

## Why Church Standards?

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Church standards are often viewed as legalistic, unloving, judgmental, narrow-minded, hair-splitting, and divisive. In this study we want to counter these arguments from Scripture and understand why fundamental churches possess some basic standards for assembly life. This may be an eye-opener to you! My prayer is that you will approach this study with an open heart and teachable spirit.

A Bible command or principle is a truth that I must live by; a conviction is a personal belief based on a Bible command or principle taught in the Bible, and a standard is a guideline that helps me keep my convictions. A standard simply helps an individual maintain the conviction based on the Bible principle or command that is given. A standard is the way to apply Bible truth to our lives. Without standards, many Bible truths simply would not assist us in life. There must be application of truth to our personal lives and church ministries; therefore, there must be some standards developed and maintained.

Standards are practiced everywhere, even in society. The purpose of traffic laws is to maintain safety. However, if we simply posted big signs on all our roads that said, "Be Safe!" we would have chaos. In a similar way, there is a need for specific standards in the Church and also in our personal lives. The implementation of Biblical and practice standards keep us from spiritual defeat and chaos as we apply God's truth to our lives through the Spirit's power. The Bible gives us various commands and principles by which we must govern our lives in a spiritual and meaningful way.

Some standards are created for group fellowships. They are simply *arbitrary* rules or standards based upon a Bible command or principle. For instance, the Bible says a man should not have long hair (1 Cor. 11:14). Of course, it does not say how long is too long. But in an effort to obey the principle being taught, group standards are established to

present the least questionable testimony of masculinity (the same should be true in our personal lives). In our church we want those men who are participating in ministry to keep their ears off of their ears and collar. This is an *arbitrary* standard but there has to be some limit set to obey the principle being taught concerning the distinction among the sexes. When I get to Heaven I might discover that a man can have his hair longer but I'm sure that when I get there I will not have violated this principle for personal church work and ministry. Getting back to traffic laws. Have you ever wondered why all speed limits are in multiples of five? Why isn't the optimum speed 27, 39, or 58? It's because *arbitrary* limits are always given that are clear, easy to discern, and helpful to maintaining safety. In a similar fashion, a church may want its members to maintain an arbitrary standard for group fellowship and unity, which is very clear and easy to discern, so the command or principle that God gave in His Word is not violated. The standard is often not a *spirituality* issue but a *safeguard* that is implemented to maintain God's truth.

### **Why do we have Church standards?**

- **Because church standards can promote unity when we have minor differences of opinion over “nonessential” matters regarding dress and other personal preferences** (Rom. 14:1 - “doubtful disputations” = criticizing the scruples or ethical considerations of others; Eph. 4:3 – “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”; Ps. 133:1 - “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”). When we attend a fundamental church, we should get with the program! A proper heart attitude toward unity, authority, truth, discipleship (passing on and protecting truth - 2 Timothy 2:2) and learning will make your presence in a church or institution of learning a blessing instead of a blight. Don't become a distraction but a blessing. Be someone who unites instead of divides (Titus 3:10). And don't become “saint critic” or a chronic complainer because some basic standards are followed

within church life and ministry (Numbers 11:1 – “the people complained”). We are to *glow* instead of *moan* as we step out to serve the Lord in a sound, fundamental, local church. United we stand, divided we fall. The old axiom is still true: “In essentials, unity, in nonessentials, tolerance, in all things, love.”

- **Because church standards can maintain unity in philosophy of ministry and outreach.** Amos 3:3 asks this enduring question: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” No! This is especially true in church outreach and ministry since their different philosophies would collide. The old cliché that says, “There is unity in diversity” only applies to personalities and minor personal preferences (nonessentials) but NOT to doctrine and a separated philosophy of ministry (1 Cor. 1:10 – “that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”; Phil. 1:27, “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel”). There may be many players but there is only one team! Get on the team. And remember this: “If you have to do wrong to stay on a team, then you are on the wrong team.”

True love and unity is always centered in truth (1 Cor. 13:6; 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 (Eph. 4:3 – “keep the unity of the Spirit”). This is done by upholding truth at all cost while at the same time possessing humility and love toward the brethren. Charles Spurgeon said: “I am quite sure that the best way to promote union, is to promote truth.” Obedience to God’s truth is more important than an artificial unity built on disobedience and compromise. This means there are times we must even separate from worldly brethren who are bringing shame upon our church ministry by their actions and worldly compromises (“withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly” - 2 Thess. 3:6-11). This means we are to separate from men, ministries, and



movements that do not uphold sound doctrine and sanctified living. *It also means that disorderly brethren cannot run and change the Biblical philosophy of church ministry.* They are not to dictate and reshape church life.

John Miles said: “Believers can lead us into compromising positions more quickly than anyone else. So though we long to fellowship with believers and recognize the unity of the body of Christ, if a believer leads us into a compromising position, where our loyalty to God is going to be questioned and compromised, then we have to part company with that believer. This seems like a contradiction to many, but again we must remember the most important thing in life is to be loyal to God and to do His will. As Jesus said, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself (say no to himself), and take up his cross (the will of God) and follow me.’” 2 Timothy 2:19 says, “And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” We are not to accept, overlook or endorse error and worldliness in the church. When correction does not work (Eph. 5:11) then purging and departure is necessary. Of course, tolerance is often associated with the practice of unity but tolerance and openness to errant doctrine, worldliness, and pragmatism can never result in true unity. We cannot be “open” to everything that comes down the pike. Dr. Wendell Heller once said: “We have our minds so open our brains are falling out.”

- **Because church standards declare a stand in areas of sanctification such as distinction among the sexes, heathenism, worldliness, and ecumenicalism** (1 Cor. 11:14 - “if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him. But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering” ; 2 Cor. 6:14-17 – “Come out from among them, and be ye separate ... and touch not the unclean thing”). One does not need a Ph.D. to understand the meaning of these exhortations. In a **GENERAL** way (our daily living), God has called us to be distinct and separate

("Come out from among them") in relationship to the ungodly actions of unsaved people and the worldly culture in which we live. In doing so we will not "touch the unclean thing" (paganism/worldliness/carnality). Incorporating some basic standards for a church group will enable us to implement and apply Bible separation in the local church setting. As to the distinction among the sexes and hair length on men and women, many will ask: "How long is long and how short is short?" The better questions are these: "What represents masculinity in the best possible light?" and "What represents femininity (not feminism) in the best possible light? We should strive for excellence in everything that we do. According to 1 Corinthians 11:3, a man's long hair is a sign that he does not want to live under the authority of his Head (Jesus Christ). A woman's shorter hair is a sign that she does not want to live under her husband's authority or local church authority.

As Christians, we must constantly seek to appropriate Bible separation to our daily lives and "come out from among them" (their pagan practices, programs, places, and patterns of life that run contrary to holiness). 2 Corinthians 6:14-15, "Be ye **not unequally yoked together with unbelievers** (be tied to and participate with their way of life that is against God and His holiness): **for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial (Satan)? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?**

Paul is drawing an analogy from the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 22:10 states the principle of the unequal yoke and gives the picture of separation when saying, "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together." The ox was considered a clean animal whereas the ass was not a clean animal. They had to remain separate. The two were never to be joined or yoked together because an unholy mixture would occur between the clean and

unclean. Deuteronomy 7:3-4 also warns against the unequal yoke, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.” Judges 2:2 says, “make no league” with the enemy (see also 1 Kings 22:44; 2 Chron. 18:1; 19:2; Ezra 9:1; Psalm 119:63). The old saying is still true: “When you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas.”

The basic Bible teaching on separation informs us that righteous things cannot mix with unrighteous or evil things, light cannot mix with darkness, Satan’s workings cannot be identified with Christ’s workings, and unbelief and belief can have no common meeting ground. This is because they are *incompatible realms* of existence, *opposing forces* with two different agendas. They clash with one another and whenever one tries to unite these opposing forces in some manner, there is compromise of God’s righteous standard, corruption that results when seeking to unite contradictory systems, and confusion of God’s holiness is created when seeking to blend together opposing forces. The words “**yoked**” (unequal bond) “**fellowship**,” (sharing) “**communion**” (joint-participating), “**concord**” (agreement\symphony), “**part**,” (portion) or “**agreement**” (joint coalition) suggest inappropriate and unsuitable relationships that offend God’s purity or holiness.

2 Corinthians 6:16 goes on to say, “**And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God ...**” Since God indwells His people (their bodies are God’s temple) they should not promote these pagan ways or participate with worldly actions, ideas, and philosophies. The New Testament teaches that our body and life is a sacred temple, sanctuary, or shrine where God dwells through the person of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19; 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21-22). This means that our bodies should be used for God’s holy purposes (sanctification - 1



Thess. 4:4) and given to God completely (ownership – 1 Cor. 6:19-20). *We should not allow other things to pollute or control (take ownership) of our bodies since God indwells them is to be our Owner.*

God's indwelling Presence in our body (His holy temple) should result in two things: 1. Honoring His holy presence in all that we do with our body. 2. Allowing God to possess and control our body. *Since God lives within us we should live a life that is holy and in harmony with His indwelling life and personal presence and not engage in those practices which would misrepresent His holy character or take control over our lives. **A temple is a holy or sacred place where God is honored and it's a place where God is given His rightful place of ownership.** Many things can take control of our bodies such as nicotine, drugs, sex, money, food, anger, jealousy, lust, rock music, TV, etc. When these types of things control our bodies God's holiness is not honored and the Lord is no longer set apart or given His rightful place of ownership.*

Since we are God's dwelling place, God commands us to be a "come outer" from the worldly living of unsaved people and not be a "stay inner" (2 Cor. 6:14) following and accepting their ways. Take your stand! God has not called us to mimic the worldly actions of the unsaved but counteract the wickedness in the culture. This means we are not to accommodate the philosophies and ideas of unsaved people in the church and allow them to reshape church ministry and life (Psalm 1:1). We are not to "go along" to "get along." We are commanded to separate from the wicked practices, weird philosophies and worldly vices of the unsaved. The Bible commands "touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17). Pastor David Moss asks these important questions: "Why did God separate Himself from Satan? Why did God separate Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden? Why did God insist that Israel separate themselves from other nations? Why does God want the church to be exclusive rather than inclusive?"

These are good questions and a general observation, which tells us that God has always expected His people to live separate from the people and pollutions of the world system in all of its forms.

