

# OpenTheo

## Legalism (Part 1)



### **Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture** - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg argues for the importance of Christians adopting a countercultural attitude that reflects the teachings of Jesus. He highlights the danger of legalism, urging Christians to uphold high standards while also exercising wisdom and humility. Gregg emphasizes the need to avoid cynicism and judgmentalism, recognizing that different Christians may come to different conclusions about how to live out their faith in a secular culture. Ultimately, he suggests that Christians should strive to establish an alternative culture that shines with the light of Christ, offering a consistent and compelling witness to the world.

### **Transcript**

Tonight, we're going to continue our series which bears the title *Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture*. And I know that most of you were here last time, and it would not be necessary for me to go into detail what I mean by that. It would be redundant for many, although there are some here who were not here last time, and I will try to summarize rather quickly what that peculiar title means.

What we were exploring last time is what is the correct relationship of the church as the people of God, not the institutional or organizational church necessarily, but simply the community of believers in any country, in any time. What is the relationship of that community to the dominant culture, the secular culture of that society in which we find ourselves? Jesus did compare the kingdom of God with leaven, that a woman puts into a lump of meal until the whole is leaven, suggesting that the presence of the kingdom's citizens and the expression of the kingdom in the community of believers is to have some kind of a dynamic impact on its environment, even as leaven does in a lump of dough. Jesus also told his disciples there to be, or they are, the salt of the earth and the light of the world, but he indicated that it was not a given that the mere presence of Christians would function as salt and light.

He said if the salt loses its savor, it's worthless for any purpose other than to be thrown out and trodden under the foot of men. And obviously the light is not going to do its function if it's put under a bushel. So Jesus in these kinds of remarks tells us what the

church's commission is, what the church's role is in society, but he indicates that it's not automatic that the church will have the impact it is supposed to have.

If the salt loses its savor, if the light is under the bushel, then if the leaven, Jesus didn't say this, but I mean it would follow, if the leaven was not alive, then it would not have the impact it's supposed to have. As Christians, I hope that it is our principal concern that the will of God be done, and therefore that the will of God for the church in the culture to be done. But there's not unanimity among Christians as to what the correct role of the church in the culture is to be.

As we saw last time, there are some Christians, quite a few churches, that seem to feel that as the cultures change, the church's methods should change to accommodate the changes in culture. That, you know, if we have a MTV culture in the world around us, a soundbite culture, an entertainment-crazed culture, then the church needs to adjust and needs to have the same kind of entertainment that the culture offers the young people. That the sermons should be short and soundbite-like because people get bored otherwise.

And you just accommodate the culture. And I suppose the scripture of choice for those who hold that view would be Paul's statement that when he was with those who were under the law, he could observe the law. When he was with those who were without the law, he could live as one without law.

He could live as a Gentile, in other words, even though he's a Jew. He could accommodate the sensitivities, at least, of his hosts at meals and so forth and the people he lived among. He said he did that so that by all means he might save some.

And I'm sure that the churches that make an effort to accommodate the secular culture to a large degree, leaving out only those elements that they consider to be the most objectionable, that they would say they do this so that by all means they might save some. And while I tend to be a little critical of that approach, I have to be a little more like Paul than I am in that he said, you know, when he was in prison and writing to the Philippians, he said some preach the gospel with bad motives, but he says at least the gospel is preached in that he rejoices. And I think we need to recognize that if we come to different conclusions about how it should be done, then the way many Christians do it, we need to beware about being cynical and judgmental and harsh on people who see it differently if they are preaching the gospel.

One of my problems I have with it is that I'm not sure it is the gospel that's being preached sometimes in these settings. Sometimes I think the world's culture has so come in that the church is not seen as having any distinctiveness at all to offer, except, you know, a gift of salvation, which is a wonderful thing. But as I read the scripture, Jesus came to do more in people's lives and to have more of an impact in the world than just to rescue a few folks and get them off into heaven.

I mean, if that's all he wanted, then he could have saved each of us and then taken us right to heaven instantaneously before we could get into any trouble. But he leaves us here because there's something he wants us as individuals and us collectively to do. And that something is, of course, in part defined in terms of just evangelizing more.

But if evangelism was the only thing, he could use angels to do that, and they do it a lot more effectively. They wouldn't have to be like Wycliffe Bible translators have spent 20 years learning the language of the tribes. He could just send angels who already know the language.

And I mean, if it's just a matter of getting the gospel to be heard, God could get it done a lot more quickly, more efficiently than to leave it how it is, where we have to kind of, he has to wait on us to get out there. But there's more, I think, in God's mind than that. And it has to do with the formation of an alternative Christian culture, the kingdom of God in the world as an alternative society with its own distinctive culture.

Now, an opposite approach to culture that churches often take is the idea that, well, we shouldn't accommodate the culture. We should present the norms of the kingdom of God and of God's culture, of his standards to the world and try to infiltrate the institutions of the secular culture, politics and the media, the arts, literature, education, these areas where culture is generated and perpetuated. We need to get into those areas, and we need to infuse them with Christian ideals.

We need to get into the legislature and start appointing judges who will make rulings that are more according to decency and justice. We need to protest blatant immorality in the media. We need to get some Christians out there in these areas as journalists and so forth so they can start promoting a more decent culture and elevate the secular culture.

Many of these people, these are the people who talk about the culture war. They see themselves and us as engaged in a tug-of-war over the secular culture. On the one end are the liberal, immoral, godless, Hollywood types who are trying to pull the culture more and more into a Sodom and Gomorrah model.

And then on the other end are the Jerry Falwell and the forces of decency who are trying to pull the culture the other way, back towards something a little more like it was when some of us older folks were kids. And that is really probably one of the more popular approaches to the church and culture that is happening right now. So I'm sure you've both seen examples, I mean you've all seen examples of both of these things, that you see some churches that seem to just accommodate the culture and all they want to do is just get people to come down the aisle to say a sinner's prayer and they'll do it.

I mean there's a church like that in Oregon where I came from. Some of my friends used to go there, they left, it got too weird. But I mean they had, like I think Neil, the church Neil used to go to actually, before he started going to our home church, the last Sunday

he went to that church was a Sunday they had Batman climb down from a hole in the ceiling in the middle of the worship service in order to announce some entertainment thing that they were doing for the youth the next Saturday night.

The guy dressed in Batman suit. Well I mean got a lot of attention, in fact everyone who is there remembers it very well. They don't remember what the sermon was that day, but everyone remembers Batman coming down from the ceiling.

I can guarantee you that. Now I mean that's the kind of stuff that is happening in a lot of the, of course the cities. The largest churches in America are for the most part churches that have adopted that model and they would say see how big we are, it works.

You know don't argue with results and that's what we call pragmatism. But the other side of the coin is more like the Christian Reconstructionists who feel that you know what we need to do is just change American culture back to a more godly model and by a more godly model they have something in mind that maybe things were like 40, 50 years ago in the US. And you know I can see that both groups have commendable motivations, I would hope.

I mean I give them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe they don't, but I can, I give them the benefit of the doubt. They may have very commendable motivations, but what I was saying last week is that I don't really think either of them have really captured the essence of what Jesus came to do or what he expects the church to do in society.

Neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever made any motions whatsoever to deliberately confront the secular culture and try to bring the secular culture under God's standards. I think they believe that people who are unregenerated can't live according to God's standards except hypocritically. And the real issue was to get people converted and then for those who were converted to have and generate among themselves an alternative culture, a counter culture in society.

Which culture could, would be a witness to the secular culture around them. Now the secular culture around them might improve as a result. Eventually that does happen a lot of times.

The secular cultures see that you know these the Christians or the decent folks got get better results about some things than they do. When Team Challenge first got started they were having tremendous results getting people off heroin addictions. As I recall their success rate with heroin addicts was like 90% or something.

People getting permanently off of heroin. And government programs were getting something like maybe a 5th, 10 or 15% success ratio. And there were actually, David Wilkerson and his organization was actually approached by people who run government programs for drug addicts.

What are you doing? It's working for you. Well of course he had to tell them the reason it works for us is because we're getting people saved. And once they have Jesus in their life there's potential there that isn't there without Jesus.

I don't think the government program adopted their methods. But there is nonetheless precedent for people in the secular culture looking over at the Christians and saying they do things differently than we do and their marriages aren't falling apart. Now that precedent isn't recent in America.

American Christian marriages do fall apart just about as much as non-Christians do. But if you go back to the Book of Acts, if you go back to various times of revival and so forth, the church has had a much better success rate. There was an article in Reader's Digest several years ago called Shimabuku, the village that lives by the Bible.

And it's after World War II when American troops went in to liberate Okinawa there was the whole area, all the villages were just in squalor. They were morally corrupt. They were just totally run down.

And then the troops came into Shimabuku which was a village that was very different from the others around them. For one thing when the troops arrived, two old men, one of them carrying a Bible, came out to meet them, to greet them and to bring them into the city. And initially the liberators were suspicious of a trap and they went in cautiously and looked around.

