

## CHAPTER 8 THE RESPONSIBLE CHRISTIAN

### *Freedom and Limits*

Few things excite me more than visiting a foreign country. Traveling offers the willing person a chance to grow and learn. Preparation serves as a key element in visiting another nation. Learning as much as possible about the country before visiting is vital.

Pondering all the issues can be exhausting. What offends the citizens? What types of foods do they regularly serve? What kinds of clothes do they wear? What's illegal and what's not? What parts of the country are safe?

Visitors should seek to be responsible and grateful guests. It would be shameful for someone visiting a foreign country to insult the local people. For example, it's rude to show the bottom of your feet in Thailand or to give something to someone with your left hand in Indonesia. In Vietnam, you should motion for someone to come to you with your hand and palm turned downward, instead of upward like we do in the U.S. In South Korea, in some circles, Koreans commonly turn down an invitation or offer three times before accepting it. In certain countries, people initially laugh when something tragic or embarrassing occurs, not because they think it's funny, but because it's the way they deal with certain difficult situations.

A tourist should be careful not to offend while at the same time not becoming easy prey for those who take advantage of foreigners' ignorance. People living outside their home country often struggle with what they can, or can't, do because they want to be responsible guests in their host country.

Likewise, Christians who live in intimacy with God and have an awareness of Satan's ploys often struggle with what they can or can't do because they desire to be effective and responsible Christians. Aware of such struggles, the Apostle Paul talked about believers' freedoms and responsibilities in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

Paul avoided activities that would spiritually hinder or offend Christians. Paul lived free from bondage to "dos" and "do nots," but he realized that not all things worked for his good (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). He wanted everything he did to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

What about the morality of certain television shows, secular music, movies, drinking alcohol, smoking, gambling, etc.? Although I don't have the perfect answer to all of these scenarios, keep in mind that wherever you go and whatever you do, Christ goes with you (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:15).

Ask yourself, "What does Scripture teach me to do?" Although the answer will not always be obvious, sometimes it will.

Don't go where Christ would not want you to go (for instance, into a strip club), and, likewise, do what Christ would want you to do (like share your faith). Certain movies and music can damage your Christian life and should be avoided. But I'm not going to name specific titles, bands or genres, rather I want to encourage you to fill your mind with things that will make you more like Christ.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

Before you sigh with despair, realize that Christianity consists of having a relationship with Christ, not just obeying commandments and following rules. Relationships do require responsibility, but they also provide fulfillment and fun. Have a good time and enjoy life, but don't harm yourself or others in the process. Furthermore, for those wrestling with whether certain issues and habits are acceptable, ask yourself these questions:<sup>110</sup>

- 1). Does it violate any clear teaching of Scripture?
- 2). Does it destroy any part of you?
- 3). Does it hinder a nonbeliever or a weaker believer from coming closer to Christ?
- 4). Does it violate the express will of one's authority (i.e., not permitted by your employer)?
- 5). Does it glorify God? Can you, with a clear conscience, ask God to bless it?
- 6). What motivates you to do this activity?
- 7). Is this the wisest choice to make?

Answering these questions will not clarify every query you have, but it may point you in the right direction.

Even though 2 Corinthians 5:17 says Christ made you *new* at salvation, your struggles remain. Bad habits might continue to tempt you as a new Christian. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul states that believers should not be addicted to anything. If you can't seem to break a habit, get help from someone in the church, or from another mature believer outside of your congregation. Christ has not come to put you in bondage, but to give you freedom and victory (John 10:10).

### *Family*

Healthy societies can't exist without healthy families.<sup>111</sup> In Genesis 2, God made the first family--one *man* to live with one *woman* for life.<sup>112</sup> This model reflects God's ideal family.

Because of divorce and unforgiveness, many broken families fill the American landscape. Nonetheless, God still wants these broken families to glorify Him. The family was God's idea, not society's, therefore, society has no right to redefine the family. Satan attacks the family through sexual perversions, like affairs, incest, pornography, and homosexuality.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Some of these questions derive from Byang Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Jos, Nigeria: Challenge, 1976), 55.

<sup>111</sup> By "health," I have the traditional nuclear family in mind, in which the members of the family remain a unit and love each other.

<sup>112</sup> Notice what the Bible says about the family in Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1.

<sup>113</sup> All of these are clearly sins: Genesis 19:4-11; Leviticus 18:22; 20:10-17; Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

Satan would also like to destroy your family through fighting and divorce.<sup>114</sup> Even if you are married to a non-Christian, God wants your marriage to succeed (1 Corinthians 7; 1 Peter 3:1-7). Among other sins, God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). God doesn't hate divorced people, but He does hate divorce. Divorce serves as the world's answer for marital conflict, but forgiveness is God's answer (Colossians 3:12-17).

