

OpenTheo

Traditions of Men (Part 3)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this lecture, Steve Gregg discusses the dangers of blindly following traditions that are not supported by the Bible. He cites an example from Matthew 15 where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for prioritizing their own traditions over God's commandments. Gregg emphasizes the importance of being aware of the traditions we follow and ensuring they align with biblical teachings. He also reminds listeners that ultimately, it is the heart and our actions that truly matter in our walk with Christ.

Transcript

Let's turn to Matthew chapter 15. In our last session, we were supposed to cover more than we did. We were supposed to cover the entirety of Jesus' discussion about the damnable traditions of the elders.

You recall Jesus' disciples were criticized because they ate without washing their hands in the ceremonial manner that was usually practiced by the Pharisees, and they felt that Jesus, being a rabbi of superior reputation, ought to enforce at least as much ritual purity of his disciples as the Pharisees did of theirs. And finding that Jesus and his disciples did not wash their hands before eating in the ceremonial way, they found fault, and Jesus took the opportunity to blast them for their traditionalism and externalism. Now, we were looking last time at Mark chapter 7, which is parallel to Matthew 15 today, because I don't intend to go at length into the subject of traditions, as we did last time.

But beyond that, I want to use Matthew 15 because of the additional detail that is given in Matthew 15 to the subject matter that is before us. There are parallels to what we're now studying in Matthew 15. And by the way, I hope we are, we should, if we kept on schedule, we should get into chapter 16 too, but that may be asking too much.

But there are parallels to this material in Mark 7 and Mark 8, but nowhere else in the Gospels. So Mark and Matthew alone cover the material that we're looking at right now. I think what I'll do is go ahead and read again the material even that we were discussing last time, because I said at the end of our last session that we'd run out of time and would have more to say about it in our next session, which is this one.

So let's look at it in Matthew's version. There are a few details Matthew gives that Mark has not given. Matthew 15, verse 1 says, Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.

But he answered and said to them, Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honor your father and your mother, and he who curses father and mother, let him be put to death. But you say, whoever says to his father or mother, Whatever prophet you might have received from me has been dedicated to the temple, is released from honoring his father or his mother. Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, These people draw near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, that their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Then he called the multitude and said to them, Hear and understand, not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth.

This defiles a man. Then his disciples came and said to him, Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone.

They're blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch. Then Peter answered and said to him, Explain this parable to us. So Jesus said, Are you still without understanding also? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murderers, adulteries, fornications, thefts, faults, witnesses, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

And that brings us up to the point that we were discussing last time. Now, there are two parts to what Jesus says to the critical Pharisees on this occasion. One part has to do with their man-made traditions.

The other part has to do with their externalism in interpreting the whole religious enterprise. As far as traditions are concerned, we had enough to say probably last time about that. That is the portion I feel that we discussed.

I don't feel we discussed the other portion at all, really, or not very adequately. We pointed out that the legalism of the Pharisees has two aspects, and there are more than one thing called legalism in modern speech, although the word doesn't appear in the Bible. When Christians talk about legalism, of course, they're always talking about

something bad.

No one ever uses the term legalism and means it in a positive way. Although not everyone has the same idea of what legalism really is. As I pointed out, Galatianism, or the legalism of the Galatians, which Paul wrote to refute, was actually the incorporation of Jewish law, along with faith in Christ, as a necessity of salvation.

Now, I don't know very many Christians who fall into that particular brand of legalism, that is, thinking that the Jewish law, with its ceremonies, circumcision, sacrifices, dietary restrictions, and so forth, that those things are necessary parts of salvation. That particular error probably went out, for the most part, with the destruction of the temple and the sacrificial system. Anybody who taught after that point that you had to keep the Mosaic ceremonies was teaching that which could not be done, because without a temple you couldn't offer sacrifices, you couldn't bring your tithes to the Levites, you couldn't do any of the things that the ceremonies of the law required.

Therefore, although I don't know entirely that no one taught such things after the temple was destroyed, I imagine that the destruction of the temple brought a fairly decisive end to that breed of legalism that imposed Jewish ritualism upon Christians. But the Pharisaic form of legalism was something different, and there are two aspects of it, both found in this passage addressed by Christ. One was the addition of human ordinances and statutes and regulations to that which God had already given.

It's true that in the law of Moses, which, by the way, at the time of Jesus' ministry, was still in force. The Jewish law had not yet been abrogated. The disciples and the Pharisees were rightly to observe the Jewish law at that point in time, because Jesus had not yet displaced it with the new covenant, which he would later from this point in the upper room, when he established the new covenant with his disciples there.