And what they found there was a village in the midst of degradation and squalor all around. This village was clean. The fields were tilled and productive.

The streets were clean. Everyone seemed happy. There was no divorce in the village.

There was no crime. There were no jails. There were no brothels.

There was no drunkenness. And they said, what's going on here? And they found out that 30 years earlier an American missionary on his way to Japan had stopped in at Shimabuku and he had converted those two men 30 years earlier. And when he left, he didn't have time to disciple them much, but he left them with a Japanese translation of the Bible and urged them to study it.

And they had. And they had no other Christian contact for 30 years. But when the American troops came into Shimabuku 30 years later, the whole culture had been transformed because apparently everyone accepted the teaching of Scripture.

Everyone got saved. And it's amazing how Christianity, when it's lived consistently, can change at least the culture of those who are living it. Now, whether it has an impact on the dominant culture is a side issue.

We want the whole dominant culture to come around to our way of seeing it because it's more comfortable for us. If the whole culture, even the non-Christians, embrace our ways, then we don't seem ridiculous to them. We don't seem old-fashioned to them.

We don't get ridiculed. You know, the TV shows aren't going to make us look like idiots and so forth because the whole culture agrees with us. But there's no guarantees in the Bible that we're going to get the whole secular culture to agree with us.

They may not. Jesus told the parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares remain tares until the end of the age.

And the wheat remains wheat. And both mature along their own lines. And the wicked secular culture may get worse and worse as the kingdom of God grows brighter and brighter and better and better.

So, I think it's wrong-headed. Although, in many parts of my heart, I sympathize with the effort to try to clean up, you know, American secular culture. Of course, I'd love it to see American secular culture more decent than it is.

But that's got to be not the thrust. That's not the thrust that Jesus had. That's not the thrust that the apostles had.

It's the establishment of an alternative culture in the midst of the world that shines because the persons in it follow the ways of Jesus Christ. Now, those people, in order to do so, have to be actual Christians. Which means we're talking about a culture that only exists among the Christian community.

Not just Christendom, as if to mean Western Europe and America and that part of the world that nominally has been affected by some form of Christianity over the centuries. We're talking about real Christians. Real Christians are what we call the church.

They're the Christian community. And the Christian community is supposed to have its own culture. And what we're examining in this series is what that is.

What is that culture? What does it mean? Now, the terms that I chose for the title, radically Christian counterculture, I explained at the end of our last session. Radical comes from the word radix in the Latin, which means to the root. Radically Christian means it's really Christian.

It goes back to the root of Christianity, not back to, let's say, the founding of this nation. Not back to the Reformation time. A lot of people, a lot of godly people today, a lot of godly Christians who want to see America become a more decent place, they're actually strongly advocating going back to the ways of the reformers.

You hear a lot of emphasis on getting back to the days of the Reformation or the days of

our founding fathers of this nation. That's not far enough back. The roots of Christianity go further back than that.

And although there were things better than now in some of those times, in some of those places that people are wistfully remembering and wishing we could go back there, we've got to go back further if we're going to be genuinely Christian. Radically Christian means genuinely Christian. It means that we go back to the root of Christianity, which is Christ and his teaching and the apostles' teachings, the Bible, in other words.

That's the roots from which the culture of Christianity is to spring forth and grow. Now, the term counterculture, as I said, I've defined it myself based on the way I've seen it to use. I don't know who coined the term counterculture.

I think it actually is a relatively recent introduction into the English language. And it may have been coined back in the 60s. I think it might have been actually coined in the 60s to describe the emerging hippie movement or maybe before that the beatniks or whatever.

But some people who rejected the dominant culture and went on their own way and had their own clothing styles and their own music and their own language and their own morals and customs and so forth, it's like they have their own culture within the dominant culture. A culture, of course, is simply the accepted norms of thinking and acting, traditions and morals and practices of a group of people who share them, a consensus of people who share these things in common. And every society has its own culture.

A counterculture, the very word counter suggests that it stands in contrast to the dominant culture. The hippies were a counterculture, a bad one, but they were a counterculture and a powerful one, as we can see, because they now control even the White House. I mean, it's amazing what can happen in 35 years.

I mean, a counterculture, if it's a committed one, can go far. Think of what communism did in the early part of the 20th century. They start out with a handful of really, really committed people who said, no, the whole paradigm has to shift over to this.

And in a short time, they controlled 50 percent of the world's population. That's pretty rapid growth within half a century. I mean, the world has not yet seen, at least the last few centuries, have not seen what is possible, what impact is possible for a committed Christian counterculture to accomplish.

We just haven't seen it yet. But I think God wants the world to see it. And that's what we want to examine.

We want to discover. And I'd like to do my best to try to present from scripture what that would look like. But a counterculture, I made this distinction.

There's such a thing as a subculture. The Amish in Pennsylvania are a subculture. They're a hermetically sealed group of people who have as little contact with the outside as they can and don't let any influence from there come in.

And none of their influence goes out either. They are there doing what their ancestors have done. It's, in their judgment, a better way than the dominant culture.

And frankly, I agree, it is a better way than the dominant culture around them. But they are a subculture. The Chinese in Chinatown, San Francisco, are a subculture.

But they're not a counterculture. A counterculture is a subculture with an attitude. And the attitude is, it's not just we want to do it our way, leave us alone.

It's we want to do it, in this case, we want to do it our way, and we think you should do it our way too. And we are going to confront you with what's wrong about the way you're doing it. That's, a counterculture is in the face of the dominant culture.

Now, Christianity is supposed to be a counterculture, not just a subculture, not run off into monasteries and hiding out while the whole world decays around. But like salt that's rubbed into flesh so that it doesn't rot, or like leaven that's put into a lump of dough so that it infiltrates, in a different way than what many people want. It is that we are not trying to make the secular people adopt a Christian culture.

We're trying to make the secular people adopt Jesus Christ. And when they do, they should come into a community that has a separate culture, a superior culture. Not just for the sake of having a culture, but for the sake of being obedient to Jesus Christ.

When we do things God's way, things are better in all ways. Because, I mean, Jesus said, I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

You should expect those who follow Jesus Christ, their life, their corporate life, their world is going to be enlightened, not in darkness. And so, that enlightened counterculture is what I'm trying to investigate in these lectures. Now, I'd like you to turn, well, before you turn to any particular scripture, I want to go over just a few points.

I actually thought I would make these last, but I didn't get around to them. Christianity in America does not have, in my opinion, any examples of a radically Christian counterculture. There are radical Christian individuals, but I don't think there is any kind of a consensus that could be called a radically Christian counterculture that's visible or definable.

What we do have is a lot of Christians who are really rethinking a lot of things from a more biblical way of looking at them. And some are on one track, some are slightly different. I mean, there's a big resurgence, of course, of women wearing head coverings



in some churches.

That's because, and by the way, I don't agree. As I interpret the passage of scripture, I don't agree that women need to wear head coverings, but I can appreciate the fact that a lot of people of my generation who didn't grow up in churches where women wore head coverings, they're saying, well, I see that in the Bible, that's what I think, so we're going to put on head coverings. At least they're trying to say, I don't care what the culture around me says.

If that's what I think is biblical, that's what I'm going to do. And what we need is more people who are willing to be radically obedient and original in a sense. Not original in the sense of really making up something new.

Anything that's really new isn't radically Christian. But original in the sense that we don't just think like we've been conditioned to think. And we do some thoughtful rethinking of norms that we've just always assumed.

My parents were good Christians, but they sent me to public school. It never occurred to them to question it. They knew some people sent their kids to Christian schools, but most of the Christian schools were repositories of kids who were too bad to make it in public school.

I had a cousin who was raised in Christian school. He was the black sheep of the family. He's been in prison many, many times.

And he may even be now. I don't know. I lost track of him.

But the fact of the matter is, a lot of good Christian people wouldn't put their kids in Christian schools back when I was growing up, because it was known that the kids who got kicked out of public school or who were just discipline problems, their parents put them into Christian school to try to reform them. And so it was safer to have your kids in public school. It was thought.

Nobody, when I was married, no one ever thought of homeschooling. I shouldn't say that. There were some who did, but they were invisible.

They were culturally invisible. There was not a movement. And my parents never heard of homeschooling.

So, I mean, I don't blame them, but it was a blind spot. I mean, Christians of their generation never, for the most part, never thought of homeschooling as if that, I mean, just sending your kids to school. What else do you do? That's the American way.

And they never rethought it. That's been rethought in the past 25 years or so. And lots of Christians are rethinking that whole assumption that you must send your kids to

government schools or even Christian schools.

Now, I'm not saying everyone has to reach exactly the same conclusion I have. I'm just saying it's a good sign when Christians are saying, well, wait a minute, who says we're supposed to send our kids off to school like everyone has for the past 100 years? Who says we're supposed to do that? And some of them are saying, well, wait, who says that teenagers have to date? You know, just because our dominant culture has assumed it. When I was growing up in the church in high school, no one questioned whether we teenagers should be dating.

