

(1 Timothy) Goodness, Grace, and Freedom

by Brian Brodersen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's grace and goodness, and how legalism can distort our concept of God and lead to guilt, fear, and despair.

Duration: 1:01:51

Topics: "Legalism", "True Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the teacher discusses the story of a man who signed a covenant with his church to abstain from various activities in order to be right with God. However, this decision led to a life of misery, condemnation, frustration, and anger for him and his family. The teacher then draws a parallel to the Israelites who were sent into captivity in Babylon due to their idolatry. During the inter-testamental period, a group of zealous men arose in Israel to study and communicate the law to prevent future violations and captivity. The teacher emphasizes that true spirituality is not achieved through bodily exercise, but through cultivating godliness and following the teachings of the Bible.

Transcript

1 Timothy chapter 4, let me read to you once again from verse 1. There Paul says, Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God in prayer. If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ.

Remember, Paul is writing to Timothy and he's instructing him on how to conduct himself in the house of God, the church of the living God. And so Paul gives Timothy this insight into the future that there will come a time when people are going to depart from the faith. They're going to come under the influence of demonic teaching.

And so he warns about that, and then he goes on to exhort Timothy to instruct the people in the right things. And the contrast here really, in many ways, is the contrast between the grace of God and all of the various manifestations of legalism that can potentially crop up within the church. So when he says to Timothy in verse six, if you instruct the brethren in these things, that these things are really in contrast to the false teachings, the false teachings of legalism, forbidding to marry, commanding to abstain from

meat.

So. Paul's. Setting forth a contrast to that.

So what would be. The these things in contrast to those legalistic things, it would really be the goodness of God, the grace of God and the liberty that comes to us in Christ. That's what Paul is saying to Timothy.

Timothy, if you instruct the people in the goodness of God, in the grace of God and in the freedom that they have in Christ Jesus, you will be a good minister. That's what a good minister does. He instructs the people of God in the goodness of God and in the grace of God.

You see, God wants us to be free. He wants us to be basking in his goodness and his grace. He wants our lives to be full of joy.

And if we get caught up in legalism of any sort, the joy is gone. We lose sight of the goodness and we forget all about the grace. And so we have got to keep before our minds constantly the grace of God.

And this, of course, was Paul's great mission to bring the people back to an understanding of the grace of God or actually to bring it to them originally. But then he had to keep fighting to oftentimes bring them back to it because they would so often drift away, Paul says here. In contrast to those who are forbidding to marry, commanding to abstain from foods and so forth.

He says that these these things that they're restricting people from these are things that were actually created by God and to be received with Thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth for every creature of God is good and nothing is to be refused. The reason why Paul is passionate about this is because ultimately the very. Conception of God is what's at stake.

You know, your life will, to a large degree, as a Christian, your life and your experience will be determined by your concept of God. If your concept of God is something other than a God of grace and goodness who wants to give us freedom. Your your life experience will be a miserable life experience.

You know, when you look at religion, religion is legalism in a variety of different forms, it doesn't matter where you look in the realm of religion, you find that there's always a work ethic attached to it, and ultimately it's a it's a legalistic system and it breeds one of two things. It breeds. Either pride.

Or it breeds despair, usually for the most part, it breeds despair, people living under these burdens. And feeling hopeless and like they're never going to make it. And there's guilt and fear and all of these kinds of things.

I mean, you know, maybe you've read some of the responses or maybe you've even heard some of the things that have been said in reference to the tsunamis. Now, of course, those destructive waves struck in regions where Hinduism and Islam and Buddhism are the dominant religions. And what what is being sensed in what the people are saying is that they somehow are connecting this to God.

Their their concept is that God has done this to them and God has done this to them because they haven't been devout enough in their religion, they haven't sacrificed enough, they haven't given enough, they haven't obeyed enough or something like that. And that's really a picture. Of what we're talking about here, that's what religion does, it breeds this sense of condemnation and guilt and fear and dread of God so that you walk around in fear that lightning is going to strike you or something like that, or when any little thing

goes wrong and automatically, oh, that's God, he's after me, he's he's punishing me because I did this or I didn't do that or I thought this or I didn't think that.

And so you see what happens with. Legalism, it causes us to have a distorted concept of God, and that's why Paul fights against it constantly. Because this is not God.

God is not like what he is so often being misrepresented as being like. God is not petty, he's not hung up on little unimportant kinds of things. You remember how Jesus would rebuke the Pharisees? He was so upset with them because ultimately they were misrepresenting God.