In a **SPECIFIC** way (our church ministry) the command to “come out” (2 Cor. 6:17) means that the local church is not to place itself in a working relationship with unbelievers or unbelieving systems while attempting to do God’s work. Once again, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15 asks these questions: “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” In other words, we are not to accommodate and promote those who are apostate in their teaching, doctrine or manner of living within church life and ministry. Accommodating unbelieving religious systems and pagan worldliness within the church, and ecumenically uniting with those who promote, embrace, or overlook apostasy in any way is a breach of the doctrine of Bible separation – “come out from among them” and “touch not the unclean thing” (pagan apostasy and worldliness). The enemy says, “Come, let us meet together” in God’s house (Neh. 6:1-4) but the separatist says, “I will not go in” (Neh. 6:11).

I must ecclesiastically (in a church setting) separate from anyone that *is* the enemy, everyone who **represents** the enemy, anybody that **mixes** with the enemy, and anything that **reflects** the enemy (2 Cor. 6:14-17). We must remove ourselves from the chain that leads to apostasy and not fellowship (participate) with any form of apostate or paganism, either directly or indirectly (1 Cor. 10:20).

The old saying is still true: “Unless you stand for something, you will fall for everything.” Rolland Star said: “God did not call us to be popular, nor did He commission us to get along with everyone.” And remember: “What is popular is not always right and what is



right is not always popular.” The Bible declares, “Love not the world” (1 John 2:15) and commands us to “be not conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). Standards keep us from imbibing or accepting the worldly culture and becoming insensitive to its inclinations and vices. Remember the frog in the water? He was slowly boiled to death without realizing it. Accommodation and compromise will take us further than we want to go and keep us longer than we want to stay!

- **Because church standards help us to avoid taking on the appearance we are associating with the heathen, pagan, and rebellious practices within society** (Jer. 10:2 - “learn not the way of the heathen” (heathen music, immodest dress, excess body piercings, strong drink, long hair on men, promiscuity, tattoos, free sex, unisex philosophy, etc.). 1 Thessalonians 5:22 commands us to “abstain from all appearance of evil.” We should be cautious and not identify, associate, or fellowship with worldly or heathen practices (Eph. 5:11 – “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness”). This means we are not to participate with the questionable, extreme, radical, heathen, worldly and unbiblical movements within our culture and society. Heathen practices ignore the God-given natural order (1 Cor. 11:3) and God’s righteous standards (2 Tim. 3:16) by promoting such things as rebellion against God, lust, sex and drugs. God’s Word condemns heathen practices. The old adage is still true: “A man is known by the company he keeps.” However, we might also add that “A man is known by the things he compromises with.” The believer should be willing to part from pagan and culturally corrupt practices within society and not associate with them in any fashion. In light of the day in which we live *the believer should present the least questionable testimony before the world* and represent Christianity as a non-rebellious movement of people that are different than the world with its lack of holy standards and rebellion against God.

The rock culture of rebellion is one primary example of heathenism that Christians should separate from. In a world where just about everything is permissible and acceptable, it becomes a learning process for many Christians, to separate from this type of contaminated music. The rock culture is being presented in *secular* but also the *sacred* musical realm and the music is termed as “Christian Contemporary Music” or “Christian Rock Music.” However, this type of sound is part of a perverted and heathenistic culture and it is a different sound that Christians should oppose based upon God’s unchanging command regarding non-conformity to the world (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Exod. 32:1-9; Dan. 3:5-7, 10, 15; Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15-17).

We must remember what the rock sound of a perverted culture has always represented rebellion against God and the natural order, while at the same time promoting lust, sex, and drugs. Therefore, the Christians should take steps to not associate with this type of cultural sound (2 Cor. 6:14-17 – there should be no fellowship between “righteousness” and “unrighteousness” or “light” and “darkness” - also “touch not the unclean thing”). We must learn that God’s people are to have a renewal song in their hearts (Ps. 40:1-3) which is a *distinct and different song and sound of purity unlike the rock songs of the world which represent the old way of life and rebellion*. Yes, some have tried to redress the rock sounds of a perverted culture by attaching Christian words to them but this is like dressing up a pig, putting lipstick on him, and trying to avoid the true nature of the animal!

- **Because church standards can be part of the ongoing spiritual process of learning to discipline our lives as Christians** (1 Cor. 9:27 – “But I keep under my body, and bring it unto subjection”). Paul learned the value of disciplining his body and life so he might live according to God’s truth and righteous standards. The Christian life is a disciplined life. It’s not a “free for all” and “anything goes” lifestyle. We must learn certain facets of

discipline to keep our lives from being pulled away by the current of the world system and overcome by the flesh. What would a violinist sound like if the musician's strings were all hanging loose, not stretched tight, or in order? Discipline is important in relationship to anything that we do. The New Testament is full of checklists for Christians that outline the difference between right and wrong and the clean and the unclean (1 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 5:18-21; Eph. 4:31-32; 5:3-4; Col. 3:8-9; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 2:13-20). Through the Spirit's power we can follow these Biblical checklists to help us *discipline* our lives. Of course, we will also adopt various standards in our church ministry and personal lives, which help us to apply God's truth, reverence, and holiness to our lives. In order to be obedient we must make certain boundaries and standards that will enable us to incorporate God's commands into our church ministries and daily lives. Standards (the application of God's Word to our lives) enable us to discipline our lives as we follow them under the Spirit's guidance and power.

The disciplined person is the free person. 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, when we discipline our lives according to Biblical truths, our discipline that is based upon the Spirit's work taking place in our hearts, will actually hold us up, while at the same time hold us down! And yes, this is true liberty.

- **Because church standards present a good testimony before the unsaved who may be visiting the assembly.** Paul expected the



unsaved to see a difference in the worship, conduct, and living of the saints. God wants us to possess a pure testimony and good report among the unsaved (1 Tim. 3:7; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12 with 1 Cor. 5:1). If we are out of order in our church services and Christian life “will they not say that ye are mad? (1 Cor. 14:23). 1 Timothy 4:12 says we should be “an example of the believers, in word (what we say = speech), in conversation (how we live = conduct), in charity (what we love = God, truth, and His people), in spirit (what we long for = enthusiasm and desire for spiritual things), in faith (what we trust = God and His Word), in purity (who we are = in heart, motives, and actions).” God wants us to be a living epistle known and read of all men (II Cor. 3:2). Of course, this will necessitate the establishing of various corporate and personal standards that we will need to follow in order to maintain a pure walk and live above reproach. When we live by the Spirit’s power and discipline our lives we will express godliness before others (“exercise thyself rather to godliness” – 1 Tim. 4:7). As Christians, we are to cease from walking like other men (the lost — “walk as men” - I Cor. 3:3). We are to manifest a changed life so godless men are genuinely surprised by our different walk of life – a transformed life (“they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot” - I Peter 4:3, 4). We are to walk wisely and not as fools (Eph. 5:15-17). D. L. Moody said, “Where one man reads the Bible, a hundred read you and me.”

- **Because church standards portray that the saints are at war against the world, the flesh, and the devil** (1 Timothy 1:18 – “war a good warfare”; 2 Timothy 4:7 – “I have fought a good fight”). Ultimately we are at war with the world, the flesh and the devil (Eph. 6:11-13). Temptation is not a sin; it is a call to battle! Surrender is not an option if you plan to win a war! Standards can make a strong statement that believers are determined to wage war against their enemies. Of course, it takes the power of God to enable us to overcome the enemy (“be strong in the Lord and the

power of his might” - Eph. 6:10). However, standards are a means to an end. They assist us in the battle because they provide us with some barriers and boundaries (Rom. 13:14) that help us to avoid temptation and enter temptation (Matt. 26:41). Living with boundaries is important. If you don't want to trade with the devil then keep yourself far away from his shop. Standards can assist us in this process. Someone said, “Flee temptation and don't leave a forwarding address.”

- **Because church standards convey the message that a church is not going to compromise with the enemy** (Psalm 1:1, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” There is no room for compromise in the Christian life. Bob Jones Sr. has likened the Christian who compromises to a soldier in the civil War who tried to save his neck by wearing a Confederate jacket and Union pants at the same time. The Yankees fired at his jacket and the Rebels shot at his legs! It never pays to compromise! Proverbs 4:14-15 warns against compromise: “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.” We are to do everything possible to *avoid* compromise. D.L. Moody said: “I thought when I became a Christian I had nothing to do but just to lay my oars in the bottom of the boat and float along. But I soon found that I would have to go against the current.” It's true; we must swim against the cultural current of today or else we will compromise with the present age. We must beware of the drift of the times. John Ashbrook also said: “Compromise ties your tongue so that you cannot rebuke evil.” Charles Spurgeon remarked: “Complicity with error will take from the best of men the power to enter any successful protest against it.”
- **Because church standards that are based upon Biblical commands and principles can express our freedom in Christ.** The

indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, who provides personal power for New Testament Christianity (Gal. 3:18 – “led by the Spirit”) does not work in a vacuum. The Holy Spirit still guides us by the Word of God (John 16:13 – “he will guide you into all truth”; 17:17 – “thy word is truth”; 6:17 – “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”). The Holy Spirit uses the New Covenant document or New Testament epistles (“the perfect law of liberty” – James 1:25) to free us from sin’s slavery and power. Here is the point; some basic standards that remind us of God’s liberating power from worldly sins will not stifle the Spirit’s work and ministry in our hearts and lives but convey the truth of our freedom from sin’s power. George Parsons once said: “You can’t help people without prescriptions. God goes by His Word and His Spirit.”

- **Because church standards maintain reverence during services and assembly life by establishing boundaries in areas dealing with music, modesty, and moral laxity** (Ps. 89:7 – “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence...”; Heb. 12:28 – “...serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”; 1 Tim. 2:9 – “that women adorn themselves in modest apparel”; Col. 3:16 – “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”). The Biblical concept of “reverence” and “fearing God” suggest that we want to represent and portray to God His moral and holy character by the way we conduct ourselves in church. Reverence and fear also convey the message that we do not want to displease God in our church services by man-centered and carnal worship. Some basic standards can maintain a degree of reverence and respect toward God and His House. When we come to church and worship Him we are saying, “This is what we think of You, God!” How we conduct ourselves in church life and ministry is usually a direct reflection on how we view God. Someone wrote: “We have learned to go to church without reverence for God and have come to look upon it as the natural and expected thing.” When it comes to music, Lehman



Strauss adds this: “But many of the saints are disturbed and concerned about some of the self-styled, flashy combo groups who move from church to church with a new dress and a new beat that has no serious and reverent sense of God.”