It was assumed. What else would you do? How else would you entertain yourself? You know, it's just that what's happening now, and it's very encouraging to me, is there's a lot of people, they're not all on the same page, but a lot of them are doing the same thing, and that is that they're rethinking things that Christians didn't rethink 30 years ago. And maybe that's a good result of the degeneration of the secular culture.

You see, 30 years ago, most Christians thought that the American culture was Christian, because there was a very largely Christian conscience that informed even the secular culture. But that isn't true anymore, and that's an ugly thing that's happened in the American culture, but it may have one very positive upshot, and that is that Christians who used to be just kind of lethargic about things say, wait a minute, this thing's going to hell in a handbasket. What are we Christians supposed to be doing about this? And then, you know, start rethinking things.

Well, I've been rethinking things for about 30 years. I haven't finished yet, and that's why the series is called *Toward a Radically Christian Common Culture*, because I don't have it all figured out yet. I'm just going toward it, you know, and, but I, because I've been rethinking things for about 30 years about this, I have a lot of categories I'd like to talk about.

These categories are going to include meddlesome issues of, you know, things that you don't want anyone to intrude into, like, you know, how you raise your kids, how you spend your money, you know, what you lay up for retirement, whether you have insurance. I mean, what, who has any business talking to anyone else about that? Well, I think Bible teachers ought to, since the Bible has something to say about issues like that. And, you know, these are things that a lot of people aren't going to like.

Birth control, putting your kids in, putting your old parents in retirement homes and convalescent homes and stuff. I mean, a lot of stuff that is still done by most Christians without thinking. It's well overdue that Christians rethink these categories and see if there is a word from the Lord.

If there isn't, then we have a lot of liberty to do whatever, you know, whatever moral thing seems okay. But if there is a word from God, it may be that we've been overlooking

it because we're so immersed in cultural assumptions of the dominant culture that we've never thought about or never dared to rethink them in terms of the Sermon on the Mount or in terms of the general teaching of Christ and the Apostles. That's the scary thing about where we're going here.

The idea is, if the dominant culture is corrupt, it's corrupt not just because a few bad things have been happening, like the homosexuals have come out of the closet and took over Hollywood. You know, it's more than that. It's all kinds of ways in which the culture has rejected God and gone its own way and the church only recognizing the most blatant things and saying, oh, we need to protect our children against that homosexual movement.

We need to teach our daughters not to get abortions and so forth. I mean, we see the really raunchy things in the culture and we say, oh, that's bad. We better stand against that.

But we don't change everything around to bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ that the Bible says we're supposed to do. And when we change one or two things, we don't get very good results. Cultures, by their very nature, are homogenous.

Cultures survive through the centuries in different countries because they are self-consistent systems. For example, there was missionaries who went to an African village and converted the people. And before they came, the people there kept pretty tidy streets and yards and things like that.

But after they got converted, they let junk and garbage accumulate in the streets and rats were running around and things became disease-infested. So I thought, what's going on here? How come these people are Christians? You know, their society is kind of becoming less sanitary and more disorganized and less disciplined and so forth. And it turned out that before they were Christians, they were afraid of demons.

And they believed that demons sneak up to your hut, hiding behind stuff in the streets. Rocks and whatever junk is out there, you know, that the demons sneak up behind these things. But once they got saved, they weren't afraid of demons anymore.

So they didn't have any motivation to keep the streets clean of this stuff. Back when they were afraid of the demons, they wanted to keep the streets clean so the demons don't get there. And the missionaries realized that, you know, you can't just change one thing, you know, about the way Christians think without having a more broad, self-consistent ramifications in all the areas of life.

I can think of a number of cases in the modern emergence of the Christian counterculture where people have really not had very good results. For example, there

are a lot of people who decide to adopt homeschooling. But they don't challenge the whole educational philosophy of the dominant culture.

And therefore, they assume that homeschooling has produced basically the same results as what the public schools produce. When my wife started homeschooling our oldest, when he was in the first grade, actually we homeschooled him from birth, but when we actually started giving him some curriculum, she thought, well, okay, Benjamin's going to the first grade, better find out what he's supposed to learn, I'm supposed to teach him. So she went to the educational service division or something and got a list of the things that first graders are supposed to learn in first grade.

Well, the list was four pages long in small print, just a long list of things you're supposed to know. Some of them were things I never learned even in high school. And I knew for a fact that first graders in public school weren't learning all those things.

They hardly learned to read some of the time, much less did they learn how to find some of the angles of an isosceles triangle or whatever. But I mean, there were all kinds of abstract and intimidating things on this list. And my wife was overwhelmed.

She thought, well, I can't teach all this, I don't even know all this stuff. How can I teach him this in one year, much less in his whole schooling career? And it was really hard on her. And we've met other families who were hard on her.

We settled this, I just said to her, well, who made that list? Was it someone godly? The Bible says don't walk in the counsel of the ungodly. And if they're counseling us that we have to teach our child all these things in the first grade, unless they're godly people, we're not supposed to walk in their counsel. God didn't give our children to them to disciple.

God gave our children to us to disciple. And therefore, we should make the decisions what our kid needs to learn in the first grade or any other grade. God didn't give the children to the state.

The state is trying to kidnap them and confiscate them. But that's not something Christians have to agree with. You know, when people, they say, okay, we're going to home school.

And that's one countercultural thing that they're going to adopt. But they still try to do the school about the same as the secular schools, but just do it from home. Same thing, a lot of people who home church.

A lot of people decide to home church and be really radical. But then they just try to turn the thing that's going on in their living room into something that's identical to the institutional church, only smaller. And, you know, they're not rethinking everything, they're just rethinking one thing.

We're going to bring the kids home. Well, that's an improvement, but a lot of home school parents get really burned out because their goals are not radically Christian goals. Their goals are the same as the secular school's goals.

It's just that they're trying to keep their kids from being infected by bad company or something. You need to change more than just one thing. Just deciding to home school isn't going to create a self-consistent culture.

It's going to burn out a lot of people unnecessarily. Another example would be, and we see this all the time. That the more conservative churches try to teach their young people not to fornicate.

Try to teach them not to, you know, have sex with each other. But they don't challenge the whole institution of dating, which is the primary matrix for immorality among young people. And it's so absurd, it's so blind.

I mean, they say, okay, the dominant culture is going way into immorality. We'll tell our children not to do that. But we won't challenge the whole institution of dating.

That's too, I don't know, too dear to us. It's too much a part of our lives. And yet that has to be called into question.

Is dating really something the Bible advocates? Is dating even something decent people would have done 200 years ago? Decent non-Christians wouldn't date. Dating is a corrupt, immoral practice that originated about the beginning of the 20th century in America. And it has led to really awful results.

But we try to get rid of the bad results, but keep the fountainhead of evil, you know, dating as an institution. We don't challenge those things consistently. You've got to have the whole, everything changing.

Everything has to be rethought in biblical categories. Another example is when people decide that it's more radically Christian to give up birth control than to use it. A lot of people have done that.

They decide, well, okay, we're going to just trust God for family size. We're going to give up birth control. Great.

I highly recommend that. I think it's a great choice. The problem is a lot of people do that without adopting the necessary other commitments that are involved in having children.

I mean, it's not enough just to grow a big family, I mean, in terms of numbers. You've got to have the whole Christian commitment to the discipling of children. And there's a lot of people who say, well, I'm convinced, you know, I guess as a Christian I'm supposed to not use birth control.

Now, maybe you're not convinced of that. I'm not here to convince you of that right now. We'll save that for later.

But the thing is, a person who is convinced they shouldn't use birth control is not necessarily going to have a better and more godly family if they don't also rethink their whole philosophy about child rearing, about their roles as parents and so forth. It's not enough just to add a lot more kids into your family. That's not more radically Christian.

There's whole family styles and parenting responsibilities and so forth that some people don't pick up, even though they do make a decision, well, I feel convicted about birth control, I'll stop using it. Another example would be when Christians become convinced that the place for the mother is not in the workplace, but in the home. And so they give up their second income.

The problem is they don't change their other economic habits. Now, let me tell you this. If there's any area of life that the gospel does speak to, it is money.

Jesus, I think, spoke 39 parables. About 36 of them were about money. There are, I forget the exact number of days of Jesus' life and ministry I recall, I think it's 40-something.

On all but a handful of them, He spoke about money. Money is a big issue in the gospel. It's a big issue in Jesus' teachings.

It's a big issue in the epistles. We don't want, sometimes, God's word to intrude into our economic choices and financial choices. But, you see, if we decide that some of the problems in the secular culture are that they've departed from God's norms of having the mother at home with the children, and the women have gone into the workplace because of this feminist trend.

Okay, they say, okay, I'm convicted, mom has to come home, we'll give up our second income. But if we don't change our spending habits, our whole philosophy of how we spend money, what we buy and our standard of living, then suddenly we just run up the credit cards out of sight and we're in huge problems. Because we change one thing, but we don't change everything.

We don't bring everything into conformity with what the Bible teaches. It's dangerous to change one thing. I mean, you just can't change one thing of a highly complex system and expect things to go okay.

