separated stand and the establishment of some arbitrary standards can cater to the scruples of other saints so that unity might be maintained and so the work of the Lord can move forward without multiplied issues surfacing to bog down the saints (1 Cor. 15:58). As stated before, standards make group living more pleasant.

4. Because we need to maintain order, decency and reverence.

Standards are necessary to promote order, decency and reverence in God's House (Psalm 89:7; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40). Standards are rules that help set the house of God in order and keep it pure in over all practice and leadership (Titus 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Acts 6:3). Every business and public meeting place has a certain amount of standards that people must abide by in order to maintain public decorum and decency. The same is true in a spiritual sense for any church or institution of learning. Without good, Biblical, and separated standards, a church or institution of learning will sooner or later begin to accept and promote irreverent practices, disorderly conduct and ecumenical involvement. They will begin to move down the rabbit trail of worldly, pragmatic, and even mystical practices, which do not honor God's holiness and express true reverence for God. This is because Satan is always trying to push his diabolical agenda (2 Cor. 2:11; 11:3).

5. Because of discipleship training and godly example. (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1, 1 Cor.4:16; Phil. 3:17).

Standards that are set by those leaders, who are above us in the Lord, and who have weathered many storms and understand the principles of Biblical separation, can be followed as trustworthy examples. Paul was a spiritual mentor to Timothy. And Timothy, who was not an apostle, was to be a spiritual mentor to others and follow the same practice of making disciples, so the church could

continue to expand and grow through discipleship training and example (1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:2). In a similar way, pastors and instructors can become spiritual mentors to other believers and young believers can follow their godly example as the mentor seeks to follow the Lord and do what is right. In fact, believers can actually follow the Lord and grow as they learn to follow the leading and direction from a teacher's discipleship training and godly example. This is a very normal process of growth and development and a primary way that older and wiser brethren in the Lord can teach younger brethren (1 Pet. 5:5). The idea that we are never to direct people in any of our own convictions, which are rooted in Biblical principles, is misleading and contradicts the pattern of discipleship taught and displayed in the New Testament (see Luke 6:40). We must repeat something said earlier. *There is no such thing as radical individualism (autonomy) in New Testament discipleship training and growth.* The very fact that leaders are responsible for the spiritual direction and moral training of the believers necessitates practical instructions and guidelines for personal holiness.

6. *Because God wants us to discipline our lives (Heb. 5:14; Titus 2:12).*

Discipline is a key part of the Christian growth process. The Christian life is a life of discipline and learning to live separate from the world is part of this process of discipline. Standards help us to discipline our minds so that we can know the difference between what is good and what is evil (Heb. 5:14 – “senses exercised to discern both good and evil”). They also help or aid us to discipline our lives so that we might learn to live “soberly,” “righteously” and “godly” in the present world (Titus 2:12). Grace “teaches” or disciplines us to live differently and godly and this New Testament grace factor will always lead us to establish, promote and maintain high and holy standards for our lives.

Standards help us to discipline our bodies so that we might avoid participation with sin (1 Cor. 9:24-27 – “buffet my body”). Paul was not referring to the actual mutilation of his body. He was simply using an illustration from the athletic world to teach how we need to discipline our bodies and subdue our passions and own will in

order to please the Lord. Jesus taught that His followers must deny themselves of all carnal living and selfish ambitions or goals which would keep them from becoming the kind of learner and follower that He intended them to be (Matt. 16:25; Luke 9:23).

Discipline is a key word associated with all separation and holy living. *The separated and holy life is the disciplined life.* Believers must learn what it means to surrender to God and follow His path of holiness in all areas of their living. As believers learn to follow the Biblical principles, which revolve around the doctrine of separation, it will help them to set goals or standards and discipline their lives, so that they might promote godliness and holiness in their own personal lives and church associations. Standards will teach each believer that there must be separated lines drawn in order to maintain a holy distinction and lifestyle. No Christian can make spiritual progress or live a godly life without the spiritual exercise of discipline (“exercise thyself rather unto godliness” - 1 Tim. 4:7-8). Guidelines or standards, which are based upon Scriptural principles, are needed and useful in order to prevent believers from engaging in various pleasures and habits that are designed to lead them astray. Standards will help the believer to walk “circumspectly” or carefully in this present world (Eph. 5:15).

7. *Because God wants us to strive for excellence (Phil. 1:10).*

Following separated standards reminds us that God wants believers to strive for excellence in their Christian lives. Philippians 1:10 says, “That ye may approve (discern, test, allow) things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.” This is one of the most importance principles that we can apply to our lives today. In whatever we do we should strive for excellence. This is where many Christians fail. *We must “approve” (discern or test with a view to endorse or approve) what is right and best for our lives, what is according to God’s truth and holy way.* The word “approve” (dokimazo) refers to the ability of the saints to sift or test a certain thing or practice and then recognize its worth and put their stamp of approval upon it. The word was used in connection with testing metals and coins, to determine whether they met the specified standards. When we learn to

discern or test what is right and proper we will discover, practice and promote “excellent” things in our lives.