But until that point in time, the disciples were officially still under the Jewish law. Jesus himself was, according to Galatians 4, born under the law. And so he and his disciples and the Pharisees that he rebuked, all of them were in fact required to keep the Mosaic law.

But the problem was that in addition to the actual laws that Moses or God had given through Moses, there were the human laws of the rabbis that had been elevated in status to the level of authority that God's word had been. And we talked about this last time. This error is still among us, perhaps not the very same traditions as the Pharisees enjoined upon people, but there are traditions nonetheless that are esteemed in different denominations and certain churches as being important parts of righteousness.

And they are traditions which are in addition to, and sometimes in contrast to, what God has in fact commanded. So to avoid this aspect of legalism, we must always make sure that our convictions rest upon what the Bible itself says, and in a correct understanding

and exegesis of a passage, it is of course the case that any of us who were raised in a denomination, or maybe we weren't raised in a denomination, but after being converted we've come under the influence of some denomination or human teachers, whether it be even myself, I'm a human teacher. If I'm the first teacher you've sat under, or Phil or someone, there is the danger that you will simply see everything through the lens that we have fitted for you.

We've given you a pair of glasses by teaching you verse by verse and said, here's what's there, here's what's not there, and you've pretty much, to a certain degree, hopefully not entirely, but to a certain degree you've picked up our grid, you've picked up our lenses and you probably see things a lot of the ways we see them. That can be dangerous, the more so the more wrong the teacher is, of course, but even if the teacher is quite right, it's dangerous to depend on a teacher instead of depending on the Holy Spirit and upon the Scripture itself. And I certainly hope that none of you, having gone through a verse by verse Bible school, where you've gone through the whole Bible, will come out thinking, well, I guess I understand everything now, because much of what you learn from us you may be called upon by God to forsake in view of something improved over what we've said.

Who knows, we might change our minds before our lives are over too. So don't rest on what we've said and say, well, I guess they've thought it out well enough, because human teaching is imposed not only in the form of extra-biblical traditions, but even in human interpretations of what is in the Bible. And we need to make sure that we are following what God really did say, not what some human teacher or pastor or founder of a religious movement said or interpreted the Bible to say.

And, of course, it's a lifetime enterprise, following the Holy Spirit's leading, studying the Scripture diligently, sorting things out, rightly dividing. And as you do so, I guarantee you, I can say this on the basis of my own experience, which may be, since I'm a little older than most of you, my experience may be a little more than yours in this respect, you will find your whole life likely to be a process of learning what you have been taught is wrong on many points. Now, you might think, well, how many points are there that we could be wrong on? Well, you'd be surprised.

You'd be surprised. In my own experience, raised as a Baptist, we were quite proud that we were not tradition-bound as Baptists, like the Roman Catholics were. We knew the Roman Catholics were hopelessly lost in human traditions.

But we Baptists, well, we weren't even as tradition-bound as the Lutherans and Presbyterians and those guys. We were a free church. We were an evangelical, free kind of a church.

And so we were quite sure that we were not bound by tradition, we just went by Scripture. But then, once I got filled with the Spirit and found myself in a non-

denominational church under Spirit-directed study and teaching, I found that a number of things that I had assumed to be true as a Baptist and certain interpretations were in fact human traditions, which I had not previously recognized as such. And I remember at one time rejoicing that I had finally come out of all traditionalism, now that I was a Charismatic, now that I was a Neo-Pentecostal.

I knew that there were no traditions in those movements, and we were truly free and scriptural and so forth. But, of course, I've now spent over 20 years in that stream and have had many occasions to see the traditions of Pentecostalism and the traditions of the Charismatic movement rise and fall, and many of them. I mean, as you know from having heard me teach on many subjects, my whole life has been almost a series of saying, where is that in the Scripture, to things that most people have never dreamed to ask that question about.

And once asking the question, it almost gets you on to a very dangerous territory. Not dangerous in terms of truth, but dangerous in terms of acceptance with the Body of Christ at large, because there's an awful lot of people who are content to let someone else ask those questions and answer them for them. And the more you ask the question, where is that in the Bible, the more you will discover how many layers of tradition you have to unpeel.