Everything has to be self-consistent. And when you do everything the way the Bible says to do it, it's a beautiful thing. The early Christians demonstrated that.

But it's not a beautiful thing when you say, well, I'm going to make the big move and I'm going to give up the second income, I'm going to give up birth control, I'm going to give

up this or that or the other thing just to be really radically Christian. But the other things that have to adjust at the same time, if they're not adjusted, you've just created a monster. You've just ruined your life in all likelihood.

Very possibly. Another thing that is an example of wrong thinking is Christians try to change some things. A lot of us do not believe in psychology.

I don't believe in psychology. I don't believe in Christian psychology. I don't believe in any kind of psychology.

I believe it's unbiblical. And I do believe that the problems that people go to psychologists about are problems that are addressed in the Bible. And you don't need to go to a psychologist for it.

You need to go to God. And God has the solutions to these problems. The problem is that some people come to this conviction I've just described and they decide, okay, people don't need to go to therapists, they don't need to go to counselors, they don't need to take their psychiatric medications.

God is all they need. And that is, in a sense, true. But some people get so oversimplistic about it.

Initially, when I began to see these things, I was too, I've adjusted myself since then. But when people come and they say, I'm depressed or I'm suicidal or I'm, you know, I'm anorexic, you know, and you say, well, here's a Bible verse for you. Now, it may indeed be that that Bible verse contains all the truth they really need, but they may not be in a position to assimilate that truth.

There may be so many things wrong in the way they're living, in their relationships, they may have sin in their life that needs to be addressed at a whole bunch of different levels. Depression doesn't just arise from one cause. People get depressed because of guilt or because of, you know, lack of faith or because of a whole lot of things.

And you can't just hand out a Bible verse like a vitamin pill or like an aspirin and say, this verse will fix it. You've got to, when it comes to dealing with people with life problems, now, see, I don't have major life problems. And this is why it took me a while to discover this.

I've never been to a counselor for anything. I can't imagine why I'd want to. I've been happy in Jesus since I got saved.

You know, over 30 years ago, I've been happy in Jesus. I'm not saying I never had a bad day. I've had plenty of bad days, but I've never had any problems that God and me couldn't work out together just by appeal to what His Word said.

I've never had a problem. But that's me. I was raised in a stable Christian home.

I never, you know, I didn't use drugs. I didn't go out and mess up my life when I was young. A lot of people have.

And I need to realize, and people like me have to realize that these people who come with problems, it might be easy for me to say, oh, all you need to do is do what this Bible verse says. Just do what that Bible verse says. And if someone tells me that, I'm often capable of doing it because I've got these patterns I was raised with.

They don't. And a lot of times, a lot of other things have to change too. Sometimes I'll get calls on the radio from someone and they're asking me to solve a problem they have.

You know, what should I do as a Christian about this problem? And I realize that the problem they're talking about is the tip of a huge iceberg. You know, the wife long ago has given up her place in the home. And she's gone out and worked.

And now she's gotten into an affair. And her husband's, you know, wanting to leave her over it. And there's all kinds of complications in their life because of things that were done a lot earlier in the process that were not Christian.

And they want me to settle this problem way here at the top and give them a Bible verse that will fix it. What you need to do is renovate your whole life in some cases. And change may come very slowly.

And that's a very important thing I want to get across to you. The reason that there is such a temptation to try to go for the political solutions and for the, you know, change the secular culture kind of solutions is because it conceivably might happen more fast that way. I mean, if we could just pass a law that said homosexuals should go back in the closet, for example.

That's not going to happen, I don't think. But if a law was passed by that, huh, we could all breathe easier. The homosexuals wouldn't be there teaching in our schools and promoting their agenda to our kids and so forth.

But that's the easy way. It really doesn't solve anything because the homosexuals are still homosexuals. They're still on their way to hell and that's supposed to be a concern about.

We're supposed to be concerned about their salvation. We're supposed to be concerned about more than just getting them out of our children's classrooms. It's a lot faster and easier if we can make it work to just pass laws to forbid, you know, all the things we disagree with, abortion or whatever.



It's a lot harder. To really get down to the nuts and bolts of changing the whole way that the Christian community thinks and acts about everything. And frankly, it's a daunting prospect.

I mean, can you imagine what you would be up against? I'm not saying you agree with me on these issues I've raised, but suppose you were on my page about this. Suppose you believed women shouldn't be working outside the home. They should be home with their kids.

People shouldn't use birth control. People shouldn't have insurance. People shouldn't, a whole bunch of things like that.

Now, I don't think anyone here probably agrees with me on all that stuff, and that's okay. I'm not going to try to, you know, knock those things through your head. But imagine, suppose you did agree with all those things, and you see the task is getting all Christians to accept all of that and more.

So that they can have a testimony to the world of a people who actually live according to God's standards by faith and love and purity and so forth. Dating is out, you know, all kinds of things. Wouldn't that seem a little bit like there's a huge uphill climb to get to that point? Of course it does.

It's much easier to say, let's go directly to the legislature. But that's not Jesus' method. The reason there's such an uphill climb is because we've fallen so far downhill over the centuries.

It doesn't help to try to just get a bulldozer and move the mountain. We've got to get back. We've got to take the steps to get back to where we were supposed to be in the first place.

It is discouraging. Not discouraging to me to see how bad the secular culture is. I always knew the secular culture were sinners.

Now they're manifesting it. In some ways, all the better. Now we know who the sinners are.

When we had them all civilized by a secular culture that was decent, we never knew who the homosexuals were. We never knew who the drug addicts were. They're all hidden.

Now we know who they are. We know who to keep our children away from maybe. But I'm not really saying it's better for the secular culture to go down.

But it doesn't have to hurt the culture of the Christians. What is discouraging is that the churches have embraced so much of the secular culture that there's such a long way to go to the top. Most people just say, you're talking about something that's impossible.

Let's talk about something else. This is never going to happen. Well, we do not select our mission based on what is likely to be successful.

It is our mission to do what we're told to do, whether it seems we'll be successful or not. We are told to be obedient to Jesus Christ in all things. And we're told to influence others, to provoke others to love and good works too.

Does it seem hopeless? Kind of, yeah. But with God, all things are possible. It's not an issue of us deciding what are the probabilities of success here.

The issue is, do we have any choice but to be obedient or not? Is there somewhere here that we should be going? Now, I probably have scared off a lot of you with some of the examples I've given. I did that on purpose. I want you to know we're talking radical here.

We're not talking about a few little cosmetic changes to the way Christians live their lives. You know, get some kind of a monitor on their TV or their Internet, so the pornography sites don't come into the Internet. Well, we've really cleaned up our act now.

Well, it's a beginning. But when we stand before God, the question is, do you want God to say to you, well done, good and faithful servant, or do you want Him to say, I guess I'll let you through. You barely made it.

You know, I mean, do you want God to say, you did exactly what I put you on this planet to do? Or do you want Him to say, you didn't think it could be done, so you didn't try? Frankly, we have instructions here. And we need to be living by them. And I don't think we're going to be able to save our children from the secular culture unless we have a self-consistent alternative to offer them.

And that is something that the churches, I believe, do not currently have. The churches have, you know, there are objections to the secular culture. They don't like the idea of people getting abortions.

They don't like the idea of nudity on primetime TV. They don't like the idea of pornography in the markets, you know, right there at the check stands where you can see it. They don't like some of these really nasty things.

But does the church really have any alternative to offer to their children? Is there really anywhere that Christian parents can point to and say, now, here's the way that we believe it should be done. Or can we just say, those guys, they're doing it all wrong. They're doing it all wrong.

They're doing it all wrong. I mean, our children have every right to ask, well, is there someone who's doing it right? If not, then what hope is there for me to avoid doing it wrong? You see, there has to be a community of people who are following God with no

holds barred. It's a hard thing to get yourself to agree to do because it's costly.

Jesus said, if you don't forsake all that you have, you can't be my disciple. Is that too much? Is it worth it? What's it worth to be a disciple? Hopefully it's worth everything because if it isn't worth everything, you can't be one. Now, having said all that, I have some points I really want to make that are, I think, very important foundational things to say.

And that is that I am deathly opposed to legalism. It might not sound like it. As soon as you hear someone espouse, you know, some really unusual value or something and say, I really think, you know, Christians oughtn't to do X. If it's not what most people think, the first impression people have is, well, that sounds really legalistic to me.

Well, it can be. There are definitely people who are legalistic about things like that. There are some, probably not far from here, that many in our congregation used to have association with who were espousing a more pure, countercultural way among their families.

But it is the judgment of some who have left that group that they fell into the trap of legalism. Now, I don't say that to throw stones at those people because it's very hard not to fall into the trap of legalism if you're going to hold a standard that's higher than the average. Because it's one of the easiest ways to get people to embrace the standard.

Scare them into it. Say, listen, this is what God demands. You'll be condemned by God if you don't do this.