Even though God cherishes the family, He wants our devotion focused ultimately on Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not *hate* his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26, NKJV, emphasis added). Here *hate* does not mean you should despise your family with bitterness; it stresses a point by using an extreme. Thomas à Kempis, 1380-1471, said it beautifully: "Grant, O Jesus, that I may love You more than I love my relatives and friends. That all my efforts be centered in knowing You, loving You and imitating You. O God of love, grant that I may love You as I should; that is, with a love which surpasses all other love. Amen."<sup>115</sup> The old saint's point seems clear. Love God so much that your love for family seems like hatred (Matthew 10:37). I've known Christian men to take this verse to the extreme and leave their families to study the Bible at seminary. Somehow, I don't think that's what Jesus had in mind. Loving one another remains a part of the way Christians show their love for God (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14).

Although God ultimately leads the family, the husband is responsible for spiritually leading his family and physically providing for them (Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:23, 29). Scripture commands the husband to love his wife as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29, 33). The husband should strive to understand and honor his wife. He lives with her as a partner, not her dictator (1 Peter 3:7).

Furthermore, the wife should submit to her husband even if she thinks he doesn't deserve it (Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:1). Although she should never do anything against God's Word merely because her husband wants her to, she should still submit according to the biblical model. Titus 2:3-5 outlines her responsibilities.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Deuteronomy 24:1,3; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:7-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, 27-28, 39

<sup>115</sup> *The Imitation of Christ*, Book 1, Chapter 8, Jamaica Plain, Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1962, 36.

<sup>116</sup> The husband should love, protect, and provide for his wife as Christ loved the church. He's not a tyrant, but he is her leader, a servant-leader. Most husbands could probably do more to assist their wives around the house. Christ led and served by washing feet and dying. So the husband leads and makes important decisions with his wife, putting her needs above his own. The wife nurtures her husband and children. She also submits to her husband. This doesn't mean that she's his doormat, but that she allows him to lead the family in a godly way. Submission doesn't mean the husband always gets what he wants, either. After all, how could he if he loves his wife as Christ loves the church. Any marriage must have compromise and understanding. But submission means

Not only should wives submit to their husbands, but children should obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3 and Colossians 3:20). The result of following the biblical pattern should result in the harmonious family God desires for believers.

### *Government*

Believers are responsible to God, their families, the church, and the government. Though God does not necessarily agree with all that governmental officials do, He has granted the government power and authority (Proverb 21:1; Romans 13:1-7). You should pray for, and give honor to, government leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:17). Titus 3:1 requires you to obey the government and the law of the land (e.g., speed limits, taxes, etc.).

In Matthew 22:21, Peter inquires of Jesus whether or not he should pay his taxes, and Jesus tells Peter to give the government the things that belong to the government. (Also see Romans 13:7.)

What about civil disobedience? Whether or not you like the government leaders is irrelevant. Obey them unless they require you to do something that violates Scripture. Peter and John faced such an incident in Acts 4 when the governing officials told them to stop spreading the gospel. They disobeyed the government, and obeyed God rather than man, because the government blatantly violated Jesus' command to share the good news. However, this text does not sanction all forms of civil disobedience. Regardless of the restrictions placed on Christians, God's followers can still demonstrate effective lives that testify to the integrity of the church and to the goodness of God.

### *Summary*

Since believers live under the authority of Christ, they should want to live responsibly. Often, believers struggle with what they are and aren't allowed to do. Perhaps believers struggle so much because the Bible doesn't specifically address every possible situation that a believer may encounter. Yet, believers can obey Scripture and enjoy life at the same time. Believers, however, should be sensitive that their actions don't cause less spiritually mature believers to stumble. Believers also have a responsibility to take care of their families and respect the government.

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that the wife is willing to respect her husband and support him as he leads the family. In essence, the wife submits to her husband in a way similar to the way a congregation should submit to their pastor(s). The pastor(s) makes decisions based on Scripture and occasional congregational input while leading them gently. So, it is with a husband. He's not a boss *per se*, making decisions that the wife has to comply with, but he's able to lead as he loves his wife and as she submits to him out of respect. A simple book illustrating this concept is William Hendricks and Robert Lewis, *Marriage Roles* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991). A well-written evangelical book with an opposing view is Gilbert Bilezikian's, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 12<sup>th</sup> printing, January 2001, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed [1985]).

***Assignments***

1. Memorize Romans 14:21, "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."
2. List some things that you do that could be causing other Christians to stumble.

***Discussion Questions***

1. When did the family begin?
2. As a Christian, do you have the freedom to do anything you wish?
3. When is the only time that governmental laws should be ethically violated?

***Answers to Chapter 8 Discussion Questions***

1. When did the family begin? *God created the first family in Genesis 2 with Adam and Eve. He meant the family to be one man with one woman for life.*
  
2. As a Christian, do you have the freedom to do anything you wish? *No. When Paul said "all things were lawful" for him in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23, he didn't mean that he could do anything he wanted. Otherwise, he would have contradicted himself in 6:13 where he said that "the body isn't for sexual immorality ." Rather, when he said "all things are lawful," he might have been speaking of issues such as suing someone or eating food offered to idols, etc. He could do those things, but they weren't necessarily the best things to do in every situation. Or he was quoting a statement from the Corinthians that he didn't agree with.*
  
3. When is the only time that governmental laws should be ethically violated? *Only in cases where the law is asking you to violate the teachings of Scripture.*