I've considered it to be like taking old paint off a wall, you know, and when you want to repaint and you've got an old wall with some old gunky paint on it, you figure, well, I'm not going to just put paint over this, I'm going to sand it down to the wood, and then I'll repaint it to the sheetrock if there was sheetrock in those days. And, you know, you take off the red coat, and to your surprise, there's a blue coat underneath it that's even more ancient. And when you shave it down below the blue coat, there's an orange coat there, and you keep going and there's another blue coat, and below that there's a purple coat or whatever, and there's a white coat, and you think, well, is there any wall under all this paint? How many layers of paint are there here? You keep thinking, well, I'm getting through, I'm coming to the bottom of this layer, and then you find there's another layer to get through.

It's like peeling an onion, you know. You wonder, after all the layer's been peeled off, if there's anything there at the core, to your faith. Because when you pick up, at second hand, your Christian beliefs, there might be any number of traditional things that you don't suspect for the moment that they're traditional, but they will turn out, as you simply say the scripture on your own, they'll turn out in many cases things that no Christian you've ever met has ever dreamed of questioning.

You'll say, well, but where do we get that anyway? You know, I've told you about my own eschatological pilgrimage, as it were. The first thing I became aware of as a dispensationalist was there's people out there who don't believe in a pre-trib rapture. I

never had the faintest idea there were people who were amillennial, or whatever that was.

I didn't even know what that was. But eventually, first of all, I thought I'd made a radical step by rejecting pre-trib rapture. But my belief in the millennium and the tribulation and Antichrist and all those things were still in place, and I never dreamed that anyone would ever think otherwise about them.

And then, years later, my own thinking had taken me away from the pre-millennial view, and I was now amillennial. And it was years after that that someone said, well, where is that seven-year tribulation in the Bible? I never thought to question it. And I started looking for that, and I couldn't find it.

And then, you know, I began to think, is there anything in the eschatology I've been taught that's found in the Bible? Is there anything there? And you happen to have met me after that particular pilgrimage has reached some kind of a stopping point. Maybe not forever. I may yet change, but in some area, who can predict? But, you know, you just begin to think, well, gosh, the more I learn, the more I'm alienated from other Christians.

The fact of the matter is, and this is a bit of a side issue, you should pursue truth no matter how much it may appear to alienate you from others. Because, in fact, you will never, if you make pure truth your pursuit, and you pursue it through Scripture, through God's Word, if you make the pursuit of truth your one priority, you'll find that although you'll come to different conclusions than others have reached up to this point, you are nonetheless at unity with all others who are in search of pure truth. Because people who are in search of truth are not threatened by challenges to what they believe.

In fact, people who are searching for truth welcome such challenges, because if they happen to be wrong, they want to change. And if they happen to be right, they know that challenges won't overthrow the right thing they believe. And so, you'll find that as long as you're loving toward all people, including people you find yourself in disagreement with, you don't find yourself alienated as much as you thought you would be.

I mean, as soon as I didn't believe in the pre-trib rapture anymore, I didn't know anyone else who didn't believe in the pre-trib rapture. I was the only one I knew. And I thought, wow, I won't be able to teach anywhere.

No one's going to fellowship with me anymore. But my fears were never realized. What I found were other people who either believed the way I had come to believe, or else were willing to consider it.

Every time I changed, I thought, oh no, I don't want to see something new. I mean, I'm alienated enough. Someone said, knowledge alienates.

And I don't know, I guess that's true. That's not a Bible statement, but I heard someone say that. That knowledge alienates, knowledge separates.

And that doesn't necessarily have to be true, but it certainly feels like it. When you begin to challenge traditions that are human traditions, and human interpretations of things, and just say, well, is it really there? Did God really say it? You'll find more and more yourself reaching conclusions that are different than those you held before, those that you've been fed before, whether by us or others, and you'll just keep growing. But sometimes it'll be an uncomfortable growth, because you realize that if you really let the Scriptures lead you to the conclusion they seem to be saying, that might put you on the outs with every Christian you've ever had fellowship with, for all you know.

But following the Lord is always the right thing to do, and it's amazing how many Christians you think you'll be on the outs with if you let truth guide you, if you let the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit guide you into all truth that you thought you wouldn't be received by, but they're being led similarly, and unbeknownst to you. Or maybe they will be through your influence. The point is, however, that we see that wherever there is traditionalism, there's always got to be the ability to see through what is tradition, and to the core of pure revelation from God.

Jesus was not enamored with, he was not impressed with, he was not intimidated by the traditions of the elders, although they were definitely the orthodoxy of the conservative branch of the Jewish religion. The conservative branch, by the way, was the branch he had the most in common with. I mean, the Sadducees, who were liberals, they were, in many respects, at least they were social liberals, he had less in common with them than he did with the Pharisees, but the Pharisees were totally enamored with the traditions of the elders, and Jesus had no use for them.