And, you know, well, I guess I better do it. People may not embrace it from their heart, but they're made to do it externally because that's the legalistic standard that's put on them. I'd like to talk tonight about legalism.

And I'd like to call this study Legalism or Wisdom. When I suggest that the body of Christ, if it would begin to actually follow the Bible in all areas of life, and I suggest some of the specifics, it makes some people's, you know, all the blood runs out of their face. Down to their feet.

Because they're, you know, it just sounds so, what, so strict. Well, I'm not into a legalistic enforcement of anything that I advocate. I advocate what I consider to be biblical wisdom.

A person may do what is unwise without being condemned. But they can't do what is unwise without suffering consequences of some kind. God has taught us his way of wisdom.

If we reject it, it doesn't mean we're going to go to hell. It does mean, though, if we reject the way of wisdom, we'll suffer the consequences of foolishness. And not only our

secular culture, but the church culture of this country is suffering the consequences of foolishness.

For example, the huge divorce rate in the churches. That's not just a problem. That's a symptom of a deeper problem.

It has to do with a whole lot of other things that are done wrong in family life, in the way that family is perceived, in the way marriage is perceived, in the way that a woman's role is perceived. All those things contribute. And I can prove that.

I mean, I'm not going to work on it tonight. That'll come up later on. But I can prove it.

That the reason that marriages break up in the church about as often as they break up in the world is because Christians have not been taught a consistently and radically Christian model of marriage and family. It exists, and it's not even hidden. It's exposed to plain view in many, many passages of Scripture.

It's just that Christians read through a grid. All people do. When you read the Scripture, you read through a grid.

That grid is made up of what you've been taught and what you consider normative. I know when I was a kid in the Baptist church, I used to read the Sermon on the Mount. And I wanted to follow Jesus.

I was serious about it. But I just couldn't take most of it seriously. And the reason I couldn't was because none of the adults in the church that I was going to, even though they were good Christians, none of them seemed to take seriously a lot of those things.

And therefore, the spiritual environment I was in did not encourage me to see and to take seriously some of the more radical things Jesus said. I just assumed it must mean something I'm not getting. These older people would see it if it meant what it looks like it means.

I really thought that. I honestly thought, you know, it seems to me Jesus is saying something real different than what we're living. But if he was, I'm sure these older Christians would recognize it.

And so I must not be seeing it very clearly. And this process goes on in our mind, whether we're aware of it or not. It's a grid.

We read the Bible, and what comes through and impacts us are things that fit through the filter that we've been fitted with by our religious upbringing and cultural assumptions. And what we have to do is learn how to dismantle that grid so that everything comes through. So we say, now, it's not all going to come through at once.

It's line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. But it's not going to

all come through at once. But you've got to start letting some of it come through or else we're going to be stuck in the place that the church has been stuck in for the past 30 years, and we're going to lose our children to the world.

Because they will... If we preach that such and such a thing is wrong, but we have not demonstrated that anything else is better, because we really follow the world's ways 90%, then our children are more astute than that. They're going to recognize we don't really mean it when we say the Bible is supposed to govern everything, because it doesn't govern everything in our lives. We tell them, oh, you've got to live by the Bible.

If they see that 90% of our lifestyle isn't based on the Bible, and it's contrary to what the Bible says, then why should they take us seriously when we say, well, you need to obey this 10% of the Bible? Why? Mom, Dad, if you don't take it seriously, why should I? And you know they're going to be pulled toward the world a lot more strongly than you were when you were a kid. I mean, the world is... It's a scary thing. But there is a potent alternative that God demonstrated, and people actually did it.

People have done it. In the book of Acts, in the first few chapters, you find people doing it. And it had a tremendous impact.

It was an alternative society, a counterculture in Jerusalem at that time. And this got planted in other places. It did get corrupted eventually, but it has renewed.

It has come back again in various times where there were revivals and so forth and where Christians got serious about living the way Jesus said to live. Now, I want to talk about what legalism is because I believe there is an enormous danger of becoming legalistic even when you begin to just discuss these things. Just raising some of the issues I've already named.

And I pick them on purpose because they are just the kind of things that some people embrace and it becomes legalism to them. And I want to say first of all that if we're going to talk about radically Christian counterculture, the most radically Christian phenomenon is grace. There is nothing radically Christian about legalism.

Every religion has it and even non-Christians have it. Everybody has got their hypocrisies. Everyone has got their legalistic codes they put on other people and condemn other people.

Legalism is universal. It's not radically Christian. And as soon as we lapse into legalism, we're not where we're talking about being.

We're going the opposite direction. Grace is the one thing that can be said to be radically Christian. But how do we uphold a high standard and not be legalistic? Well, that depends on a great number of things.

I'd like to investigate with you biblically if I could. First of all, let me just point out to you what isn't legalism. What isn't legalism is obeying God.

It's not legalistic to obey God. It's mandatory to obey God. The Bible makes it very clear in many scriptures.

Jesus said in Luke 6, 46, Why do you call me Lord, Lord? And you don't do the things I say. And if you don't obey, you're supposed to do that. You're supposed to obey Jesus.

I quoted earlier, 2 Corinthians 10, verses 4 and 5, where it says we're supposed to bring every thought into the captivity of the obedience of Jesus Christ. That means something. That's not legalism.

Paul who wrote it was not a legalist. But obedience to God is not legalism. Legalism is something else.

The problem is that some people have been taught so little about obedience or so much negative against obedience that they assume when they hear about the need to obey God that someone's being a legalist about it. It's not legalism to obey God. Secondly, it's not legalism to advocate a high standard of holiness.

A high standard of separation to God is not legalism. Not in itself. Now, people who do it can be legalistic.

That's what we want to avoid. But the advocacy of a high standard of holiness is not legalism. In 1 Peter chapter 1, just for a single example of this, 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 14, it says, As obedient children, there's obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as he which has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, all manner of your life, of your behavior.

Now, when Peter says you have to be holy in every area of your life, just like God is holy, is that a high standard? That's a very high standard. Is it impossibly high? Depends on how legalistically you enforce it. I don't think we can be perfect every moment of every day, but it must not be an unreasonable standard to aim at because the Bible gives us that.

That's the goal, to be holy in every area of life even as God is holy. To advocate that high standard is not legalism. Peter was not a legalist.

And he is, through the Holy Spirit, he advocated it. Another thing is it is not legalism to give wise counsel. If somebody is giving you some counsel about some area of your life and that person exposes where some of the snares of the devil are and says, steer clear of there, that's not legalism.

Even sometimes some counsel might go a bit beyond what the Scripture specifically

says, but to give counsel is not legalism. Giving counsel is simply trying to be helpful and to share what wisdom would dictate. It can become legalism, but it doesn't have to be.

To give wise counsel about practical matters of life, every area of life, is not legalism. Paul did it in all his epistles. He was intrusive.

He told wives what they have to do in the home. Husbands what they had to do. Our society doesn't want any laws against homosexuality or abortion because we don't want anyone intruding into what we do in our bedroom.

The Apostle Paul didn't mind intruding into what Christians did in their bedroom. He told in 1 Corinthians 7, you women don't deprive your husbands and you husbands don't deprive your wives and give each other due benevolence. Paul talked about the nitty-gritty stuff of the sex life between married partners and all kinds of stuff, very intrusive stuff.

Do you know why? Because every area of life is supposed to be affected by your commitment to Jesus Christ. Because what happens when you become a Christian is you, at least you're supposed to, surrender your agenda, all your agendas, and you accept God's agendas as best you understand them. For someone to help you to understand them better should be something welcomed by those who want God's agenda.

Although sometimes it might seem too much if it's too soon. But I should also point out that the exercise of legitimate authority, for example, parents over children, is not legalism. That's an area where God has commanded obedience and has commanded parents to take authority.

And there are other areas where there's legitimate authority. The exercise of legitimate authority is not legalism. For the policeman to give you a ticket because you ran down somebody's dog and didn't stop to pay for it or something, that's not legalism.

That's what he's there for. I remember before Christa and I were married, I was driving her home from some church thing one night, and I hadn't... I do tend to drive a little fast at times. We were driving into Scotts Valley where her parents would have taken her home.

And I guess I didn't notice the speed limit. But there were no policemen there, fortunately. And I did drive in a little fast.

But she says, you might want to watch your speedometer. She says the cops here are kind of legalistic. Well, it's not legalistic for the cops to give you a ticket when you break the law.

There is such a thing as legitimate authority. I'm not saying speeding laws are legitimate or not. That's maybe debatable.

But the point is the Bible does indicate there is God-ordained authority in certain levels and institutions. And that is not legalism for someone to exercise legitimate authority. So what is legalism? Well, first of all, one reason it's very difficult to distinguish between legalism and simply advocacy of a high standard of obedience and holiness is because legalism is a slippery thing.

It's a spirit. Legalism is a spiritual dynamic. It's a demonic thing.

I'm not saying everyone who is legalistic has a demon. I'm just saying that it's devilish in its origin. And it works on you spiritually.