That was the biggest problem with them. The people watching the Pharisees thought that God was like them. Now, how did the Pharisees treat the common people? They treated them with disdain.

They treated them with contempt. They would. Snarl at them and, you know, give the impression that.

They were worthless and and, you know, bound for judgment when a Pharisee would walk through a crowd, he would put his robe as close to himself as possible, lest he would rub against the centers, and. This, of course, was creating an impression among the people that this is how God is. But nothing could be further from the truth, and so it's because the concept of God is at stake here.

It's because of that that Paul so heroically really defends the position of God's grace. So he says, this is what we need to understand. We need to understand that God created things to be received by him with thanksgiving.

And that every creature of God is good and it's not to be refused. The word refused here could be translated, it's not to be thrown out. One of the.

Translations of the Bible renders the word tabooed. What is something that is tabooed, something that is tabooed is something that is forbidden. Don't touch it, don't taste it, don't handle it.

Paul addressed that with the Colossians. The heathen religions are full of taboos. And as I said, subsequently, the people live in bondage to fear, they're always afraid that they're going to be doing something that is offending God and therefore they live in in fear and dread of some judgment coming upon them because they're everything's taboo.

Now, that's the sort of the essence of demonic religion to bring people into bondage to these these petty rules and nonsensical superstitions and things like that. That's the essence of of heathenism. There should be nothing even remotely like that among God's people.

But sadly, that kind of stuff is crept into the church and it's been around for ever, it seems Paul was battling it in his day and and they needed to keep on battling right down to today because the church is still full of these kinds of things, superstitions and phobias and things that develop in people's minds because they've been falsely instructed. They've been in they've been instructed in the wrong concept of God to think that God is primarily full of wrath and anxiously awaiting their slip up so he can judge them. Nothing can be further from the truth.

And so it's the goodness of God, the grace of God and the liberty that comes in Jesus. That's what Paul is saying to Timothy. Timothy instruct the people in these things.

That's what you want to teach God's people. You know, I do think that today, because of certain segments of the church being caught up in various forms of legalism and legalism can be very blatant and obvious. It can also be very subtle.

And not so obvious, but yet it's definitely there. I have encountered situations where. Legalism was present, but it wasn't so obvious that you could just point out, say, oh, there it is right there.

Sometimes in some in some senses, you couldn't even necessarily see it, but you could feel it. It's like an atmosphere, it's like a presence. And.

It's because of the presence of legalism within the church that I think a lot of people are turned off by their perception of Christianity. That's what they think of it as they think of it as. A system of rigid rules and regulations, and so they're.

They're repelled by it, they they don't want to move in that direction, they don't want to think in those terms, but it's a misrepresentation of what it is. And again, the unfortunate thing is that quite often it's been the church that's given the false view to people, this whole thing we talked about it previously, but this whole thing of forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods. This was all the outworking of the ascetic mentality, which was that the the the true way to holiness or godliness was intense denial of of the physical desires.

This was the thinking that somehow. Suppression of the natural desires equaled or, you know, led to a greater degree of holiness. And that's what Paul is fighting against here.

Listen to what he goes on to say, which says that if you instruct them in these things, you'll be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of good doctrine, which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives fables and exercise yourself toward godliness or train yourself toward godliness. Now, listen for bodily exercise profits a little.

But godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful, sane and worthy of all acceptance. Now, I used to think when I read this eighth verse that.

It was mainly dealing with just the whole idea of, you know, working out, getting in shape and. Telling us, you know, not to put that is too much of a priority, but to concentrate on the things of the spirit. You know, that's not really what it's talking about, although it seems like it is in our English translation.

And it seems like it is because that's generally what we think of. But it's not talking about that totally. We have to understand that verse eight is connected to verse three.

Verse seven is connected to verse three, the wives fables that Paul says to Timothy to reject the wives fables are what's declared in verse three, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods. You see, here's what Paul is saying, and this is what he's really talking about here. It's that idea.

That. True spirituality is manifested in a denial of the flesh. That's the path to true spirituality.

A lot of people think that. But that's not it. You see, when he says bodily exercise, he's not talking about jumping jacks, he's not talking about push ups, he's not talking about that.

He's talking about this teaching that had come in that was saying in order to be really spiritual, you must suppress all of the fleshly tendencies. Now, that sounds good and right, doesn't it? But you see, it's not. It's not accurate.