And so we find that by his concern for following truth, instead of man-made ideas, he not only was criticized by them, but he was forced to confront them, and say that their attachment to human traditions had, in fact, interfered with their obedience to God. Some of the traditions, if kept, provided loopholes that would prevent a man from being obliged to obey God in some of the things God had commanded. And so traditions can be harmless, but they very seldom are.

There are traditions, you know, like family get-togethers for Christmas and things like that, that can be harmless, or even positive experiences, but there are very few traditions in religion that arise that don't become bondages, and do not, in the end, obscure your view of what really God did say and what he did not say. And therefore, we need to be careful about traditions, and we don't have to condemn all traditions outright, but we need to be aware, because traditions do seem to elevate themselves to the status of theological norms. And the problem here, of course, as Isaiah said, and Jesus quotes Isaiah, he says that these people worship God in vain, and they've come to a

place where they teach as doctrines the commandments of men.

And Jesus, in his own statement about it, said in verse 6, Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. So that's the first part of legalism that's the problem, and that is human ideas entering. But then there's the problem, even if you manage to get around the human ideas, or if you are focusing strictly on things God has commanded, there's also the problem of majoring on minors.

And the minors always are the external ceremonial kinds of issues. The majors are the issues of the heart, issues of moral purity and goodness, and love for God and love for man. These are moral issues.

And religionists, as a rule, tend to focus on religion. And religion is very little more than ceremonies. Some of the ceremonies are, in fact, ordained by God.

To be baptized is a religious ceremony, but it's God-ordained. To take communion is a religious ceremony. It's God-ordained too.

To go to church is something that God ordains, but it's a ceremonial thing. These things you ought to do and not leave the other undone. Jesus said to the Pharisees about their ritual observance and their failure to do the more important things.

But religion, I use the word religion in contrast to relationship with God. Religion tends to elevate the ceremonial things, even things that were not man-made but God-made, and elevates ceremonial things to the place where they preclude, in some cases, observance or emphasis on the things that really matter. We know David ate the showbread.

That was a violation of a ceremony that God himself had commanded. God had commanded that the Levites only or the priests only could eat the showbread. David didn't qualify, but he ate it anyway.

Jesus allowed his disciples to seemingly violate the Sabbath. He said, however, that was justifiable because God will have mercy and not sacrifice. So there were times when even God's ceremonial requirements could be sacrificed for the sake of the moral issues of love and compassion and so forth.

Now, there's never been a time ever, to my knowledge in the Bible, where God has ever allowed anyone to sacrifice a moral requirement in the interest of observing some other moral requirement. When we talk about some of the laws that God gave, in some cases have to take a back seat to other things God gave, we are not suggesting for the moment, for any moment, that morality can be compromised for the sake of love because morality is defined by what is truly loving. And if you do something that violates a moral command of God, then you are not doing it for the sake of love, you're doing it as a violation of love because the commands of God that are of a moral nature are simply descriptive of what love is and what love does.

And so you're never doing the loving thing when you do something that is contrary to the moral standards of Scripture. But there are times when the ceremonies of Scripture, I mean, for example, you know, communion. Suppose you don't take communion because you're in jail and you can't.

Suppose a person doesn't get baptized because they're converted, they return their lives over to God out in the Sahara Desert the moment before they perish. In such a case, the ceremonies have been neglected. But those are not the weighty matters, those are not the things that matter most.

And that's what Jesus goes on to say. Yes, Andy, you wanted to say something? The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter? Well, first of all, I'm not sure he sacrificed her. I'm sure John, when he taught it, suggested there are two possibilities for that.

I don't know. Did John suggest to you that he sacrificed her? Yeah, there are two possibilities. And John probably brought this up.

But I'm not sure that Jephthah really did sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering. His vow can be translated this way. If you'll give me authority or give me victory over my enemies, he said, whatever first comes out of my house to greet me on my return, I will offer as a burnt offering or give it to the Lord, as it were.

I mean, he says, I will give it to the Lord and offer it as a burnt offering in the way our translations read. But the word and can be translated or. So he's saying, I will, it could be taken, I mean, I will either dedicate it to the Lord, like Samuel is dedicated to the Lord by his mother to live forever in the temple and serve God there like a Levite, or I'll sacrifice it.

And the or would hinge on whether whatever met him out of the house was an animal or a human. You know, if human, I'll dedicate it to the Lord like like Hannah did Samuel. If animal, I'll offer it to the Lord as a burnt offering.