Some people have a legalistic spirit. And that's what a legalist is. Paul wrote a whole epistle against legalism.

And I'm sure many of you could tell me what epistle that is. Galatians. And the Galatian Christians were getting into legalism.

And he wrote to them in Galatians 3. And he said in verse 1, O foolish Galatians, who have bewitched you? The word in the Greek means who has cast a spell upon you that you should not obey the truth. He means that you should get into this legalistic thing of adopting Jewish circumcision. The legalism they were into, he said they've been bewitched.

Someone has cast a spell on them. Now he might be speaking figurative speech. He might not really literally mean it.

But he acts as though something has come over them and bewitched them. They've had a spiritual confusion come over them that's caused them to reject the gospel that he preached in favor of a legalistic alternative. It is also the case in Romans 8 where Paul is talking against legalism.

He says in verse 15, For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear. He means the bondage to the law. He's talking about legalistic bondage.

He says you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you've received the spirit of adoption. So what we have received is genuinely a spirit, the Holy Spirit, the spirit of adoption. What we have not received is also a spirit, a spiritual thing, which is the bondage to a legalistic approach to law.

Now legalism is therefore a spiritual dynamic, but it's manifest in actual attitudes and behaviors. And here's what some of them are. To define legalism is a little tricky because the Bible never uses the word.

The word legalism isn't in the Bible. But the concept is. And the most notorious examples of legalism that we can think of in the Bible, of course, are the Pharisees, right? I mean,



when we talk about legalism, we could use the term Phariseeism.

Now Jesus did a great deal to expose what legalism is by pointing out the errors of the Pharisees. And I think we can learn a lot about what we're getting into. Now the Pharisees' big problem was that they added to the Word of God.

You see, from the time of Moses and the prophets, there had been a lot of rabbis who had interpreted and added to the law with their own ideas. These things were called the traditions of the elders in Jesus' day. And the Pharisees criticized Jesus because he and his disciples didn't honor the traditions of the elders.

These traditions later in the 4th and 5th century were written down in what's called the Talmud. The Jews still follow the Talmud, conservative Jews, Orthodox Jews. They are Talmudic Jews.

They follow the authority of the Talmud. Well, so did the Pharisees. In fact, the Talmudic Jews today are simply in the Jewish community what the Pharisees were in Jesus' day.

The Pharisees believed not only in the law of God but also in the traditions of the elders, which in their day were only passed along orally but later were written down in the Talmud. They were Talmudic, rabbinic interpretations. Now, in doing so, they added a great deal to the Word of God.

And that was the big problem. They criticized Jesus and the disciples often for doing things that the Bible doesn't forbid but which their traditions forbid, like eating without washing their hands properly and that kind of stuff. And Jesus always indicated he couldn't care less about those traditions.

The Word of God is one thing and the traditions are something else. But the big problem, the foundational problem of the Pharisees was that they mixed man's ideas with God's ideas. They added to the Word of God.

It says in Proverbs 30, verses 5 and 6, Every word of God is pure. He is a shield to those who put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he rebuke thee, and thou be found a liar.

Proverbs 30, verses 5 and 6. If you add to the Word of God, God will not respect you. Eve added to the Word of God. She was the first legalist.

God said don't eat the fruit. She said we can't eat it or touch it. Well, God didn't say they couldn't touch it.

She added to the Word of God. And that legalistic addition didn't help her avoid sin. Legalism seldom does.

Putting yourself under laws doesn't help you really overcome sin. And Paul said that over

in Colossians chapter 2. He says, if you've been, you know, regenerated and all and you're seated with Christ in every place, why do you live as if you're under ordinances like touch not, taste not, handle not? Those are legalistic rules. He says those things, they have a show of wisdom and humility and will worship, but he said they don't have any effect on subduing the flesh.

You cannot subdue sin in your life by laws. You can restrict it and you can condemn it when it happens, but you can't eliminate it. That's not God's way.

Legalism tries to do so. It makes a lot of rules, builds a hedge around the law like the rabbis did, and that's what the Pharisees did. Now, the results of that in their lives were largely that they tended to apply the Word of God unevenly.

For their own convenience. They had traditions that allowed them to excuse themselves and justify themselves in disobedience to God and condemn others who were not even disobeying God. Let me give you some examples from Jesus' own teaching on this.

In Matthew 15, Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees for this very thing. Beginning at verse 3, Jesus answered and said unto them, Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honor your father and your mother, and he that curses his father or mother, let him die to death. But you say, and this is one of the traditions of the rabbis, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, or korban, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and honor not his father and his mother, he shall be free.

Thus you have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Now, that's kind of hard to understand in the King James. Actually, it's not really easy to understand in other translations either.

But what he's saying is this. The command of God is you have to honor your parents. But you have a tradition that says if you have something by which your parents could be profited if you'd only give it to them, and they need it.

But you don't want to. You don't want to honor them. You can commit the thing to God.

You can say it's korban. And then you can hold on to it as long as you want until you give it to God. But you can't give it to anyone else, including your parents.

So, if you really want to avoid helping your parents when you really have an obligation to do so, you can come up with this religious thing, this excuse to say, well, I've dedicated that to God. Sorry, folks. You can't have that.

And that's what they did. They made excuses for themselves with their traditions so that they didn't have to do what God actually said, honoring their parents. And so, a legalist applies the word of God unevenly.

They'll apply it strictly enough to condemn somebody else, but they'll have their own angle. Their own twist of things that justify them in doing whatever they want to do, even if it's a contrary to what the scripture says. The other side of that is that they would not recognize legitimate exceptions to what God said.

And that's something that a lot of Christians may feel like there's a slippery slope here when you talk about legitimate exceptions. Like, I mean, how can there be exceptions to what God commanded? Well, Jesus said there were. The legalists couldn't.

They were too inflexible, too rigid, because they didn't know the spirit of the law. They only knew what the words said. But you have an example of this in Matthew chapter 12, where Jesus and his disciples at the beginning of that chapter are walking through the grain fields.

They're picking the grain, rubbing it in their hands, eating it. Trouble is, it's the Sabbath day, and so they're doing some work on the Sabbath. They get criticized for that.

And when they do criticize Jesus for that, he answers in verse 4, or verse 3, he says, but he said to them, have ye not read what David did when he was hungry? And they that were with him, how he entered into the house of God and did eat the show bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests. Now, Jesus is basically saying David did something that broke a command of God. The command of God was only the priest was supposed to eat that bread, but David broke that law.

Jesus said, you know, you guys don't blame him for that. And frankly, I don't think Jesus blamed him for it, either. David was running He was starving, he needed food, he left without a meal, he ate the showbread.

The technical ceremonial law said only priests are supposed to eat that, but there are some things more important than the ceremonial law. The Pharisees though wouldn't recognize that. They didn't recognize that, you know, to feed somebody's hunger is more important than keeping some arcane Jewish ritual.

And that was God's assessment. God didn't blame David for that. He did blame him for other things.

He took him to task for sleeping with Bathsheba and killing Uriah, but he didn't, God never criticized David for eating the showbread. There was a legitimate exception made there. And Jesus points to it as a legitimate exception, just like his disciples rubbing grain on the Sabbath is working on the Sabbath.

That's a legitimate exception to the law about not doing any work on the Sabbath day. There are a lot of exceptions. Is God flexible? Like I said, it sounds dangerous to say that God is sometimes flexible, because it sounds like you've now just, you know, the camel's

nose is now in the tent and the small end of the wedge is now into our moral fiber.

And as soon as you say there could be exceptions, then you've got, what do you got, situational ethics or something, you know? Not so. But at the same time, in order to defend biblical ethics, we can't do so by ignoring what the Bible teaches or rejecting what the Bible teaches. Let me give you several examples where the Bible itself points out that God is more flexible than people sometimes give him credit for.

We are told by Jesus Christ in Matthew 19 that God never did really like divorce. But he said, but because of the hardness of heart, God permitted divorce in the Old Testament. Now, we should not try to follow that course of life that God permitted because of hardness of heart.

We should try to do what God preferred and what God really wanted. But the point is, God did make that exception. God didn't like divorce.

I don't think he liked polygamy either. But he allowed divorce, he allowed polygamy in the Old Testament. God was more flexible than we might give him credit for being in those days.

Now, there's other exceptions. God didn't want Israel to have a king. But the people of Israel came to Samuel and said, give us a king.

It didn't please God, it didn't please Samuel, but God said, give them what they want. God went with the people's will and it wasn't what he really wanted. But he accommodated them.

He let them have a king. And he said, okay, now, but you have to make sure you only have the king that I'll give you. I mean, we'll go with your plan.

It's not really my plan, it's your plan. But you still have to regulate this thing according to my instructions, he said. We have lots of examples of that.

God sent a prophet, Isaiah, to Hezekiah who was sick and said, you're going to die. Get your house in order or you're going to die. Hezekiah prayed and said, God, give me more time.

And God said, okay, I'll give you 15 more years. God adjusted his plan. And it would have been better had Hezekiah died when he did, when God said he was going to.