- **Because church standards help maintain overall order and decorum in assembly life, ministry, and services** (1 Cor. 14:33 – “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints”; 1 Cor. 14:40 – “Let all things be done decently and in order.” Titus was called upon “to set in order the things that are wanting” (Titus 1:5). We can walk “disorderly” and “not after the tradition” (1 Thess. 3:6) of Biblical truth. 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). There needs to be order in the church (no Contemporary Christian Music, no women deacons or elders, no gossipers, no Charismatic Chaos of tongue speaking, no performance/entertaining services). Some churches sound more like hockey games where people are coaxed into getting excited over what’s happening on the ice. But instead of watching hockey players they are watching some singer or preacher doing a theatrical performance in front of them as they skate back and forth on the stage.

Standards help maintain a level of decorum and decency in church ministry and life. The application of certain standards helps a church to maintain reverence and basic Bible separation. I was in Michigan during a bad snowstorm. After the snowstorm I went to a nearby Wal-Mart and found it very difficult to park. Why? It’s because there were no lines that could be seen. As a result people were parking anywhere and everywhere. The absence of lines or some kind of boundaries for parking brought total chaos in the parking lot. The same can be true in relationship to church life. Some basic standards that reflect reverence and separation keep

a ministry from getting out of spiritual order and creating confusion in church services, life, and ministry.

- **Because church standards keep a conservative and holy approach to ministry that maintains historic Fundamentalism** (Ps. 11:3 – “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”; Prov. 22:28 – “Remove not the old landmark”). John Ashbrook once said: “You cannot preserve a position without crusading for it. Trying to take a stand, while remaining all positive, is the halfway house between Fundamentalism and New Evangelicalism” (compromised Christianity). Fundamentalism has always stood for God’s holiness in church services and pastors who embrace this Biblical mandate have promoted sanctification in the lives of their people (1 Pet. 1:15-16 – “Be ye holy for I am holy”). Believers are to be “partakers of His holiness” (Heb. 12:10). “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thess. 4:7). *The holiness of God demands specific responses from men!* Leviticus 11:44, “For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy ...” Holiness is a *command* to be obeyed, a *course* to be followed, and a *commitment* to be kept.

R. B. Ouellette said: “Find out what God likes and do it. Find out what God does not like and don’t do it!” Good advice! Great blessing and Biblical happiness comes into the life of the person who follows God’s Word, who doesn’t ask, “How much can I get away with?” but rather, “How obedient can I be?” Biblical Fundamentalism has always stood for holiness in its church meetings and personal, day-to-day living. To disown holiness in our church ministries and living is to disavow Fundamentalism. Let us remember that we cannot maintain a stance or hold ground without militancy. Never apologize for the truth! Never apologize for your unwavering militant stance as you seek to defend the truth about God’s holiness. It’s important that we do not forsake a militant spirit just because some separatists have been too harsh

and carnal. We should not throw out the baby with the bathwater. We don't want to react against one unbiblical extreme (rudeness and unloving criticism) and end up embracing the opposite extreme - compromise. Fred Moritz declared: "To forsake biblical militance is to start down a slippery slope that will inevitably lead to disaster in theology, association, and practice."

- **Because church standards demonstrate that God hates a mixture between good and evil.** God despises an unholy mixture between the good and bad. We must again bring up the important questions of 2 Cor. 6:14-15, "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion (partnership) hath light with darkness? And what concord (agreement) hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" The answer is rhetorical – none! Leviticus 10:10 commands, "And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean" (Lev. 11:47; 20:25; 22:26; 44:23; Job 14:4). This principle certainly applies to our church services, outreach ministries, and personal lives today. Mixture always causes a mental breakdown of God's absolute standard and eventually a complete distortion of God's high and holy standards or ways.

Isaiah 5:20 declares, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" The spiritual taste buds of those who compromise with error, who attempt to mix the good with the evil, begin to develop a liking for fleshly or bitter things, claiming what was once bitter now to be sweet. It's like developing a taste for coffee or some other kind of food that is bitter. Over time we no longer mind the bitterness but adapt to it. It has been said: "Almost any behavior or practice begins to look and sound normal if you are exposed to enough of it." Sadly, we can get used to the dark! When mixture begins to take place in God's work it becomes spotted by the world (James 1:27) and



ineffective in many ways. An old Plymouth Brethren, who was a close friend of mine, always said, “God hates a mixture!”

- **Because church standards can keep a ministry from sliding down the greasy tracks of pragmatic, worldly, marketing that says “the end justifies the means”** (Rom. 3:8 – “Let us do evil that good may come?”). This is the philosophy of pragmatism. We can change secular rock music into acceptable Christian Rock music and see souls saved. The philosophy says, “If it works, use it.” The problem is this; it doesn’t work! This is because only the Gospel message and the Holy Spirit saves souls – not Christian Rock Music (Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 2:13). Ministry should be built on basic principles (Acts 2:42 – “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”; 1 Tim. 6:3 – “the doctrine which is according to godliness”). Ministry and worship should not be built upon clever marketing methods that are used to compromise with sinners (Heb. 7:26). We are commanded to “separate” (2 Cor. 6:17) from the carnal and sinful practices of the unsaved (Psalm 1:1 - “who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way so sinners...”). Psalm 145:17 declares that “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” The same should be true of our church methods and ministry. *The end does not justify the means; the means justify the ending.* God is honored when the “means” (what is used) to get to the end or goal (salvation of souls) is also holy and glorifying to Him. God does not command that the church should compromise with sinners so the church can be loved by everybody. Just the opposite will be true of God’s people (John 15:18-19). The Church should stop making deals with sinners! The Church should lift the moral standard and make sinners uncomfortable in their sinning.

The mindset of “consumerism Christianity” which serves customers has turned the tables on what is right and wrong (Isa. 5:20). Church gurus in their “seeker-friendly” churches are now

saying that “God can use anything.” If this is true, then God can also use sex, drugs, and pornography to win souls. How ludicrous and despicable this type of philosophy is! Job 14:4 declares, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” Nothing good can come out of something that is inherently evil. If a shirt is dirty then it’s dirty. There is no use trying to convince yourself and others that it is clean. Dirt is dirt no matter which way you look at it. Dirt can only be one thing – dirt! The marketing pragmatist adds the names “Jesus,” “holy,” or “sacred” to his worldly actions or programs to try and suggest that bad things can be turned around and become good things. Adding Bible names and words to something that is already corrupt does not sanctify it. This is a travesty upon the teaching of God’s Word and a complete mockery of God’s holiness. God cannot use anything! Do you know why God cannot use anything? It’s because God is holy!

A. Skevington Wood said: “It is the temptation of this pragmatic age to presume that technique is the secret of evangelism.” However, it’s the Word and the Spirit that changes the lives of people (1 Cor. 2:2 – “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Bob Jones once said: “It’s never right to do wrong in order to do right.” We might also add that “there is never a right way to do a wrong thing.” Also, “it’s never right to do a good thing in the wrong way.”

Here is another note; God does not accept just any type of worship. Malachi 1:7-8 illustrates this principle: “Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible (disgraceful or disrespectful). And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.” Malachi 1:10 concludes: “I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.”

A message may be *directed* to God in worship but at the same time the worship must be *acceptable* to God (Rom. 12:1-2). *It is not enough to do a right thing; we must do it in the right way* (2 Tim. 2:5 - “lawfully”). In short, we must worship by God’s rules! God despises unholy and unclean worship (Lev. 10:1; Num. 3:4 – “strange fire”). The meetings of God’s people must be “holy convocations” or assemblies (Lev. 23:3, 7, 8, 21, 27, 35, 36). Worship that does not reflect God’s holiness or purity is deemed as unacceptable worship and becomes like “strange fire” being offered up to God (Lev. 10:1; Num. 3:4; 26:61). A. W. Tozer reminds us: “Heresy of method is just as evil as heresy of message.” Pragmatism (“If it works; use it”) is a misguided philosophy. It does not work. If souls are saved, it’s NOT because of pragmatism, but in spite of it. However, those who practice worldly pragmatism are misguided because they attempt to do a spiritual work with carnal means. The old saying by E. M. Bounds is still true: “The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.”

There are three reminders. First, we must remember that Jesus was a friend of sinners but He did not compromise with sinners (Heb. 7:26). Second, we must learn to do God’s work in God’s way (Ps. 145:17) so we only get God’s results and not man’s results. God’s work done in God’s way produces only good results; however, when attempting to do God’s work done in man’s way produces both good and bad results (Matt. 13:18-22). Gary Cohen wrote: “When God’s work is not done in God’s way, then both good and evil are produced, and only He who sees all things from His seat in heaven can see on which side the balance leans.”

Third, we must remind ourselves that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:3-4). We are in a spiritual battle against Satan which means that only truth and holiness can overcome him. To compromise by using the carnal inventions of man makes



Satan's job much easier. It gives him a beachhead to work (Eph. 4:27). God does not need us to compromise so that people will get saved. God is Lord of the harvest – not man (Luke 10:2). God is in charge of the harvest – not God's people. Vance Havner said it best when he made this conclusion about pragmatism: "The idea that we must imitate the world in clothes, language, and music to make the gospel attractive is not divine but demonic. To begin with, the gospel was never meant for entertainment. The sin against the Holy Spirit lay in ascribing the work of God to the devil. Is it not equally possible to ascribe the work of the devil to God? I do not believe that the spiritually sensitive soul can equate gospel jazz and hippie hootenannies with the hallelujahs of the redeemed."

- **Because church standards can keep worship from becoming man-centered and from replacing God-centered worship** (John 4:22 - "Ye worship ye know not what"). Again, not all worship is acceptable to God and is termed as "strange fire" (Lev. 10:1-2; Malachi 1:8, 13). *Contemporary Christian Rock Music* which appeals to the flesh, seeks the *applause* of man, and introduces a "party spirit" atmosphere of *celebration* with "Christian stars" leading in worship (1 Cor. 3:3-4). All of this causes worship to become man-centered in focus and self-seeking (1 Cor. 14:2, 6, 12-16; Matt. 6:5-7). In addition, when worship is directed to the lost or built around getting unsaved people into the church (pragmatism), it also becomes man-centered in its focus. Worship is to focus on God and not impressing the unsaved masses! John 4:24 says "they that worship him must worship him in spirit (the sincerity of worship) and in truth" (the way of worship). Psalm 29:2 declares: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Trying to impress the unregenerate with canned music and glamorized worship is a worthless cause. Why? It's because spiritually dead people (Eph. 2:1) cannot worship God in their unsaved state (1 Cor. 2:14). Vance Havner once said that "Dead people know nothing more

about God and truth than an Indian statue standing outside a cigar store.”