In either case, he gives it to the Lord. And it would still be in some measure a crisis and a tragedy for him that it happened to be his daughter because we're told it was his only daughter. And to dedicate her to perpetual virginity to serve in the tabernacle would guarantee that he'd never have any offspring to carry on his name.

And that would be one of the ultimate disasters for any Jew in those days. So there is that school that suggests anyway that he didn't really sacrifice her, that he didn't offer her as a human sacrifice. That would be a violation of all laws of Israel and of sanity too.

And that instead what he did is he consecrated her to the Lord. Now, many Christians feel the other way about it and feel like he did sacrifice her. So there is a matter of dispute about that.

I am of the opinion that he just consecrated her to the service of the temple. If I'm wrong, then that does make an example of one who seems to have kept a ceremonial law at the expense of a moral law, which in my opinion would be the wrong thing to do. God doesn't say, I will have sacrifice, not mercy.

He said, I'll have mercy, not sacrifice. So God places mercy above sacrifice, not sacrifice above mercy. Certainly if Jephthah sacrificed his daughter, he placed sacrifice above mercy.

And that would be a turning of God's values on its head. And yet, see, the man is commended for his faith in Hebrews. And I don't think he would be commended for his faith if he had done something so morally outrageous as to sacrifice his daughter, that which would be a violation of the moral laws of Israel, to sacrifice a human being.

So that's my opinion. I know many Christians have other opinions. But I would still stand by my statement that no godly person ever did or certainly was never commended for sacrificing a moral command of God to keep some ceremonial one, or even to keep some other moral one, as far as I know.

So the point here is, the other part of legalism, besides human traditions, is to emphasize even things in the Bible, even things God did say, that are of a ceremonial and lesser important nature, in such a way as to exclude people from fellowship or from giving them any kind of welcome or acceptance because they don't keep some kind of a ceremony. Now, for example, there are statements in the Bible that say we should be modest. Now, we could say modesty is a moral issue, although as soon as we begin to define modesty as, you know, the hemline has to be at X point, below the ankles or above the ankles or below the knee or whatever.

You know, as soon as we begin to decide which hemline constitutes modesty, we begin into, I guess in a sense, human traditions, although they are really an attempt to enforce, you know, a law of God, be modest, dress modestly. But there are times when even those kinds of things, and churches adopt different standards of that, which makes it, in my opinion, ceremonial in nature. Those things, you know, mercy should override sacrifice.

I remember hearing a story of a preacher who was preaching a holiness message in a Pentecostal church and a couple of ladies came in who were dressed in very short miniskirts and they sat down with some other ladies of the church right in the front rows of the church. And when the preacher saw this, he decided this was a good chance for him to make an illustration of the holiness message he was preaching and said, anybody who wears miniskirts is not welcome in the fellowship of this church. Well, those ladies in their miniskirts, of course, were embarrassed that they remained to the end of the service and then they left hastily.

And probably the preacher felt like he'd really done his service to God in speaking the unpopular word, the uncompromising word. But some of the other ladies in the church came up to him and said, you know those two ladies in the front row, they were two prostitutes we met on the street and we invited them to church this morning. And we managed to talk them into coming.

I don't think they'll be coming back, however, you know. And it's true, the church should uphold standards of modesty. But sometimes even such standards as the Bible says we should observe, it's necessary to show mercy more than that.

Now, Jesus said that it's not things like what you eat or drink that defile a man. Now, we don't have very many denominations in the Protestant church that emphasize the need to eat or drink or to abstain from eating and drinking certain things, although we do, of course, have those that would say we shouldn't drink alcohol. I don't know whether there were many Jews who held the view that they shouldn't drink alcohol.

I think alcohol was drunk at Passover and at many other occasions, probably at the regular meals they drank alcoholic wine. Of course, there are some who would say that wasn't so. But I don't know that that was the issue.

I think the principal issue was clean and unclean foods, and only people like Seventh-day Adventists and a few other groups, which you would consider not in the mainstream of Protestantism, hold to those kinds of concerns. But what is very common among us is for Christians to judge other people on the basis of whether they drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes. In some cases, it's not as common, but people will judge you on the basis of whether you eat healthily or not, whether you eat junk foods.

Yes. Okay. That's a very good question.

Let me get to it in just a moment here. No, that's fine. Excellent.

Excellent question. And I might not have brought it up had you not asked, so it's good that you asked. Smoking cigarettes amounts to putting something in your body, through your mouth.