Because, as you probably know, he would have died childless. Because he had an extension of 15 years, three years later a son was born to him named Manasseh, who became king at age 12 when Hezekiah died. And that was the worst king Israel ever had.

It led the people into burning their children to Moloch and all kinds of horrible things. It would have been better if Hezekiah had died when God told him to die. But Hezekiah

said, God, please give me more time.

So God said, okay, go ahead, I'll give you 15 more years. It wasn't the best idea, but God... You know, David quoted last Sunday in his sermon, a psalm that says, God gave them their request and sent with it leanness of soul. Sometimes God will let you get away with something.

He'll even accommodate something that you ask for. It won't be the best thing for you. And it's not really what He really wants, but He has been known to make exceptions.

Now, because God makes exceptions, that's not an argument for us saying, let's ask God to make exceptions for us. God's exceptions are when He accommodates people, it's not really for their good. To do what God wanted in the first place is always for our good.

To ask God to make an exception for me here, make an exception for me there. You know, if God does, you're not the better off for it. It's better to go with God's perfect will than with what He's willing to permit.

Because He's very gracious. God permits far more than probably He'd prefer. We need to know the difference between what God requires and what God desires.

A legalist is only concerned about what God requires. Okay, I'll just do the thing that the law says I have to do. But grace in our hearts makes us say, what does God desire? Now, He obviously wants me to obey what He's written, but there's more than that.

He may allow some deviation from that and not strike someone with lightning, but I want to be right in the middle of what God wants. I mean, can I go to heaven if I date? I think so, probably. Depends on how much I get corrupted by that and how far I go.

But the fact of the matter is, I don't think everyone who dates goes to hell. Is that what God wants them to do? I don't think so, biblically. I don't think dating is what God desires.

A legalist doesn't recognize that God has grace and sometimes will permit, without condemnation, things that are less than what He knows to be His perfect will. Now, like I said, without condemnation, but not without consequences. When we ask God to stretch for us or make an exception for us, to be flexible with us, He may do so, but that flexibility doesn't mean that we can avoid the consequences of that.

Hezekiah got what he asked for, but he didn't avoid the consequences of Manasseh coming along. There's quite a few things in the New Testament that indicate that God's perfect will is one way that He'll allow something less. But the Christian is motivated by the desire to do what God really wants, not with the least He'll permit.

And a legalist wants to do only what God requires. A person who's motivated by grace

says, OK, I know what God requires, but I want to know more. I want to know what does He really want to.

I mean, He may not require me to do a certain thing, but does He really want me to? If He does, then I want to do that. Now, there are exceptions that God makes in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 6, verses 4 and 7, we read that God's preference is that Christians do not go to court.

That Christians rather let themselves be defrauded. Just absorb the injury rather than defend themselves in court. But He says if you do go to court, you should at least do it before a Christian.

You should take your dispute before a wise Christian rather than to the secular courts. Now, you can't do both those things. You can't absorb the injury graciously and take it before a Christian tribunal.

But either one is permissible. Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 6, 7 that God's preference is that you just accept the wrong against yourself. Just absorb it, not fight it.

But in verse 4, He does permit if you must, if you feel you must, then you can go bring it before a Christian tribunal and get it settled. It might be better not to fight it at all. But God seemingly will permit it if it's before a Christian not before the worldly courts.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says that in verses 10 and 11 that a woman should not depart from her husband. But if she does, then she should remain single or be reconciled to her husband. Now, God's perfect will is that she doesn't depart from her husband.

If she does, then there's plan B. God will say, okay, you've left. I'm not going to send you to hell for that, but now here's what I require you in this state. You stay celibate or be reconciled to your husband.

God has a perfect will and God apparently has that which He will permit. But we should never be looking to do what He will permit merely, but what His perfect will is. Another example is in 1 Corinthians 7 verses 27 and 28.

Paul says that, well, let me read this one. He says that it's good not to marry, but he says, in fact, he commands, stay in the condition you're in. Are you bound to a wife? Don't seek to be loosed.

Are you loosed from a wife? Don't seek a wife. But then he says, but if you do marry, you haven't sinned. Now, he's just said don't seek a wife.

How do you get married if you don't seek a wife? He said, if you're single, be content to be single. But that's the God's highest counsel to you right now. But if you get married, you haven't sinned.

In other words, God will permit that too. There's one thing that God really advocates as His highest. There's something else that He will put up with without condemnation.

Paul indicated in 1 Corinthians 9 that many of the apostles, all the apostles except himself and Barnabas actually charged money for the ministry, but he wouldn't. He thought it was a higher way to go. To not charge.

He said, he says, you know, is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to be paid for the ministry like Peter and the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord do? And yet, he says, his own conscience told him that it was better to freely give and not to charge although he didn't feel he should condemn those who did charge. He says, well, you know, the laborer is worthy of his hire. You don't muzzle the ox while he treads up the corn.

Apparently, I think of George Mueller and Hudson Taylor who took the approach of not only not taking a salary but they didn't ever let anyone know their needs. Now, I think that's the high road to go in ministry. I think that's what Jesus did.

But, there's nothing in the Bible that says that it's a sin to let people know your needs and a minister who does that, I don't think he's sinning. I think he's maybe not taking the highest road but he's not sinning and not violating a direct command. So, there are these various examples in the scripture where God says do this but if you do this other thing then you got to regulate this plan B behavior with these instructions.

God recognizes that for the hardness of heart sometimes, you know, there's an occasion for him to bear with less than perfect behavior. A legalist has no flexibility where God does. But, having said that, just because we recognize that God will allow us to allow something less than perfect doesn't mean that we should endeavor to live less than perfect.

Jesus said, be perfect even as your father in heaven is perfect. That's the goal and we should strive for it. For someone to say, well, God will accept a lower goal than perfection therefore, I'll aim at that lower goal is not a Christian attitude.

That's a legalist's attitude. The legalist says, I'll do what the law says I have to do, what God requires, absolutely. But, the Christian says, okay, it's not just what I'm commanded to do, but what really conforms to the perfect will of God.

That's what I want. I want to go beyond. The attitude of a person who is motivated by grace is that that person wants to do more than is required.

Paul wrote to Philemon as he was sending Onesimus back and he said, you know, how did he say it? Philemon, I'd like to give it to you because it's really a good example of the attitude of somebody who's not under law. Verse 21 of Philemon, he says, having confidence in thy obedience, I wrote unto thee knowing that thou wilt also do more than I

say. Now, Paul says, Philemon, I know your Christian character so much.

I know your obedience is such that although I'm only going to command you to do this much, I know your heart. You're going to do more than I command. In fact, Paul indicated that by not taking money for the ministry, he was doing more than was required.

He said that, you know, God has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. He says, I have not used this right. I want to go beyond what's required of me.

I want to sacrifice more than God requires me to sacrifice. I want to be as perfect as I can be. Now, to have the desire to be as perfect as you can be is not legalistic.

It is legalistic only if you are being perfect because you feel that anything less than perfection will damn you. It's not, and if you impose an inflexible standard on other people. See, an aspect of Phariseeism is that they condemned others and justified themselves.

The Christian should have the opposite attitude, much more willing to try to find some way to excuse others' imperfect behavior, but hard on oneself. You know the old motto that some Christians have adopted, others may, but I cannot. You may decide that a television just doesn't belong in your home as a Christian, or the internet or some other thing.

Now, I have the internet. I'm not trying to say that Christians shouldn't ever have internet access, but I have several friends that I'm in fellowship with who will not have the internet in their home because they feel that the access to pornography is too easy there and so forth, and they just don't think it's good spiritually for them. Now, are they legalistic? They're just wise.

Legalism is not the same thing as wisdom. Let me give you a few Scriptures and then I'm going to have to quit. In 1 Corinthians 6, and you know these Scriptures, but this really shows the difference between legalism and wisdom.

To have a high standard of holiness can be simply wisdom, not legalism. In 1 Corinthians 6, in verse 12, Paul said, All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient. The New King James says, They don't propel me toward the goal that I'm seeking.

There are some things I can get away with because there's no law against them. Now, by the way, when Paul said, All things are lawful to me, some antinomians have gone so far and said, That means you can do any kind of sin and it's lawful. In the context, he's talking about eating and drinking certain foods.

He's not saying that fornication is okay. In fact, he goes on in the same chapter to point out it's not so. He says, Eating foods, that's not a big issue, but the body is not made for



fornication.

That's a different issue. You involve Christ in that. You defile Christ in that.

Paul was not saying that fornication is lawful. What he's saying is that in certain contexts, for example, when you eat and drink, all things are lawful. No one can tell you on the basis of Scripture, you can't eat pork.

Not on the basis of New Testament Scripture. No one can tell you you can't drink wine on the basis of New Testament Scripture. But it may be wise not to do either.

It may be that doing those things is not expedient, not helpful. If you turn to 1 Corinthians 10, we see he says it again, twice actually, in 1 Corinthians 10, 23. He says, All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.

Same thing he said in chapter 6, verse 12. Then he says, All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Edify means build up.