- **Because church standards can keep church services from digressing into entertainment and showbiz worship where performers are put on a pedestal instead of the Lord Jesus Christ** (Matt. 23:5 - “But all their works they do for to be seen of men...”; John 12:43 - “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”). This is really an extension of the last point. Matthew. 6:5 reminds us how human nature wants “to be seen of men.” God’s Word teaches that we should not serve “with eyeservice, as menpleasers” (Eph. 6:6) nor seek glory from men (“nor of men sought we glory” – 1 Thess. 2:7). Much of what is taking place in the church today is nothing more than religious entertainment. We live in a day of “show time” religion instead of “old time” religion.

Standards that are put in place in relationship to music and corporate worship enable a church to stop the entertaining trends that are rapidly overtaking the local churches. That which is labeled as “praise and worship” music in our market-driven churches of today, along with worship teams, Christian Rock music, Christian Rock stars, Christian films, Christian comedians, and such like, is nothing more than carnal amusement and religious entertainment. Someone has remarked: “When ministry becomes performance, then the sanctuary becomes a theater, the congregation becomes an audience, worship becomes entertainment, and man’s applause and approval become the measure of success.”

- **Because church standards counteract the worldly culture in which we live and keep church ministry from imbibing the world’s constantly changing patterns and philosophies** (Rom. 12:2 – “And be no conformed to this world”; 1 John 2:15 - “Love not the world”; 1 Peter 1:14 – “As obedient children, not

fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance”). Don’t be a conformer but a transformer! Someone wrote: “Christianity changes people, but the church has allowed the world to change Christianity.” Christians are in constant danger of being swept downstream by the currents of ungodly culture. Cultural compromise is a growing problem in even the fundamental churches. A. W. Tozer once said: “We are sent to bless the world, but never are we told to compromise with it. Our glory lies in a spiritual withdrawal from all that builds on dust.”

- **Because church standards can keep an assembly focused on the Biblical traditions that have been passed down to the church in Scripture** (2 Thess. 2:15 - “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” The word “traditions” comes from a Greek word meaning “to hand down” and refers here to divine revelation as found in Scripture – the apostolic doctrine (2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:2). Believers must “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14). Putting basic standards in place regarding separation, ecumenicalism, apostasy, and worldliness will serve as one way to keep a church from abandoning Scriptural mandates. It has been well stated: “It is possible to have a zeal for the church which is tragically misguided by the ways of the world rather than directed by Scripture.”
- **Because church standards keep us from endorsing, sanctioning, associating, cooperating, and participating with things that are worldly, questionable, or carnal** (Eph. 5:7 - “Be not ye therefore partakers with them”; Eph. 5:10-11 – “Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness ...”; 1 Tim. 5:22 – “neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure”). What we cooperate with we condone! What we “put up with” we promote. What we fail to condemn we compromise with. This is what God’s Word teaches. We can’t



wiggle out of it. When we attend a church we are basically saying, "I agree with what goes on here." "I accept their positions and practices." One man told me he did not like when his pastor drove a motorcycle into the church to make a point in his sermon. However, he then shared with me he could not change the methodology of the church where he attends. This may be true but something else is also true; he is not forced to attend the church! Sometimes we must find greener pastures to graze and still waters to drink when they can no longer be found at the church we attend.

- **Because church standards will keep us from destroying or hurting ministry with our own personal agenda** (Romans 14:20 – "For meat destroy not the work of God ... it is evil for that man who eateth with offence"). The "meat" refers to our own personal actions and agenda that might offend others. Don't be selfish when attending church. Be considerate of others and their convictions. You might say, "It's my way or the highway" but this is spoken in the flesh. Church does not revolve around you. Church is not all about your own "personal preferences" but the corporate standards that leadership has built into a church ministry which enables the saints to worship and serve together in unity and without discord (Acts 2:42). Someone said: "I have to find my place in God's plans, rather than make my own little plans and then ask God to support them."
- **Because church standards express a serving spirit toward others who have differing views on various issues related to dress, distinction among the sexes, etc.** (Gal. 5:13 – "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another"). We are to possess a serving spirit toward God's people. We are to bring sunshine into the lives of others. We are called to function together as a loving and considerate body. God wants us to encourage each other in these last days (Heb. 10:24-25) and one way we can do this is by

incorporate some basic standards to abide by in our corporate gatherings and fellowships. Someone said: “Forget yourself for others, and others will not forget you.” Here is a good motto for church: “Want the best?--give your best.”

- **Because church standards express Christian courtesy, love and edification among God’s people** (1 Peter 3:8 - “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous”; Rom. 14:19 speaks of the “things wherewith one may edify another”; Gal. 5:13 - “by love serve one another”). We are called upon to build up the lives of other saints – not tear them down by our actions or flaunting our liberty before them. Someone once asked: “Are you part of the building crew or wrecking crew?” The Bible also teaches another side of love which is centered in the absolute standard of truth. In 1 Corinthians 13:6 we read that love “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” This means that as a church seeks to disciple new converts and sharpen one another’s spiritual lives (“iron sharpeneth iron” - Prov. 27:17) we will lovingly challenge one another to live for God, sometimes by encouraging them to incorporate separated standards in their daily lives. Someone said: “My most painful experiences have been when I've had a problem and no one loved me enough to tell me about it.” “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:6).

Love 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 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. Vance Havner said: “Sometimes we mistake compromise for charity and put up with what we should put out.” Again, love “Rejoiceth not in iniquity” (1 Cor. 13:6). 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). Unless I hate *iniquity* I cannot love *Biblically*. This is the other side of love that nobody wants to talk about. Love for God always results in obedience to the truth (John 14:15, 23; Phil. 1:9-10; 1 John 5:3). 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."

- **Because church standards help us to become a peacemaker instead of a peace-taker** (Rom. 14:19 – "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another"; Matt. 5:9 - "Blessed are the peacemakers"). This is not "peace at any price" but a peace that we maintain by not stirring up unwarranted and unnecessary strife in church life and ministry. God has called us to unite on the *essentials* (doctrine which includes the doctrine of Bible separation) and not become divisive over the *non-essentials* (church practices or polity that helps maintain unity). John Ashbrook once said: "In any fellowship of fundamental men there will be differences of opinion. Separation does not standardize all decisions." Remember: God never intended that we must agree on ever little matter. For the sake of church ministry we must agree on the main things and keep rowing in the same general direction. Think of it this way; although there are many different flavors of ice-cream, we can come to church and all agree on one flavor of ice-cream – vanilla! In other words, when meeting together we can agree to follow the main things of Bible separation and doctrine and stay united. In doing so, we become a peacemaker. In the local church we should be willing to lay aside our personal preferences and unite together under the umbrella of truth and righteousness. We should strive to always be a peacemaker and not a peace-taker. The job of firefighters is to put out fires, not start them. The job of Christians is to help resolve conflict (Matt. 5:9), not start more of it!



- **Because church standards allow us to strive for excellence in our gathered meetings or church ministry and represent separated or transformed Christianity in the best possible light** (Phil. 1:10 – “That ye may approve things that are excellent”). The word “approve” means to discern, examine, test. It conveys the thought of testing with the sense of approval. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 declares that we are to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” The “things that are excellent” means that our relationships, decisions, overall living, and church services should reflect what the Bible terms as “excellent” (literally “the things which differ” – things that have been distinguished, discerned, and thought through from a Biblical perspective). When we approve excellent things we are actually *making proper distinctions* in life and *possessing Biblical discernment* in life so that we might follow God’s holy will. We are called to be discerning Christians who have their “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). Lehman Strauss wrote: “As we develop in this gift of discernment there is a growing appreciation of those things that are best in God’s eyes as set forth in His Word, and that becomes the finest quality of Christian character.”

The excellent things (things that are properly judged – Phil. 1:10) refer to *holy things, righteous things, good things, wholesome things, the best things, the superior things!* Excellence and superiority should be practiced in our personal lives and church ministries. Without making proper distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil, and the better and the best, we become bogged down in our spiritual lives and churches also become worldly and accept error. Many Christians get into trouble by straddling the fence instead of striving for excellence. We should strive for excellence (superiority) in everything that we do for the Lord. William MacDonald said: “In all realms of life, some things are good and others are better. The good is often the enemy of the best. For effective service, these distinctions must be made.”

- **Because church standards can keep an assembly focused on pleasing Christ in their worship, conduct, reverence, and overall decorum** (John 8:29 - “for I do always those things that please him”; 2 Tim. 2:4 – “that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier”; Gal. 1:10 - “do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ”). We must remember what Jesus said, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you” (Luke 6:26). There a leak in your Christianity if everyone speaks only well of you. If we are trying to please the crowds and masses then people will speak well of us. However, if we live to please Christ we will become the foul stench of death to some (“savour of death unto death” – 2 Cor. 2:16). 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.”
- **Because church standards enable us to glorify God in our church services and times of worship** (1 Cor. 10:31 – “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”). To glorify God means to do those things that would exalt, honor and magnify God’s character and attributes such as His holiness and righteousness (Col. 3:17 – “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ...”). A good question to ask ourselves is this: “Can you picture the Lord Jesus in the activity and situation you are considering?” If you can’t, then you can be sure that it will NOT represent His name and glorify Him. *We must become aware of the danger of misrepresenting God.* William Edward Biederwolf

said: “By doing those things that are contrary to God’s glory we sanction a lower tone of Christianity than His approval warrants.” Once again, when we come to church to worship God, we are in essence saying to the Lord; “God, this is what I think of you.”

In a day when everyone wants to tear down walls and deplete the church of all standards, God has called us to raise some *boundaries* of separation (2 Cor. 6:17) and erect some *walls* to keep the enemy out. Nehemiah 4:6 gives us this principle: “So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.” Someone wisely remarked: “Before you tear down a wall find out why it was originally erected.”

### **Are Church Standards Legalism?**

Leonard Ravenhill said:

“When there’s something in the Bible that churches don’t like, they call it legalism.”