It does not, in my opinion, defile a person. Now, if we talk about alcohol or psychedelic drugs or something like that, which are also consumed through the mouth, if alcohol is taken in large quantities, that can, in a sense, defile a man. But that's not what Jesus has in mind.

Jesus is saying that nothing is ceremonially defiling. The fact of the matter is that drunkenness and taking mind-altering drugs and so forth, that's not the consumption of regular food for nutrition. And the reason that those things do stand in a category by themselves is because unlike the example Jesus gives that things that go into the stomach can go on out and are eliminated, drugs come in and they do affect the mind

and the spirit.

It says that in Hosea chapter 4, it says that new wine takes away the heart. That's a little different than eating pork or something unclean. I mean, that's just ceremonially unclean.

Anything that has a chemical that would alter your mind and twist your spirit around in knots, that would be in a different category than what he's talking about here. He's talking about simply the affixing of a stigma to eating certain kinds of foods as opposed to other foods, some of which stigma were imposed by God himself in the Old Testament. But Jesus is now saying you've got to realize that a person is not really defiled on the basis of observing or not observing these ceremonial issues.

Certainly it's not what you put in your stomach that defiles you or in your lungs for that matter. Now, arguments have been raised, of course, against smoking and even drinking on another basis, and that is on the basis of the unhealthiness of such practices. People who drink not only get drunk, which is bad enough, but they also destroy their livers sometimes and destroy their health in many ways.

Likewise, smoking, as we know, is very closely connected with emphysema and cancer and things like that that people often get who smoke heavily. And on that basis, many times Christians have condemned these practices. And by the way, I've never smoked, and I never intend to.

I think it's one of the stupidest things any person could do. To me, as soon as I see something light up, I guess that eliminates any possibility to think of that as an intelligent person. It's hard to think that way.

I don't think of them as an ungodly person for smoking. I just think they don't have much in their brains. Because, I mean, who would fill... I mean, what's the point of just filling your body up with smoke and breathing it out again? I mean, what's the point? To me, it's just stupid.

And with the price of cigarettes these days, it's all the more stupid to waste your money on doing things like that. I've got little enough money to do good things with, much less to actually literally burn and inhale the smoke. It's just one of the stupidest things people have learned how to do in all their years of growing up as a human race.

But, though I think it's stupid, I do not say that we can call it, in itself, a sin that defiles. Now, the reason that people say, well, you shouldn't smoke is, so often Christians say, because your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. And whoever defiles the temple of the Holy Spirit, God will destroy.

Well, it's true, whoever defiles the temple. But Jesus has just said, you don't defile yourself by putting something in your mouth. The defiling of the temple always has to do

with doing something immoral.

And, in fact, the context where Paul talks about defiling the temple, he's talking about immorality, he's talking about fornication. Now, fornication may be unhealthy, but that's not the point he's making. He's saying that by fornicating, you're joining the members of Christ to a harlot.

And that is a defiling act. You're destroying the temple, you're defiling the temple of God. And that may or may not lead to health problems.

The health issue is not even in his mind when he talks about defiling the temple. You don't defile yourself by eating bad food or eating cigarette smoke or whatever. I mean, inhaling it.

There may be excellent arguments not to smoke, and I believe there are. Like, it's a very poor stewardship. But if we're going to make smoking cigarettes a sin and judge others on the basis of whether they do it or not because of its unhealthiness, then we have to do the same thing with people who drink coffee or who eat sugar or eat greasy foods or salty foods or almost anything.

With MSG in it or whatever. I mean, after all, research has shown that these kinds of things are not as healthy to put into your body as other things are. I mean, if you want to eat a macrobiotic diet and eat practically nothing but brown rice and beans, you can then avoid the charge of destroying your temple by what you eat.

But unless we're willing to make the drinking of coffee and soft drinks and eating of sugar and salt and greasy foods make those moral issues, then we have no right to make smoking a moral issue either. But I will say this. There are other factors.

And Jalene asked a moment ago, when is there a point in time when we need to speak about issues like this? The point in time to speak about issues of this is in the process of discipling people who have these problems in their life, we need to talk to them about the bigger issues in their life. Not the peripherals, like whether they smoke or whether their dresses are a little too short, but the bigger issues of love. Now, I mean, that's the weightiest issue of the law is love.

And you can certainly, in the process of teaching people how to love, which is a heart issue, and that's where it's the lack of that in the heart that defiles a man. Not the outward thing like that, but it's what's in the heart and what comes out of the heart. Everything that Jesus listed that defiles a man that comes out of the heart is something that's unloving.