Now, here is the perfect balance between legalism and wisdom. A person can say, Well, drinking, a lot of people when they drink alcohol, they get drunk. It's a bad deal.

Christians should never touch alcohol. And we had that written into our church creed in the back of our hymnal in the Baptist church I grew up in. It was like a church covenant they called it.

I promise to abstain from the sale and use of all intoxicating beverage. Half the deacons stopped reading it, I don't know if I can take that line. But the fact is, it was something that I don't know that the church really had the right to impose it.

You can't impose that rule biblically. The Bible doesn't say to avoid all intoxicating beverage, but it is wise to avoid it. You cannot say that it is unlawful for a Christian to drink a glass of wine.

There is no biblical case for that. But you can say, Why would you drink wine? You know, someone asked me on the air today on the radio program, What do you think about birth control? The real issue is not the Bible says don't use birth control. You know what? The Bible doesn't say that.

The Bible does not say thou shalt not use birth control. If you use birth control, you are not violating any command of scripture. I want you to know that right off.

But the question I have for the person is, Why are you interested in using birth control? Now, the issue is not that it is wrong to use birth control, it is just, what is your motivation? Certainly what Jesus taught is that even doing a good thing with bad motives, it makes it a bad thing. Proverbs says, Even the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. Sacrifice is a good thing.

Even the prayer of the wicked is an abomination. Praying and sacrifice, those are good things, but you do it from an evil motive and it becomes an evil thing. Now, the question is not, does the Bible say you can or cannot use birth control? That is not the issue.

The issue is, in making a decision like that, what is it that is motivating you? What are you looking at there? What are you trying to accomplish here? You see, wisdom knows what the goal is and recognizes the most direct path to that goal and recognizes what side issues would take you away from that goal. So when Paul said, Nothing is unlawful for me in this area, but not all things are expedient. That is, not everything will help me toward the goal of where I want to go.

And I've got to be wise enough to recognize which things will get me to that goal and which things will not. The Bible actually does not have a command, Thou shalt not date. And I don't believe that everybody who has ever been out on a date in so doing has sinned.

The Bible does not, in so many words, forbid it. I'm not a legalist about that. I can say, but is it expedient? Are you a Christian whose desire is to please God in all areas of life and live a holy life and to act honorably toward the opposite sex and to treat them as the Bible says, as, you know, treat the younger women as sisters with all purity? If that's your desire, is dating really advantageous? Is it really wise? I believe there are commands of Scripture which usually get violated when people date.

But the Scripture doesn't specifically say don't date. It's just that dating is, in most cases, the first step into the violation of something that actually is forbidden in Scripture. And I'm not just talking about outright fornication.

There's a lot of things that come short of premarital sex that are actually forbidden in Scripture. And it's hard to go on a date and not get into any of that. It's really hard to go toward the goal wisely, to take the wise course toward the goal of holiness and still do some of these things that aren't straight out forbidden.

And that is why the difference between legalism and wisdom is if someone says, you know, let me advocate that you rethink this issue. I want you to rethink this issue that nobody seems to want to rethink in our culture. Rethink this and consider this other option and see, is this the wisdom of God? Not does God require you to give up this or that or to throw your TV out.

I don't say Christians can't have a TV. I know that I can't. And I never have.

I've never had a functioning TV in my home, in my whole adult life. Now, you might say, oh, you're so holier than thou. Actually, it's not because I'm too good to have a TV.

I'm not good enough to have a TV. There are people who are better than me and they can have a TV in their home and it doesn't hurt them. It would hurt me because I'm not

strong enough.

I'm not good enough. I'm not holy enough. I'm not holier than someone else.

Because I am so unholy, I can't wisely allow myself a television within my reach. If I ever begin to discover on the Internet pornography sites, it will probably get down to me saying I have to get rid of the Internet too. Not because no Christian can be on the Internet.

There's no command in Scripture that thou shalt not be on the Internet. But if it's leading to temptation, then there's a very good reason to not have it in my life. That's wisdom.

That's not legalism. Now, when I get to the point where I say, well, because I can't have a TV, no Christian is allowed to have a TV, that's legalism. If I say, well, because I think it's wrong to, for me, to, you know, drive a new, get a new car every two years, no Christian should spend their money that way.

Well, that's between them and God. That's not between them and me. I have to follow what I consider to be the most consistent biblical patterns in all areas of my life.

I can tell other people what I believe those are. And I can give them the biblical reasons for my thinking so. But I can't, in many cases, if I'm saying something that goes beyond what Scripture says, I can't say, you must do this particular thing.

But I'm saying that wise Christians who really want to get to this goal of holiness, I don't think they can find a wiser course than to get rid of some of this and get rid of some of that and do this. It's not legalism. It's just godly wisdom.

It's saying this is the direction not all paths lead to perfect holiness. There's a lot of paths that wander in and out and some of them end up back on the main path. Some of them go off eternally in the wrong direction.

But the wise person says, what's the straightest path? The legalist says, how much can I get away with and still be saved? You've heard perhaps the story about the rich woman who was wanting to hire a chauffeur and she lived up on this really beautiful mountain overlooking a beautiful view, but the road up to it was rather narrow and steep at certain points, kind of dangerous, sheer cliff on one side and mountain on the other. She ran an ad in the paper that she wanted to hire a chauffeur. The first guy that came along, she said, well, why don't you take me for a drive down my road and let's see how you do.

So he drove down the road and she said, there's a pretty narrow spot here in the road. It's always seemed kind of dangerous to me and I wonder, how near can you get to that edge of the road there without falling over? How skilled are you as a driver? He said, I can get within six inches of that edge and safely get by it. And he showed her.

Sure enough, he did. And he took her home and she didn't hire him. The next guy took her for a test drive and at the same point in the road, she says, how near can you get to the edge of the road here and not fall over the edge? He says, I drove roads far worse than this in Vietnam.

He says, I could get within three inches of that edge of that road and get you safely by. And he showed her. Sure enough, he was able to do it.

They got safely by within three inches. She didn't hire him either. And the third guy took her for a ride down that road and she said, how near do you think you can get to the edge of that road there to that spot without going over the edge? And he said, ma'am, that's a very dangerous spot in the road.

When I get to that part of the road, I'm going to stay as far from the edge as I can get. And she hired him. She was not interested in how talented they were as drivers and how many risks they could take and get away with it.

She was interested in who was going to be smart enough to avoid the danger. And the legalist wants to know, how much sin can I do and still get to heaven? That's legalism. A Christian says, how can I avoid the traps and the dangers that are likely to make war against my soul and pollute me and spoil my witness for Christ and how can I stay right in the center of God's will? Where the Christian wants to be is the center of God's will.

When I started out in the ministry, I was answering questions for new converts for a ministry that didn't hire me. They commissioned me but I didn't get paid. But one of the questions I heard from teenage Christians, new Christians all the time was, how much can you do on a date with a person? Can you put your arm around them? Can you kiss them? Can you hug them? Can you hold hands? What can you do? And I mean, although I didn't know anything about what I know about the trouble and so forth in those days.

I didn't believe in dating even when I was 16 and I said, you know what? These are the wrong questions to be asking. The question is not how much carnality can I introduce into this relationship without totally destroying my soul. The question ought to be, how much holiness can I retain in all my relationships? How can I avoid all carnality? How can I live a life that glorifies God in everything? How can I, as Peter says, be holy in all manner of behavior even when I'm even as God is holy? That's my concern.

And I'm not going to get legalistic with people. If they don't think, if they don't see some of the issues the same way I do, you'll never get me condemning you. But I am concerned to know how can I rethink all the areas of life and find a more biblical pattern that is more expedient, that is more expedient toward reaching the goal of consistent Christian holiness as a people.

Not just me, but as a people. Now, I can't tell you I can't impose it on others, but I can

hope to commend the wisdom of certain lifestyle choices to you. If you don't agree with them, because I'm not a legalist, I can't and don't even want to enforce them.

It's not a matter of enforcement. It's not a matter of making laws. It's a matter of seeking the will of God and finding out if there's a word from the Lord that will help us to find a more wise path than the church has currently taken in all areas of life.

In future lectures, we'll be talking about all the categories. Family life, boy-girl relations, entertainment. We'll be talking about money a lot.

That's a big thing in America. It's a big thing in the Bible. And almost every time we talk about one of these subjects, it's going to ride against the grain of what you've probably heard in church before, in most churches.

And not because I'm against the churches, but because for some reason I've been told there's a strange departure from what the Bible says in the Western church. And that departure has weakened the church, emasculated the church, and caused the church not only to lose its testimony, but in many cases to lose its soul. And I think that what we as Christians need to decide is it going to be worth it to me to make all the changes necessary to live a holy life in all areas of conversation.

I might stand out like a sore thumb in this world. I might get a lot of abuse from the world who doesn't understand my reasons for what I do. But the question is, is it worth it to be obedient in all things to God and to seek His glory in all things? Paul said, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.

That gets down to the very ordinary stuff of life. And that's our commission.