Legalism and “legalism lingo” has become a scapegoat for many in the church today who want to oppose all church standards and neglect the application of Biblical commands and principles to church ministry and life. If they don’t like something, then it suddenly becomes legalistic. Most people don’t understand the meaning of legalism and therefore the concept of law and legalism in the Christian life must be rethought and redefined. Legalism is not even a Biblical word but the primary concept behind the word suggests people who follow the strictness of God’s legal letter (the Mosaic Law), and by extension and application, those who rely on any code of law to *sanctify* and *save* themselves. A secondary byproduct of legalism is self-exaltation above others.

Many throw around the term “legalism” in a naive fashion. The term legalism has become an acceptable, theological cuss word that is used against ministries and ministers, who want to practice some simple standards in their churches. Most Christians totally misunderstand and



misuse the term legalism and should jump off their legalistic bandwagon. In this second part of our standards study we need to uncover the truth and myths about legalism.

### **Are church standards legalism?**

- **NO, if they are not followed in order to get people to Heaven** (Acts 15:1 – “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”; Gal. 1:6; 3:1-3; 5:1-9; Luke 18:9, 18 – “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”). This is legalism that pertains to the area of salvation. Legalism raises its ugly head when people use law/works as a way to merit or earn their salvation before God. Legalism is the belief that you gain and maintain acceptance with God (a performance based salvation) by adhering to a set of external rules or regulations. A legalist is a person who thinks he can gain God’s approval and be saved by outward conformity to a list of rules or measuring up to certain standards. All of this is done to “earn” God’s forgiveness instead of accept His free forgiveness that is found in Christ (Luke 7:42; 1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). Of course, legalism distorts the Gospel message of salvation through Christ (Gal. 1:7). Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation is free (Rom. 3:24; John 6:28-29).

Legalism basically concludes that Christ died to only *help* us get to Heaven but His death is not the only payment that God requires for sin. God also requires us to “pay the price” by including various rules, rituals, regulations, and requirements such as discipleship, obedience to Christ’s commands, sacraments, following certain prescribed rules of a religion or denomination, maintaining specific ascetic practices related to dress, and forsaking certain comforts in society in order to complete our salvation and justification before God. Legalism says, “Christ’s payment was not enough but God says it was enough to pay the penalty for our sins and grant us forgiveness forever (“it is finished” - John 19:30). A

fundamental church that has adopted some basic standards regarding church unity or that are related to Bible separation is NOT legalistic simply because they have standards; unless they are following them to merit eternal life.

- **NO, if an artificial list of standards is not incorporated as the source or means to produce sanctification or give us victory in life** (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 3:3 – “...having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”). Paul struggled at one point in his Christian life by trying to comply with the law, through his own ability or strength, in order to produce his sanctification or holiness but he discovered that it led to defeat (Rom. 7:24). This is legalism that pertains to the area of sanctification (performance based sanctification). We must learn that the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live victoriously in our Christian life (Gal. 5:25 – “walk in the Spirit”) – not law/works/human effort. The personal dimension of the Spirit’s internal ministry and liberating work is the key feature of New Testament Christianity (Gal. 5:18 – “led of the Spirit”; Rom. 7:6 – “newness of the spirit”). *A Christian does not rely on rules for victory but depends on the Spirit for victory.*

Most Christians I know do not abuse a list of standards or rules and attempt to use a code of conduct list in order to keep their lives in check, without relying on the Spirit’s power to live the Christian life. However, the fact that some Christians might in their own strength rely on specific rules or standards of conduct to produce sanctification (holiness), while neglecting the Spirit’s role in their life, does not make a list of regulatory principles wrong. It makes the individuals practice of legalism wrong. Lists don’t necessarily lead to legalism. What leads to legalism is a person’s mistrust in God’s power to sanctify them (Phil. 2:13).

- **NO, since it’s our *attitude* toward standards/rules that actually creates legalism in our hearts.** Legalism is not the rightness or

wrongness of a list but our attitude toward a list and the spirit with which rules or standards are kept. Are we following or using a list of specific standards in order to get us to Heaven? Are we solely relying on some checklist of standards to produce sanctification and victory in our lives while neglecting the Spirit's inner work of transformation (2 Cor. 3:17-18 - "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.")? God's Word in Proverbs 4:23 reminds us to "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." *Legalism is usually not a rule issue but a heart issue.* This was true of the Jews who lived under the Mosaic Law or the strict legal codes that God gave to them. Their attitude toward what they had to do determined their legalism or absence of it (Ex. 19:8; Ps. 119:97). Moses repeatedly spoke about loving God as the key to living for Him (Deut. 6:4-5, 20-25; 7:9; 10-12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3, 19:9; 30:6, 15-20). It cannot be emphasized too strongly that *having* to do something is not legalism, but the wrong attitude toward *doing* it is legalism. If a boy is told to take out the trash and responds by saying, "I don't deserve this and I hate doing this task. I'll never do this when I get older," we know that his attitude has turned his work into a legalistic chore.

- **NO, since standards which stem from Biblical separation do not constitute the practice of legalism** (2 Cor. 6:14, 15, and 17 – "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." There is a vast difference between legalism and practicing Bible separation from those things which the Bible terms as unrighteous, darkness, and evil things which are used by Satan and for His purposes. Standards which are followed and maintained in local church ministries



(or our personal lives) which call for separation from ecumenicalism, false doctrine, carnality, vice, or other clearly defined worldly practices, should NOT be labeled as legalistic. This is because they are based upon true Biblical commands and timeless Bible principles which do not change with the culture (Rom. 12:2). Bible separation is not practicing “manmade commandments” (Matt. 15:9) which are based upon the hairsplitting rules and personal preferences of people; it is built upon Bible commands that must be upheld for the sake of maintaining purity in the Christian life (1 Tim. 5:22) and glorifying God (1 Cor. 10:31).

We are called to separate from the people, places, and personal activities which would become a stumbling block to us in our Christian walk. Separation involves “coming out” (2 Cor. 6:17) from the evil practices of unbelievers and those things that Satan is clearly using and promoting for His purposes or agenda (secular Rock Music, Christian Rock Music, fornication, adultery, ecumenicalism with liberal Protestantism, apostasy, social dancing, etc.). Biblical separation involves “coming out” from the methods, manners, and movements of unsaved people which are a clear violation of God’s holiness (Titus 2:3; Heb. 12:10) - not their colors, cars, clothing, and contemporary conveniences. It is separation from those ways that mimic heathen customs (Deut. 18:9; Jer. 10:2) which are deemed as “the unclean thing” (2 Cor. 6:17). God does not want us to mimic the evil patterns of a wicked culture (grotesque body piercings, tattoos, Christian Rock Music, etc.) nor does He want us to redeem them for good and make them into something that is acceptable to God (Isa. 5:20; Rom. 3:8 – “Let us do evil, that good may come”). We are called upon to express ourselves before others as a “new creature” or creation of God (2 Cor. 5:17).

- NO, since Biblical separation when understood and practiced correctly does not result in legalism (salvation and sanctification by rules) nor promote a critical spirit toward others.** Bible separation is NOT legalism when it is implemented properly and when we possess a right attitude toward others while seeking to live a separate life (1 John 3:14; Gal. 6:1). All true separation has a five-fold characteristic: **1)** It is God-directed (Rom. 6:11-13; 12:1; Col. 3:23-24, 1 Pet. 2:9); **2)** It is Word-informed (John 17:17; Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15-17; Ps. 119:9, 11, 24, 99); **3)** It is Spirit-empowered (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16; 23; 25); **4)** It is Grace-motivated (Rom. 6:14-15; Titus 2:10-12); **5)** It is Christ-centered (Rom. 7:4; 13:14; Phil. 1:21; 3:10).
- NO, if standards are not followed in the *spirit* of legalism, which results in comparing ourselves with others (a byproduct of legalism - critical judgmentalism) and producing a “holier than thou attitude” toward other saints** (2 Cor. 10:12 – “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”; Luke 18:9, 11 – “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others ... I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” This kind of critical spirit results in a person comparing his own spirituality with others and produces “artificial sanctification” in the individual that claims to be superior. Comparing our lives with others in order to elevate and promote ourselves is the byproduct of legalism. Of course, obeying the truth, separating from sin, and doing what is right are vitally important (1 Thess. 5:21). However, we must remember that we should not use our standards to compare ourselves with other Christians in order to determine their overall spirituality and pit ourselves against them. We must also remember that every Christian is at a different place

in their spiritual growth. It is vital that we allow others the time and nurturing that growth requires.

- **NO, unless following rules and regulations becomes the basis and focal point of our spirituality with the neglect of character change** (Gal. 5:22-25 – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...”; Eph. 5:18 – “be filled with the Spirit”). The spirit and byproduct 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 or parameters of several rules that allegedly keeps the individual spiritually if they don’t practice what is on their bad checklist. As a result, a person can find themselves eventually thinking that they can somehow be spiritual, if they simply refuse to smoke and chew tobacco, keep the hair off of their ears, and only listen to Bach classical music. 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). It pertains to developing a close personal walk and relationship with the Lord (Phil. 1:21; 3:10).
- **NO, unless our *desire* in life is to only appear whitewashed or reformed on the outside but live spiritually corrupt on the inside** (“full of dead men’s bones” - Matt. 23:27-28). Living a double life is one of the marks of legalism. I might have a superficial connection to a specific Church on Sunday (“a form of godliness” – 2 Tim. 3:5) but live a different way of life on Monday-Saturday. I might be spit-shined and sparkling on the outside but full of sin on the inside. Here is an illustration. A church might have stained glass windows on the outside but inside the carpet might be soiled and dirty. The same principle



can be applied to those who seek to live an outwardly pious looking life but on the inside their hearts are soiled by worldly lusts and filled with pride (James 1:27).