And so in the process of teaching people, well, here's how to be an undefiled Christian. Always do the loving thing. Now, let's talk about what the loving thing is in our lives.

You're talking to somebody who smokes cigarettes and you say, well, let's just consider this. Do you think smoking cigarettes is a loving thing to do? Do people who don't smoke enjoy you smoking around them? Are you at all aware of how much of an annoyance it is to people who don't smoke? To have you smoke in their house or in their car or even in their same workspace or in the place where they're eating. You may not be aware of it.

If you smoke cigarettes and the smoke doesn't bother you, you may not be at all aware that there's a whole bunch of people out there who just are disgusted and whose lives are made very unpleasant by your smoke. And therefore, at least in terms of smoking in public places, it would seem a very loving thing to do not to do that around anyone who's a non-smoker. And then, of course, there's studies about the effects of secondhand smoke and that people who don't even smoke can become more at risk for a disease just by being around you if you're smoking.

So on that basis, it seems like a very good reason not to smoke around other people. Then as far as the issue of smoking privately, that's between you and God because every man's a steward of his own, of whatever God has put into his hands. And no doubt, all of us can be faulted for the way we spend some of our money.

I mean, I probably eat breakfast out more often than I'd have to and I could save a few bucks a month if I ate at home. But the luxury of eating out is something that I enjoy and it doesn't cost me an awful lot and it's one of the few things, one of the few luxuries I can afford. But it's very possible I could be faulted for not being as tight-fisted as I could be in my stewardship.

And if we're going to go around criticizing each other for each other's stewardship, we could probably get everybody's face muddy. But certainly, certainly that doesn't mean that I have any right to be unconcerned about my stewardship. There are, we have to, each one has to ask himself before God and ask God, you know, where are the extravagances in my life that I'm going to have to answer to you for and you're going to be unhappy with me about? You know, I mean, if I'm going to have to give an answer for every idle word that I spoke on the Day of Judgment, how about every idle dollar I spent that could have been turned to an occasion to spread the Gospel or to relieve someone in misery or, you know, to help somebody out who's in a financial crisis.

It's all the stewardship. It's all God's money. And I'm not saying that God wants us to live ascetic, Spartan lives and not have any enjoyment because Paul says in 1 Timothy chapter 6 that God gives us freely all things richly to enjoy.

So He does want us, He gives us things because He's not down on enjoyment. But He does want us to love our neighbor as ourselves and loving our neighbor as ourselves obviously will impact the way we spend our money. Now, if I were a smoker, for example, and I saw the price of cigarettes going up radically, I'd say, okay, a larger and larger percentage of my elective cash is going into this habit of just putting smoke into

my lungs.

Now, I may enjoy that, but can I continue to justify the expense in view of the fact that for the price of a pack of cigarettes, even the generic brands, I could feed, you know, three orphans in India. You know, if 50 cents a day will feed an orphan in India, then for the price, how much, I don't even know how much cigarettes are nowadays. I assume you can get generics for about a buck and a half.

I don't know. You know, you occasionally see them in big numbers at the gas stations and stuff and I don't remember what the last figure I saw was. It keeps changing upward.

But, I mean, if a pack of cigarettes costs a buck and a half, then there's three kids in India could have been kept alive while I was spending the same money to keep myself from staying alive. Yes. Must.

Yes. That doesn't mean we can't speak into each other's lives, but we can't speak judgmentally in the sense of condemning someone for their choices because they are, they're not our steward, they're God's steward. See? Paul says, who are you to judge another man's servant because his own mastery stands are false.

Now, some people are so blatantly profligate and wasteful in their entire lifestyle that it's kind of hard not to come down heavy on them. In fact, they might need a bit of a slap in the face in a loving way, you know, or a bucket of water in their face saying, wake up, what are you doing with your life, you know? But when you have, in general, a person who seems to have a heart for the Lord and is not just ignoring Scripture, but they have a habit or an expense in their life that you think could be improved on, there may be a place to speak the truth meekly and in love and say, you know, have you ever considered how that, you know, maybe the most loving thing to do would be to give that up. Now, there's a lot of people who are not comfortable about being confronted about those things, but if they're not, it might be because they're already convicted about it and maybe they should be confronted again about it.

On the other hand, they may be not comfortable with it because they've been judged so much about it by others and it's a delicate matter to speak into people's lives about these things and it's usually, in my opinion, advisable. We've gotten a bit off the subject here, but it's worthwhile. It's, in my opinion, advisable to speak into the lives of people who you already have a trusting relationship with them.