The word “excellent” (diaphero) means, “to carry in different directions.” It was used of people who were constantly being carried in ships to different destinations. The primary thrust of the word means “to differ.” The excellent things are different because they excel and are superior in their design. The figurative implication of different things is that they are different because of their excellence or superiority over other things. *Excellent things are those things, which are different in their character because of their superiority and excellence.* This means that we are not to try and see how much we can get away with as believers hoping that God will not frown upon our manner of living and conduct. Rather, we are to strive for the very best things that please God! A believer is not to see how close he can get to the line. Instead, he must follow godly and holy standards and strive to get as far away from the line as he can get! He must strive for excellence and superiority in all that he does and how he lives. *In all realms of life, some things are good and others are better. The good can often become the enemy of the best.* For effective and holy service, these distinctions must be made.

Let’s think of several examples. The words of a song may have a good Biblical message, but when these words are joined with the pagan and polluted sounds of the world system, excellence is lost. Preaching the Gospel is a worthy practice but when we must connect and compromise with ecumenicalism to do it and help build the coming one world church, then evangelism loses its excellence. Therefore, lines must be drawn between what is right and what is wrong. And it’s easier to draw the lines than many modern evangelicals would want us to believe.

We must be willing to draw lines as we introduce Biblical standards to people and seek to help them grow and discipline their lives in godliness. The fact that there is sometimes difficulty in making certain distinctions and drawing that invisible line should not lead people to believe that there are no lines to be drawn and that everything is in the gray (neutral) and can be classified as existing on the same level. Following clear Biblical principles will lead to

general agreement upon many issues revolving around the doctrine that is according to godliness (1 Tim. 6:3). As we strive for excellence we will find the need to make distinctions and draw lines in order to honor God's holiness.

The literal rendering "the things that are more excellent" (Phil. 1:10) would also suggest that we need to consider even the smaller details or finer points of our Christian conduct and make sure that all we do is pleasing to the Lord. The Bible says that when we know to do "good" and don't do it, it becomes sin to us (James 4:17). The word "good" means worthy, excellent, choice or admirable. This is the way we are to live our Christian lives and serve the Lord. We must strive for excellence in all that we do, say and practice. This will naturally necessitate the establishment of standards, which promote excellent or superior things.

Stradivarius insisted that no instrument constructed in his shop be sold until it was as near perfection as human care and skill could make it. Stradivarius observed, "God needs violins to send His music into the world, and if any violins are defective God's music will be spoiled." His working philosophy was summed up in one sentence: "Other men will make other violins, but no man shall make a better one." Antonius Stradivarius expected his workers to do their very best in producing violins. How much more should we, as Christians, strive for excellence in the work assigned to us by God and strive for excellence in our whole manner of living! Good Biblical standards can help us to this end.

8. *Because God calls Christians to a life of discernment (Heb. 5:14).*

Hebrews 5:14 speaks about having our "senses exercised to discern both good and evil." First Corinthians 2:14 says, "But he that is spiritual judgeth (discerneth) all things..." In Ephesians 5:10 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21 the words "proving" and "prove" mean to discern. Discernment involves good judgment and understanding. It means to examine, scrutinize, judge, investigate, sift or question. We must never lose our will to discern between right and wrong and error and truth. Establishing good Biblical standards is one way to practice common discernment. When we lose our will to

discern we will be swallowed up by the world system. When we put a difference between the holy and unholy we become discerning (Lev. 10:10). Discernment is needed today in light of the doctrinal and worldly compromises going on in many churches and Biblical institutions of learning. *Blessed are those who can see what is happening!* The believer who is well taught in the Bible can clearly see doctrinal departure and dangers. He can sift out the philosophies and carnal ideas and practices of man. He has the skillful and discerning ability to reject the false ideas that confront him and can “distinguish” those ideas as “evil” when compared to the truth, which he knows is “good” (see Heb. 5:14). *This is simply called old-fashioned discernment.* The Bible teaches that we should be “wise (discerning) unto that which is good...” (Rom. 16:19).

Proverbs 14:15 says, “The simple (foolish) believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.” Only fools believe everything that they hear and have no discretion. But prudent or discerning men think things through before they act. Jeremiah 5:4 gives the sad commentary on God’s undiscerning people: “Therefore I said, Surely these *are* poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, *nor* the judgment of their God.” *Establishing good Biblical standards is the natural outflow of wanting to live a discerning and obedient life.* Psalm 119:66 says, “Teach me good judgment and knowledge (practical discernment): for I have believed thy commandments.” Discernment is sanctified common sense!