- **NO, since we cannot solve the problem of legalism by abolishing all standards and laws.** This is because legalism is primarily a heart issue (Matt. 15:8 – “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips; but their heart is far from me”). We can follow rules without having a heart for God and proper relationship with Him (Phil. 3:10 – “That I may know him”). As previously stated, rules or standards in themselves do not create legalistic saints any more than the laws of government create legalistic Americans or stop signs create legalistic drivers (Rom. 13:1-5). Again, it’s out *attitude* toward standards that create legalism in our hearts. Are we following a list of standards as a way to sanctification and salvation? Do we revolve our spirituality around a specific list of standards? Are we comparing ourselves to others by some specific list of standards that we follow? A distinction must be made between a list of standards and legalism. Many times legalism is related to why one obeys a list of standards rather than to the list itself. Legalism is a heart issue.
- **NO, since God gave 613 commands in the Old Testament and many New Testament commands without being a legalist!** The purpose for God giving Israel the Law was to *promote* His character of holiness through typical, moral, and even intricate laws (Lev. 11:44-45), to *provide* His people with moral boundaries to live by (Exodus 20:1-17), and *prepare* them for salvation through Christ (Gal. 3:19, 24). However, the implementation of certain rules does not necessarily constitute legalism. If this were true then God is the biggest legalist that has ever lived! Are you ready to call God a legalist? God was NOT a legalist when giving the law since He did NOT give it to the people as their “means of salvation” or incorporate it as the

“manner of sanctification” through personal human achievement or effort (Exod. 19:4). God never expected the people to be able to observe His law by their own abilities and in their own strength but this is exactly what they chose to do (Exod. 19:8). Legalism became a problem among God’s people under the old covenant not because there were laws to keep but because the people developed the *wrong attitude* about the laws. The motive of love was all important in obeying God’s laws (Deut. 6:5).

- **NO, unless a “dizzying array” of regulations are erected that are unreasonable and outlandish and which do not relate to living the Christian life according to sound Biblical principles or commands** (Mark 7:2-9 – “tradition of the elders” in vv. 4 and 5; “ye hold the tradition of men as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do” in vs. 8; “keep your own tradition” in vs. 9; “Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition” in vs. 13; Gal. 1:14 – “the traditions of my fathers”; Col. 2:8 - “the tradition of men”). The key word is “tradition” but this is not related to Biblical “traditions” (instructions and precepts that come from the Bible) which were passed down from the apostles (2 Thess. 2:15). Instead, they are manmade traditions of ridiculous and meticulous legality (exactness, extremism, and endless rules) which defy the very meaning of the Word of God (Mark 7:13). Legalism manifests itself when people follow rules that burden them down in their spiritual lives (Matt. 23:4 – “For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders”). Of course, these are rules that try and map out every little detail of one’s life and intricately regulate someone to the nth degree. They are not basic Bible standards which have any resemblance to Biblical separation from the world (2 Cor. 6:14-17) but standards that are formulated to regulate most decisions, the overall direction, and entire course of a person’s life.

Many times the *byproduct* of legalism or the legalist is unwarranted judgmentalism (Matt. 23:1-3) and hypocritical judgment (Matt. 7:1) that is based upon hair-splitting rules which really have nothing to do with living the Christian life. Colossians 2:20-23 explains these absurd rules like this: “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (manmade decrees or commands), (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom (a display of man’s wisdom – not God’s wisdom) in will worship (self-made discipline, self-made religion, self-imposed worship which is not patterned after truth), and humility (false humility), and neglecting of the body (forsaking the basic blessings and comforts of society); not in any honour (possessing no value) to the satisfying of the flesh” (legalism does not restrain or tame the old nature – it can never satisfy its insatiable desire for sin). Legalism cannot bring us victory – only defeat!

Legalism sometimes moves into a form of asceticism. You can’t drink tea or coffee as the Mormons teach. You can’t have a tractor with rubber tires as the Amish inform their people. I see this in Lancaster County many times. Engines are okay on tractors but rubber tires are forbidden! However, rubber tires are acceptable on the wagons that are pulled by the tractors which cannot have rubber tires! You can’t have a car that is red; it must be black. You can’t wear a certain color. You must wear a certain type of clothing so God will accept you. You must follow strict, prescribed patterns of manmade rules in order to be accepted by the community and people. You must practice self denial (legalistic/asceticism) in various areas of dress, commerce, and every day, normal living if you want God’s approval. How wonderful to realize that God has given us



the basic things of life for our blessing and enjoyment (1 Tim. 4:1-5). To create multitudes of manmade rules and regulations around our lives will cause us to lose the liberty we have in Christ.

Legalists normally possess a religious system filled with meticulous rules and they become hypersensitive when someone else does not see eye-to-eye on every little detail of their intricate religious system (Matt. 9:9-13; 11:19; Luke 15:1-2; 19:7). They attempt to trap people behind the legalistic bars of their own opinions, traditions, or personal preferences. Of course, as previously stated, this revelation about legalism can be carried to an extreme position that disallows for proper standards to be erected that are built upon absolute truth and the discipleship of new converts who need to be directed in the “paths of righteousness (Ps. 23:3).

Some basic standards for group fellowship and unity, or standards representing clear Biblical commands or a Scriptural principle are NOT “heavy burdens” placed upon people that bog them down in their spiritual lives. Since when is singing conservative/separated music in church, having some basic rules for modesty and decency, or wearing a tie to usher a heavy burden? This is a silly conclusion and caricature (a description ludicrously exaggerated and defective) concerning those churches that have some basis standards to abide by for congregational unity and reverence. Many Christians shy away from following any kind of standards simply because they don’t want to have any authority in their lives, which would include Biblical (John 17:17) and church authority (Heb. 13:7), or even God’s authority (1 Cor. 11:3). The total rejection and eradication of all standards in one’s life boils down to an authority issue.

The “free-thinking” philosophy of many today who claim that all commands or standards are “burdens of law” is a giant smokescreen, which is created by Christians 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). We must remember that our yoke to Christ and His commands are light – not a burden (Matt. 11:30 – “my yoke is light”; 1 John 5:3 - “his commandments are not grievous”). Christ has freed us from the yoke of bondage (the old life of slavery to sin and the Law) so that we can wear the liberating yoke of Christ! Now we can practice His moral commands out of a heart of deep appreciation and love for what He has done for us.

It’s interesting that even Christians who do not possess strong standards can be outright practicing legalists! All of us can be guilty of the marks, symptoms, and spirit of those who practiced legalism while Jesus was on earth. 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 spirit and 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.

- **NO, since in everyday life standards or levels of requirement are placed upon every person to some degree within the family (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; Col. 3:18), by the government (Rom. 14:1-7), on the job (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22), and within institutions of learning (Gal. 4:1-2) without these standards or requirements being “legalistic” or turning people into legalists!** Are parent's legalists when they want their children to dress nice for school? Are schools legalistic when they require their students to be on time? Are employers legalistic because they require their employees to work hard and make money for the company? Is the government legalistic when it requires taxes from its citizens? It seems that everyone is willing to abide by some form of standards except when it comes to church. Most people think that the church should throw out all of its standards and accept everything and everyone or else the church will become legalistic in its practice and attitude toward people. Of course, the charge of legalism is a straw-man argument designed to strike fear in the hearts of pastor's and church members, so a church can take on a more contemporary/worldly/man-centered approach to ministry.
- **NO, when we recognize that standards are not the main thing that drives ministry and church life** (Romans 14:17 – “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”; Gal. 2:20 – “Yet not I, but Christ



liveth in me”). John Miles used to say: “The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.” Or as George Sweeting once said: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Communion with God, character, conduct, and compliance or obedience to God’s standard of truth are the main things. Although we build walls (standards) around our lives for protection (Rom. 13:14), our lives do not revolve around the walls (standards). We are married to Christ (Rom. 7:4) – not to a wall (standard).

- **NO, since it’s erroneous to conclude that some basic standards will hinder God’s work from taking place in our hearts through the ministry of the Holy Spirit** (Gal. 5:16 – “walk in the Spirit”; 25; Eph. 5:18 – “be filled with the Spirit; Phil. 2:13 – “God which worketh in you”). Some personal or corporate standards will not stop the work of the Spirit from taking place in a person’s heart unless the individual stifles the Spirit’s power and work in his heart by relying on his own strength or compliance to external rules, or if he quenches the Spirit’s ministry by allowing sin to come into his life (1 Thess. 5:19). Many today conclude that Christians who follow 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). Of course, this type of mindset and mumbo jumbo is an absurdity! It’s true, the Holy Spirit impresses God’s moral law upon our hearts and leads us to victory; however, some basis standards do NOT necessarily silence the work of the Spirit taking place in our lives any more than controlling what we eat (our intake of calories, cholesterol, etc.) hinders us from living healthy and effectively. Just the opposite may be true, the practice of certain standards can be

evidence of the Spirit's work taking place in our hearts and lives!

- **NO, since living under grace (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 5:18) also includes living according to Biblical standards that promote godliness and virtues** (Titus 2:11-12 – “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”). Holiness is the outgrowth of grace operating in the life of a believer. A Christian can *violate the principle of grace* when they engage in ungodly living and lustful practices. The liberty that saving and sanctifying grace brings into our lives is not only “freedom to do” (freedom to live a life that is pleasing to God and liberty from the Mosaic Law’s intricate rules and regulations) but also “freedom not to do” (a new liberty to live separate from the world and free from the power of sin).

Christians throw around the term of “radical grace” today which means that God loves us unconditionally (Rom. 8:35-39) and that salvation is totally and absolutely free (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8-9). It also means that sanctification, spiritual growth, and victory are not dependent upon the strict observance of regulations and rules (Romans 7:14-25; Phil. 2:13). I would agree with these conclusions wholeheartedly but radical grace is sometimes viewed as living the Christian life with a type of “radical individualism” or without any regulatory principles, rules, commands, guidelines, accountability, discipleship, and reverent fear for God. This sidesteps the meaning of “living under grace” according to New Testament revelation. 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. *Grace does not make us liberal; grace liberates us from sin.* The instruction and discipline of grace does not grant us a “free-for-all” lifestyle. This is grace gone wild! Living under grace results in believers practicing holiness (Rom.

6:14-15; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; 2 Cor. 7:1), separating from and not supporting apostasy or unrighteousness in any way (2 Cor. 6:14-17); 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), not fellowshiping with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11) and proving all things (1 Thess. 5:21).

Today, the terms *law* and *grace* have been both misunderstood and misapplied by believers. Many Christians view commands as *law* (creating legalism and bondage). They also conclude that possessing no commands as the expression of *grace* living (liberty to choose how one should live and conduct themselves). Of course, it's true that living under grace does provide us with a certain freedom of choice regarding non-essential matters which are NOT related to areas of sanctification (Romans 14). The strictness of the Mosaic Law, with all of its miniscule rules and regulations no longer must be followed in the Dispensation of Grace. It has been rescinded or annulled (Acts 10:9-16; Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). However, to make a blanket statement that Christians do not follow laws or commands is erroneous.