I mean, where you have that kind of rapport because it's so hard to even speak a word of correction and love to somebody who just interprets all criticism as condemnation because that's all they've heard from anyone else before. But it just is a matter of you doing the loving thing. I mean, there's times when speaking up may be the loving thing.

There's times when just leaving up to the Holy Spirit to convict them would be the loving

thing, but the point is if, for example, we talked about smoking a moment ago and how that is impacted by loving your neighbors yourself. I mean, the way you spend your money, the way you pollute the air in a enclosed place where other people have to breathe your exhaled air. That impacts choices about whether you ought to smoke or not.

Is that a loving thing to do? But then there's also the issue you raise of modesty. I don't think God is himself shocked at short skirts or tight pants simply because he sees us all the time even when we have no clothes on and I don't think that he gets shocked by that. What he's concerned about is our motivations.

And the fact of the matter is an awful lot of people wear short skirts and tight clothes for very bad motivations, for very unloving and very selfish and very lustful reasons because they want to attract the sexual attention of other people. And that is displeasing to the Lord but only because it's so unloving. Because immodesty advertises something which in many cases is not available.

Advertises a product that's not really for sale. Or worse yet, maybe it is available. That's worse still.

And it's obvious that if, now I think there's a problem more with women than men. Men have other problems that are not as frequent among women but I think, maybe it's not, maybe men are just as much that way but I just don't notice it so much with men perhaps and maybe that's because I am a man. But I think that women probably more often have this problem or it becomes a problem to men when women do it more than to men when men do it.

Men are much more likely to be aroused and distracted by visual stimuli. That is something that is understood not only in Christian but non-Christian circles that men are more than women stimulated in the wrong kind of way by visual stimuli. And therefore men have a greater problem with a woman who's, you know, strutting her stuff with clothes on that accentuate what her stuff is.

And that's a problem in churches as well as not. Now some women are probably totally unaware of how they're dressing and how it's affecting men. Others may be very much aware of it and that's why they do it.

But in discipling a person and it's extremely common in the modern church or even in ancient church I'm sure, when a person got saved out of the world they got saved out of an immodest and immoral background. They don't instinctively always know all the things in their wardrobe that are really objectionable or why. And so we shouldn't judge people just as soon as we see that they're dressing immodestly we just may assume that they may have some blind spots or they may need some discipleship.

In which case, again, the whole way to approach it is not to outright condemn immodest clothing but in the whole context of what is important in Christianity and that is love. And, you know, you may not realize this, sister, but, you know, the way you're dressing is not, it's a tremendous distraction and even a temptation to some of the brothers. And it's not a very loving thing to do to subject them to that.

And so you might reconsider, you know, the way you dress. Now I'm not saying that to anyone here. In fact, I think the sisters here are pretty good about that.

But we have, most years had that problem and in most churches there's certainly that problem. I wouldn't mind if we went to the old fashioned days of the biblical times where the women were in one side of the room and the men in another, you know. So that I could just pay attention to what's ahead and it wouldn't be any women immodestly dressed.

But there's hardly been a case in modern times that I've been into a church where there weren't some women dressed in a way that was calculated to distract, you know. And it's not a very loving thing to do. And no doubt some men do the same thing.

But anyway, you ask, you know, at what point do you speak to such an issue? You speak to it at any point where it seems like the loving thing to say. But you approach it on the basis not of condemning and not on the basis of legalism but on the basis of saying, well, what does really matter in the Christian life? What matters is that we're doing the loving thing toward all parties that we have contact with. That everyone we meet, they've seen more of the love of Christ as a result of the contact with us than they had seen before they ran into us.

And if we're dressing immodestly, we're actually putting a stumbling block in front of some people. That's not a loving thing to do. Smoking cigarettes in a public place is probably not a loving thing to do because most non-smokers find it objectionable if not on the basis of you're destroying your temple and therefore that's a bad thing to do.

Just, you're bugging my temple, you know. And so there are a lot of issues which Christians are right to disapprove of. But many times they disapprove on the wrong basis.

They disapprove on the basis that in our religion nobody goes to movies and nobody wears short skirts and nobody smokes or drinks. And therefore, anyone who does those things are not accepted in our religion, in our denomination or whatever. That's the wrong basis for it.

It's not those matters of externalism that matter. As Jesus said, what defiles a person is what comes out of the heart. And of course, what comes out of the heart is either going to be loving behavior or unloving behavior.

Now, Jesus gives the example here in verse 19, verses 18 and 19. He says, But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart. Now, this is not the first time he's said that.

Back in Matthew chapter 12, he said,