That's not what Christianity is about. Buddhism is about that. Buddhism is about suppressing.

Desire getting rid of desire, but that's not what Christianity is about. You see, Christianity is not about self-denial, although a lot of people think it is. Christianity is not about that.

It's about something totally different. It's not about me giving all my effort and my deep concentration toward suppressing. My humanness.

That's what that was the mistake that they made in the monasteries and the monasteries are just the outworking of asceticism. Asceticism is that that rigid denial of the flesh. But you know what happened in the monasteries, they were in there suppressing the flesh with every bit of strength they had, but they found that, man, it wouldn't go away.

They locked themselves away from the world, thinking that the only way to have victory is to get as far away from the world as possible. But then, although they. Isolated themselves, they found that there were still all kinds of evil desires and things within them.

There's another passage that Paul addresses the same thing, and I want you to turn back to Colossians with me. The second chapter. And let me show you what he's really talking about here.

Colossians chapter two, verse 18. He says, Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind and not holding fast to the head from whom all the body nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments grows with the increase that is from God. Therefore, now listen to what he says here.

If you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why is the living in the world? Do you subject yourself to regulations? Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle which all concern things which perish with the using according to the commandments and doctrines of men. You see, this is how you know if the doctrine is from God or men, if it's from men, it says, do not touch, do not taste, do not handle. That's.

That's where man is at, but that's that's not from God. Now, listen to what he says, though. He says these things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility and neglect or suppression of the body, but they are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

See what Paul is saying? He says, yeah, this stuff looks good and it sounds spiritual and you might think it's right, because after all, of course, we ought to be suppressing our desires and things like that. But he said, no, that's not the way to do it. That's his whole point.

That's not Christ way. You see, here's what it comes down to. It's not a matter of denying the flesh.

But rather, one of building up the spirit. See, the Bible does not teach self-denial. The Bible teaches that we're dead in Christ and we need to realize that and consider it to be a reality.

And that we are to put all of our energy into. Cultivating the life of the spirit. I'm not to waste my energy on trying to suppress the flesh, I'm to use all my energy on cultivating the life of the spirit.

Guess why? When the spirit is strong, the flesh is under control. But people make the mistake of trying and trying and trying and trying to control their temper or to, you know, get their thought life in order or whatever it is. And they find that they fail over and over and over and over and over again.

And they end up just condemned and wondering if they're even really saved or if they're ultimately going to make it to heaven. It's because they're concentrating on the wrong thing. So when Paul says back in chapter four, verse eight.

For bodily exercise profits a little again, he's not talking about getting in shape physically, he's talking about this. This contrast between the two ways, there's nothing the matter with bodily exercise in the sense that we think of it. As long as it's in balance.

But in the way that Paul was speaking to them. As a means of attaining spirituality, that's not the root, the root to spirituality is through cultivating godliness. So that's how we become godly, we become godly by cultivating the spirit.

And and so that's why Paul says to Timothy, Timothy, if you instruct them in these things, what things the goodness of God, the grace of God, the liberty that's in Christ Jesus, when we get to know the goodness of God and we get to know the grace of God, all of these things. These things build us up in the spirit and they make for the kind of life that God wants us to have a life where we can freely enjoy with Thanksgiving the things that God created for us to enjoy. The person who is.

Miserable. In their faith. Is surely a poor advertisement for the kingdom.

And who is the person that's miserable in their faith? Well, that's quite often the person who's all bound up in legalism. They're miserable because they know they're failing and and that's not attractive to people. That's not anything that anyone is going to rush to sign up for.

It's when somebody sees a person who is full of joy, a person who is gracious toward others, a person who just seems to, you know, go about enjoying life in the good sense. Not involved in sinful things, but still having a great time. Man, that's the kind of person that people are attracted to.

You see, the big lie of the devil is that you've got to send to have fun. You can have the most wonderful and enjoyable life imaginable. And you don't have to do any of the things that people normally think you have to do in order to have a good time.

Just enjoy the things that God did give us. And see, the problem with legalism is that legalism deprives us of the good things that God gave us, things that he intended us to enjoy, that would be a reflection to the world of the goodness of God. Legalism forbids us, prohibits us from enjoying those kinds of things.

You see, the legalist is marked by. A great concern over nonessential things, a great preoccupation with petty, unimportant things. That's again what we see pictured so clearly with the Pharisees.

And we don't have to look back that far. We can again find it. Around us today.