The New Testament is filled with many commands and the repetition of God's moral and ethical laws (Rom. 13:9-10). Once again, it's our *attitude* toward any law or command that creates legalism in our heart. If we are following commands/law for salvation and sanctification (a performance-based salvation and sanctification) then we are a legalist. However, following ethical laws does not make anyone a legalist. Christians who make the broad statement that they don't follow rules (antinomianism – no law) are only fooling themselves. They know that murdering people, taking drugs, committing adultery and fornication are wrong and choose to not engage in these practices. Why? It's because they are part of God's unchanging ethical laws and commands.



Living under grace does not mean we can bypass all laws; it means that we can now follow God's commands and unchanging ethical standards in the context of grace which provides us with victory (Rom. 6:1-14). Al Cremard correctly observes: "Oftentimes, the growing believer who obeys God's law, in word and principle, is accused of legalism. However, applying God's law to one's present time and culture is not legalism but rather it is obedience as a result of loving God with one's whole being (Matt. 22:34-40, Jn. 14:15)! When one truly loves God, as a result, he will not only obey God's explicit laws but also the spirit of His laws."

This simply means we will lovingly submit to God's Word and commands for our lives today and do so with an attitude of humility, submission, and love for God. Living under grace (Rom. 6:14-15) does not mean the absence of law, commands or regulatory principles (1 Cor. 9:21) but it means that we can now possess a right attitude toward any law, since we are nurtured by the internal working of the Spirit (Gal. 5:18 – "if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under law"). The Spirit provides freedom or liberty from following a law/works system of salvation (2 Cor. 3:17) and compliance to a rigid legal system that is intended to produce artificial sanctification. 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).

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, 22; 2 Cor. 3:3, 18). When grace is ***ignored*** legalism is the result (Acts 15:1; Romans 7:7-25).

Both extremes, radical grace and freedom on the one hand, and pride in standards, ultimately fail. On one end of the spectrum people abuse their liberty and use grace as an excuse to do whatever they want, such as drinking alcohol, watching nudity on

TV, and living without any godly standards. On the other end, there are those with strong standards who believe they are more spiritual, victorious, and righteous before God because of their specific standards. This takes a Christian to the end of the spectrum where they are arrogant, self-righteous, and harshly judgmental. Both extremes fail, dishonor God, and hurt the testimony of Christ. The person in the radical grace movement who uses grace as a license to sin will eventually lead himself and those he influences to spiritual defeat. Their criticism of those who possess standards is sometimes used as a means to justify their own self-will and sanctify their disobedience.

When establishing standards in our lives, it is important to root each standard in a conviction based upon a Biblical command or principle. As we grow in grace and Christian maturity, we will respond to Bible commands or principles and develop convictions and standards that will help us live in a way that pleases God. For instance, Psalm 101:3 says “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.” This is a Biblical *principle*. From this truth we develop a Biblical *conviction*. This is a personal belief based on a Bible principle. From this we develop a *standard*. This then becomes a guideline, which helps us keep our convictions. Because God’s Word never changes our convictions should not change. The personal standards in our lives must be based upon Biblical foundations. They should be the by-products of something greater and should originate from God’s Word at work in our hearts. They should also be the product of a relationship with God (Phil. 3:10), not merely an outward conformity.

- **NO, since standards when properly understood do not hinder our growth in grace** (2 Pet. 3:18 – “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”). The *method* of all spiritual growth is “grace” (it occurs through God’s favor and blessing being poured out and experienced in our lives) but the

*explanation* of how grace changes our lives is “in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (a growing relationship with Him and understanding of His character and holiness). 1 Peter 2:2 adds this: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”

Some basic standards to abide by can never erase the wonder-working power of God’s grace and truth working in our hearts and lives! Our relationship with Christ does not suffer when we incorporate some basic group standards that unify us or some specific Biblical standards in our personal lives. Standards in themselves do not choke out our dependence upon Christ and our love for Him (Phil. 3:10). We can maintain a “grace perspective” and “grace relationship” with Christ (Gal. 2:20) while still possessing standards and Bible convictions in our lives. To conclude that standards restrict our growth in grace is often used as a smokescreen that is designed to give people permission to live without any restraints and enjoy their carnal expression in life.

- **NO, since being “free from the law” does not mean to live lawless or without any standards or restrictions in life** (Rom. 6:1-2, 14 – “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid ... For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace”). Our liberty or freedom is not spiritual anarchy; it is monitored and controlled by our life of service and slavery to the Lord (1 Peter 2:16 – “As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness [a cover-up for wrongdoing], but as the servants of God”; Galatians 5:13 – “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh”; 2 Peter 2:19 – “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption”). A person practicing sin but promising freedom is like a 300 pound man selling diet books! In short, we should not use our freedom to sin but to refrain



from sinning. The cause of Christ is never advanced by evil masquerading in religious clothes.

It's true that the Mosaic laws with all of their dietary regulations, days, miniscule rules (Exodus 30:19-21; 35:3; Lev. 1-7; 5:2; 11; 19:19; 35:2-3; Num. 6:18; 15:32-33; Duet. 22:10-11; 23:1-4, 12-13; 21; Matt. 23:23), and distinctions between clean and unclean (Lev. 11:47) have been rescinded for believers today (Acts 10:9-16; Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:1-5) but the *principle of holiness and separation which they taught remains intact* (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Time does not change principles. God still wants us to represent His moral holiness in all of our actions and decisions in life. Our freedom from a strict observance of the 613 regulatory commands of Moses, as the *means* of our salvation, the *measurement* of our sanctification, and as an outworking of many *miniscule* rules that must be followed does not bypass God's unchanging moral and ethical standards related to worldliness, heathenism, and sin (Exodus 20:1-7, 12-17; Lev. 19:28; 20:13-14). The moral law of God is still impressed upon our hearts and is practiced in our daily lives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:4 – “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”).

The Holy Spirit writes God's moral code upon our hearts. This causes us to love what God loves and move away from those things which are carnal and worldly in nature (2 Cor. 3:3 – “written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart”). *The Christian no longer lives under the law (Rom. 6:14-15), as a motivating rule of life, or a governing force that gives assistance, power, rule, direction, aid, and regulation to his life.* However, the New Testament believer does live in *union with Christ* for sanctification and transformation which is what living under grace and experiencing grace means in the New Testament sense (2 Pet. 3:18).

We are called to follow “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2), which is the Spirit revealing Christ’s life to us, so we might possess victory. We are also told to follow the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2) which involves loving others. We are also called to follow the “rule” of sanctification (Phil. 3:16). Philippians 3:16 says “let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” In this context our “high calling in Christ Jesus” is mentioned (Phil. 3:14) which is a holy and Christlike calling. Therefore, sanctification (Christ-centered living) is the standard (rule) of the Christian life which in this context speaks of knowing Christ better (Phil. 3:10), following Christ, being victorious through Christ, and becoming more like Him (spiritual growth in character and conduct).

Sanctification is a vital part of what it means to live under grace and this is why there are many commands to follow even when living under the administration of grace (Rom. 12:2; 13:1; 1 Cor. 10:7; 14:40; Eph. 4:30; 5:22; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:21; 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17, 19; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 2:2, 4, 6; Heb. 10:25; James 4:11; 1 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:15-16; 2 John 10). While God does not want us to live legalistically, seeking to merit our salvation and depending upon our own human power for sanctification, this does not mean we are to live lawlessly. Living under grace does NOT mean lawlessness but should lead to sanctification which results in a person’s true freedom and liberty from sin and new life in Christ.

- **NO, since standards will not rob us of our freedom in Christ.** It is senseless to conclude that following some Biblical standards becomes a form of bondage in the lives of Christians and keeps them from being free in Christ. Just the opposite can be true; following good Biblical standards, which promote separation and holy living (sanctification), can actually become an outward expression, practice, and confirmation of a believer’s newfound freedom that they possess in Christ.

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 threat of a system of rules forcing you to live right - or else! In respect to sanctification or living the Christian life, liberty points to the believer's freedom from sin's bondage (John 8:36; Rom. 6:12-18, 20-22; 8:2; 1 Cor. 7:22) which includes being released from the Law as a means to sanctification (living a holy life). By extension or application, it means to no longer rely on any strict, external, legal code (law), since legalism is a system that cannot deliver us (Romans 7:4-11; 8:3 – "what the law could not do"). "Run, run the Law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. Better news the Gospel brings, it bids me fly and gives me wings."

True Christian liberty or freedom grows out of a love relationship with Christ – not a legal relationship (Rom. 7:6). It originates from our "newness of life" in Christ (Rom. 6:4) and the "newness of spirit" or the Spirit's inner transforming ministry taking place in our hearts and 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. The New Covenant promise is that living the Christian life comes with "batteries included" (Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 8:3-4). Today we have the permanent indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

To be able to live holy in every area of our lives is God's true gift of freedom. Separating from all sin and giving ourselves "unto God" (Rom. 12:1) 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 completely (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). However, we can't neglect the Biblical commands and principles (John 17:17) that revolve around separation from worldly lusts and ungodliness that would in some measure rob us of our freedom in Christ (1 Pet. 1:14-16). *Liberated living is not unrestricted living.* Freedom is not an open invitation to do whatever seems right in our own eyes (Judges 17:6). It is freedom to do what is right in God's eyes by His power and enablement.

- **NO, since a basic list of standards does not become a threat to a Christian's spirituality.** Many assume that genuine spirituality is something that is only found and relegated on the inside of a person's heart. Therefore, it's assumed that following a list of standards gets in the way of true spirituality, since spiritual living is a heart matter that has nothing to do with any outward regulations or restrictions. Of course, this is a limited and false view of spirituality, which dismisses outward 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." An inadequate view of one's own sinfulness is spiritually debilitating. The heart is deceptive (Jer. 17:9) which can result in denial and deception to the point that God's people choose to not lay aside certain sins (Heb. 3:13).

Yes, 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 (1 Cor. 6:19; 1 Thess. 4:4; James 1:26-27; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; John 13:17). The externals will many times reveal what is going on internally with one's relationship with God (Mark 7:21-23; Luke 6:45). The external is often a telling story of what is taking place internally (1 Peter 3:3-5). When we want to live for Christ the outward will sooner or later catch up with what is occurring on the inside. There is to be a correlation between what a Christian *believes* and how he *behaves* (Eph. 5:3; Phil. 1:27). A transformed heart should result in transformed living. Here is the main 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!