9. *Because God wants us to live separate and declare a testimony of holiness and light (Eph. 5:8; Matt. 5:14; 1 John 1:7; 2 Cor. 3:2).*

Standards help churches, institutions and personal believers to declare the kind of separated stand and testimony that is necessary to maintain in a world filled with sin and degradation, and which is experiencing an ever-increasing cultural collapse of morals and decency. The old saying is still true: ***If you don’t stand for something, you will fall for everything!*** Knowing what you stand for limits what you will fall for. Standards seek to promote Christian purity and also help God’s people to maintain a testimony

of light and holiness in a world of darkness (1 Pet. 2:9). Standards that promote godliness and righteous living can help keep the Christian beacon shining brightly so that a watching world can see a genuine difference in our lives as Christians (2 Cor. 5:17). Standards can help promote the distinction between light and darkness and righteousness and unrighteousness (2 Cor. 6:14). As previously mentioned, standards also teach us that there is no need to conform to every new type of sound, dress, style, place, movement, message and program that man creates and condones. Standards teach us that we do not have to follow every culturally accepted norm and strive to conform to the culture of the world in order to be noticed and accepted by society (Rom. 12:2; John 12:43). Standards can help us to maintain a consistent Christian testimony of holiness in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation in which we live (Phil. 2:15). Let us remember this one thing. **God has not changed and the challenge has not changed!** God is still holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16; 1 John 1:5) and we must seek to honor His holiness in all that we do.

10. Because Biblical standards can help believers to live a life that pleases and honors God.

Jesus said in John 8:29 "... for I do always those things that please him." You can't get any more positive than this! Why do we practice good Biblical standards? It's because we want to please the Lord ("to walk and to please God" – 1 Thess. 4:1). Col. 1:10 says, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." 2 Timothy 2:4 states, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." The question is not, "Can I handle this?" but rather, "Am I pleasing the Lord?" The question is not, "Will it please the people" but rather, "Am I pleasing the Lord?" Christians need to establish good Biblical standards because they want to truly honor and please the Lord.

J. C. Ryle admonishes: "We must give up the idea of trying to please everyone. The thing is impossible, and the attempt is mere waste of time. We must be content to walk in Christ's steps, and let the world say what it likes. Do what we will, we shall never satisfy

it, or silence its ill-natured remarks. It first found fault with John the Baptist and then with his blessed Master. And it will go on caviling and finding fault with the Master's disciples so long as one of them is left upon earth. Let your life be filled with all that pleases Him. Nothing else is worthy of the minutes it occupies."

A Concluding Remark About Standards

John Miles, the president of the Bible Institute where I attended, once said this about standards and rules: "Rules are made in times of quiet to protect and guide us in times of stress. Rules are simply goals, fulfilled through God's power, that can help discipline and direct us to God-honoring lives. Rules can make group living more pleasant, declare a stand, and help establish order in lives that are undisciplined."

A Personal Note to Young Christians

Young believers may not fully understand the importance of some standards but will in time grow and mature in their Christian life so as to fully understand the importance of basic Bible standards of separation. This parallels with what Jesus said in John 16:12, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." However, in time you will begin to see the significance and importance of various standards and how they need to be implemented to honor God's Word and God's holiness. Biblical standards need to grow into convictions in the lives of church members and students who are part of institutions of Biblical learning.

It is vitally important that each believer maintains an open heart toward all truth and the teaching about the separated way of life (Ezra 7:10; Ps. 119:2; 34; 69). Each believer needs to realize that they will have a fuller understanding about various matters in the Christian life as the Spirit teaches them in the months and years ahead. For now, it's important to place yourself under the authority of the local church (Heb. 13:17) and those who are above you in the Lord (Eph. 6:5-6; Col. 3:22) and with a submissive and humble heart follow the godly example of Christian leaders (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1, 1 Cor. 4:16; Phil. 3:17) realizing that

they “watch for your souls” and want you to live a godly life both inwardly in your heart and outwardly in your conduct. So keep your heart right. God is looking for your heart!

Ezra 7:10 says:

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”

The commands and principles of Scripture are directed primarily to our hearts. A surrendered heart is a heart that is always ready to listen to truth and obey truth (Psalm 119:12, 26, 33-34, 64, 66, 68, 124, 135). God is not interested in your excuses, feelings, views or opinions. He is interested in a teachable spirit that is totally surrendered and ready to both receive and obey truth.

The thrust of any church or institution of learning is to teach the teachable and reach the reachable. Psalm 119:12 says, “Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes.” Jeremiah 15:16 says, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart...”

Every pastor and instructor must commend their sheep and students “... to God, and to the word of his grace” (Acts 20:32). Every church pastor or school instructor wants God, through His unchanging Word, to do a great work in the hearts and lives of their people. So every pastor or instructor will need to place each believer into the hands of God and allow the Word of God and power of God to sanctify and transform their lives. With an open heart and open Bible the Holy Spirit can begin to do His work of sanctification in your life (2 Cor. 3:18; James 1:25). A proper heart attitude toward authority, truth, discipleship, and learning will make your presence in a church or institution of learning a blessing instead of a blight. Will you make the prayer of the psalmist your own prayer?

“Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart” (Psalm 119:34).