A man once said to me he was part of a contemporary Christian rock band and that God knew his heart was sincere. I told him he was absolutely right. Only God can know the sincerity of the heart (Jer. 17:10; 1 Cor. 4:5). However, sincerity of heart does not mean an action is right in God's eyes (Judges 17:6). If this were true a convention room filled with 25,000 Jehovah's Witnesses would be something God accepts and condones. Sincerity does not sanctify our actions. A person may be sincere but sincerely wrong in what they believe and practice. Only truth can sanctify a person's life (John 17:17). Truth is the measuring stick for what is right and wrong – not relativism, existentialism, postmodernism, mysticism, hedonism, or any other "ism" that is being promoted today in the world.

- **NO, since basic standards/rules/guidelines will NOT take away from our sanctifying relationship with Christ** ("for to me to live is Christ" - Phil. 1:21; 3:10). There is a vast difference between *living* by rules (revolving our entire Christian life around rules) and *having* rules in the Christian life. It's rather absurd to think that some simple rules or guidelines that are

followed in corporate gatherings or even in relationship to our daily living will drown out the Christian's personal relationship and walk with Christ. This is another "straw man" argument pitted against those who practice Bible separation; an argument that is simply erroneous. Basic standards will not cause us to lose our focus on Christ Who inspires us to live by faith (Heb. 12:2 – "looking unto Jesus"). In true Christianity *legalism* is replaced by *love* (love for Christ), *rules* are secondary to our *relationship* (a dynamic relationship with Christ) and *codes* do not overshadow *Christ* (faith in Christ for salvation and sanctification). This reminds us that we should not be reluctant to teach the reasons behind rules since rules without reason eventually lead to rebellion. R.B. Ouellette once said: "Behind every policy we implement there should be a principle from the Bible, and behind each principle there should be a Person we are trying to please – the Lord Jesus Christ."

- **NO, if the lesser things** (Matt. 23:23 – "ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin") **do not override the more important things** (Matt. 23:33 – "and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith"; Matt. 6:33 – "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"). A ministry might recognize the value of lesser things even as Jesus did (Matt. 23:23 - "these ought ye have done") while at the same time not base the entire ministry on the lesser things ("and not to leave the other undone"). The main things are the main things and the plain things are the main things!
- **NO, since righteous judgment and discernment is not legalism** (John 7:24 – "judge righteous judgment"; 1 Thess. 5:21 – "prove all things"; Eph. 5:11 – "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" – refute and correct them; Heb. 5:14 – "their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"). Living the Christian life is not a free-for-all, "if-it-feels-good-do-it" and "judge-not-lest-ye-be-



judged mentality.” There is a place for proper judgment and discernment that we must maintain so we do not allow our Christian lives to become worldly and carnal. Generally speaking, “righteous judgment” (John 7:24) 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).

Of course, we are never called to compare our spirituality with other Christians and pit ourselves against other believers (2 Cor. 10:12; Luke 18:11). This is the *fruit* of legalism. However, 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”). Harry Ironside said this about the discerning Christian: “He is able to see the difference between what is of God and what is of man, what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit, what is of the new and what is of the old nature.”

- **NO, since we are commanded to obey authority in the local church setting** (Heb. 13:7, “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 – “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls ...” There are two areas in which we are called upon to live under the legislation of certain rules. One place is in the home (Eph. 6:1) and the other is in the church (Heb. 13:7, 17). Dr. Charles Ryrie has well stated: “Twice in Hebrews 13 we are reminded that there are rulers in the local church who in the exercise of their responsibilities will have to set guidelines, exercise authority and discipline, and make rules for the members. Exactly what

this may involve or how far it may go is not stated, but the principle is clearly established. Without it, there would be anarchy in the church.” The principle of church authority is clearly established in the Word of God. Without leadership and some form of legislation the church would not function properly. Some Christians have this attitude when attending a church, “If I can’t do something that I like, then I’m leaving.” Instead of this attitude, we should possess a desire to follow church authority and leadership and present a united front in a local church ministry.

- **NO, since healthy standards help us to discipline our lives under the Spirit’s power and ministry and live free from the world, the flesh, and the devil** (1 Cor. 9:24-27 – “... But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection ...”; 1 Pet. 4:3-4 – “... Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you”). *Traffic lights in themselves do not change individuals but our lives are safer because traffic lights exist.* The Christian life is not mere outward conformity to a list of behavior patterns, but neither does it exclude personal discipline through standards, which are an application of Biblical principles to our lives.

Discipline is actually the result of freedom. The person who wants to be an athlete, but who is unwilling to discipline his body by regular exercise and by abstinence, is not free to excel on the field or the track. Yes, discipline is limiting and restraining. But it is also liberating and enabling. In fact, how free you are in life depends on how disciplined you are willing to be. Discipline is the key to freedom. *Structure and discipline is not legalism.* Winston Churchill once said: “I spent the first twenty-five years of my life wanting more freedom, and the next twenty-five years of my life wanting more structure, and the last twenty-five years of my life realizing that structure is freedom.”

- **NO, since discipleship training and godly example are part of the Christian life and not the radical individualism that is being taught today** - 2 Tim. 2:2 – “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”; Matt. 28:19-20 – “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations ... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...”). Whatever happened to discipleship? Part of discipleship is telling people how to walk right and what to avoid in live. It involves them imitating a mature Christian’s life as they follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). The radical idea that says “I can make up my own mind about everything that I do” defies the needful ministry of discipleship, local church authority, and the limitation of our liberty for the sake of unity among the brethren.
- **NO, if we do not become a slave to others in our everyday Christian life by overbearing rules and regulations which have no Biblical basis or reasonable application to God’s moral law** (1 Cor. 7:23 – “Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men”). We are God’s slaves and therefore should not become enslaved to people (Eph. 6:6; Phil. 1:1 – “servants of Christ”). To keep this principle in perspective, whenever or wherever we do submit to any rule or authority, we are actually submitting to Christ, since He is the One we are serving (Col. 3:23 – “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”)
- **NO, since every evangelical church has some form of standards.** For instance, I know of no evangelical church, even the most relaxed ones, that allows its youth group to smoke pot or marijuana during church activities or their choir members to sing in bathing suits or bikinis! Some churches may not like where a more separated and Bible-believing church



draws the line, but every church does have some standards. Therefore, no Christian can legitimately argue that there should be no lines. Each church has some form of standards which they abide by in order to maintain a certain level of decency and respect in God's House (1 Cor. 14:40). The standards may vary from church to church and are minimal in most churches but once every church possesses some form of standards. Case in point; a church can possess standards without becoming legalistic in their implementation and application of standards. However, the goal is not to get people to keep "The List" but to help them live by Biblical convictions which are derived from the Bible commands and principles being taught, even when no one is watching. Also, we must remember that even when follow certain guideline on a list, the devil invents new ways to draw people astray. So, it's not the list that is important but the internalized conviction which stems from the unchanging command or principle.

- **NO, since believers in the New Testament were told to not attend certain places (1 Cor. 10:20), commit various sins (1 Cor. 6:18, 7:1; Galatians 5:19-23), practice disorderly actions (1 Cor. 11:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:1-7) and dress a certain way (1 Timothy 2:9-10) would indicate the need to establish various standards, both personally and corporately within church ministry, which would accommodate these Scriptural teachings.** If instruction was given regarding these different areas of life, then certain standards were adopted on a personal and sometimes church level that would accommodate these "new life" patterns of Christian living. Instruction and truth must be applied to our lives in order for it to be seen in our daily relationships and overall living. This is called the Bible in shoe leather.
- **NO, since it's not legalism to live by virtues, values, and valid Biblical principles** (2 Pet. 1:5-9 – "... add to your faith virtue;

and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity ...” Dan. 1:8 – “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself ...” Living by Biblical values and virtues results in liberty and freedom from sin’s power. Wendell Heller said: “If our value system is right everything else will fall into place.”

- **NO, since we are sometimes called upon to limit our liberty in certain areas to accommodate the convictions of others and serve them** (1 Cor. 8:9 – “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak”; 1 Cor. 8:13 – “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend”; Gal. 5:13; “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another”). The Bible teaches that Christians are to possess a love-limited liberty when it comes to not offending others.

Dr. Charles Ryrie comments on the above verses in this way: “Do everything possible including restricting your freedom, to encourage the spiritual life of your fellow believer.” Our love for others causes us to limit our liberty at times. This is especially true in relationship to our church gatherings and fellowships. We should ask ourselves this question; how many might be adversely affected and hindered if I express my freedom? This is a guideline we should live by in relationship to our church meetings. Someone once said: “The only time we should look down on our neighbor is when we are bending over to help him.”

Every church that wants to maintain a level of decency and respect should determine some basic “operational guidelines.” As mentioned at the beginning of this study, these guidelines will sometimes include

*arbitrary* standards which are levels of requirement for group fellowship that are based upon a Biblical command or principle. These arbitrary standards are established to draw some kind of line that would safely represent the command or principle being taught. One example would be modesty (1 Timothy 2:9). The specific or exact line does not necessarily promote spirituality, but it is drawn to represent modesty and Christianity in the best possible light. Then too, there are standards which are erected which are based on the clear violations of God's moral laws. These guidelines represent God's absolute standard and mind on certain matters (adultery, fornication, drunkenness, homosexuality, ecumenicalism, etc.) and are not arbitrary in any fashion. They are straightforward because God has spoken!

As we reflect upon drawing those invisible lines in order to create some group standards, we should 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. Here is the point; if a stopping point is not made somewhere within church life and ministry, then worldly influence will eventually establish a beachhead in the church. In time, spiritual disorder and ethical breakdown will occur. Although boundary lines are sometimes imperfect they are nevertheless very valuable.

For instance, we don't know the exact difference between 100% pure water (if there is such water) and water that might not be quite as pure. In other words, where is the exact line between what is deemed safe and unsafe water? This is sometimes difficult to discern. However, the fact that it's not easy to discern does not mean we should be naive and drink water from a source that is unquestionably unsafe or drink water without questioning its purity. We should maintain some kind of standards or guidelines to follow so we can test the water and be sure we are drinking the most pure form. This is why spiritual boundaries are valuable to our lives even though the lines cannot always be perfectly drawn. Boundaries are important to



our spiritual health as we seek to apply the commands and principles of God's truth to our lives regarding separation (2 Cor. 6:14-17) and many other Biblical directives. Boundaries (standards) keep us from drinking from the world's contaminated sources which can never satisfy us (John 4:13-14).

In conclusion, establishing some Biblically based standards in an institution helps to achieve a collective testimony since each person represents the local church or institution in his or her actions. All standards are designed to unify the saints and contribute to the overall purpose and stand of the church as it seeks to honor Christ (1 Cor. 10:31).

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."