Those people who are quick to condemn. Just about anything and everything. And so life becomes just this little, you know, there's this little sliver here that you can live in, and that's about all there is to it.

And then what you're seen as is a person who is against everything, is uptight about everything, who can't do anything. And people, like I said, they look at that and they think, oh, I don't want to be part of that. And

we have to be on our guard against that.

In the church, historically, you've always had the two extremes. You have the extreme we're talking about of legalism, and then you have people that swing the pendulum all the way to the other side where it's anything goes. I can do anything.

It doesn't matter. I'm saved by grace. And so anything goes well.

That's not right either. How do I how do I find that middle path? How do I strike the balance? You know what? If you just stick with the word of God, you'll strike the balance. You know, if you just stick with the scriptures, you won't become a legalist, nor will you become a licentious person who thinks you can just do anything and still go to heaven.

The Bible gives us the perfect balance. It shows us that all things are given to us richly to enjoy. But God lays down the borders himself and he tells us now these are the things that you're not to be involved in.

You know how legalism happens, it happens because people try to help God out. People think, well, you know, God, your rule, I see it there. That doesn't look.

That doesn't look quite. You know, rigid enough, I think we better. We better extrapolate on it a bit.

The Pharisees. You know what they did? They were well-intentioned, but they made a huge mistake. Remember what happened? Israel was sent into captivity because of their sin, because of their idolatry.

They were there in Babylon for 70 years. And at the end of 70 years, they came back into the land and during that period of time after the days of Nehemiah and Ezra in what's known as the intertestamental period. Four hundred years known sometimes as the silent years.

This group of men arose in Israel. Who were so zealous for the law. They began to study it diligently and they began to communicate it to the people, no longer did they leave that responsibility in the hands of the priest, but they they developed a whole new group of people that took that upon themselves.

And their mission, their goal was to. Understand the law, communicate the law and help the people never to violate the law again. So that Israel would never be led back into captivity again.

So they took the law and they codified it. They broke it down. They came up with 613 commandments.

And they thought, OK, here are the commandments, but. You know, now that we've defined them, there is a danger of someone violating these. So here's what we'll do.

We'll put some additional laws in front of them and behind them so that. You'd have to break these additional laws before you could ever get to the actual law of God. So their their intentions were good.

They were motivated by a desire to see God's law honored and kept, so they put. What would become termed as a hedge around the law, a protective hedge around it, but in a process of time, they lost the distinction between the law itself and the hedge. They began to think that the hedge was the law.

They began to think that their. Interpretations of the law were. As authoritative as the written law itself, and they began to put these burdens upon people and then condemn them over their failure to live up to these additional commandments that were placed there.

They became so absorbed in this legalism. That they would just go about simply just condemning everyone that wasn't part of their little group. And guess what they ended up doing.

When God came to visit. Them. They condemned him.

Because he didn't keep the law according to their interpretation of it. He allows his disciples to eat bread with unwashed hands. He heals on the Sabbath day and over and over again.

You remember, as you read the Gospels, what did they do? They accused Jesus of violating the law. Jesus never violated the law of God. He went out of his way to break their laws.

Because their laws were. Simply that they were their laws, they were the doctrines and the commandments of men, but that is what became the whole mosaic system. In their view.

Now, you see, similar things have happened in our day and age. There are people that have a whole list of things that in their mind, they they see a sinful things. That are not necessarily sinful at all, but it comes from this adding things on to we're going to be more holy, we're going to be the most committed, and so we're not only going to not violate anything written in here, we're going to come up with a new list of things that we're going to keep.

And if you think you keep them, you're become arrogant, self-righteous. Irritant to everybody else, and if you don't think you keep them, you live in misery because you're condemned. And you're certain that in the end you're going to be damned because after all, you just can't do this.

And these are the kind of things really that have driven people away from the church. You know, there's a group called Fundamentalist Anonymous, and they are people who have come out of fundamentalism. And, you know, they go sit around and talk about all the horror stories they experienced while they were in the fundamentalist movement and so forth.

And and I'm not agreeing that that's a good group, but, you know, I'm sure they've got some interesting stories because among the so-called fundamentalist, this has been a huge problem, the problem of legalism. And people have been driven away, but the sad and tragic thing is they've been driven away from what they perceive to be the Christian faith, but that's not what it is. It's been misrepresented to them, but they think that this is it.

So now they don't want to have anything to do with it. Someone was recently telling me about an experience they had. They grew up in a Pentecostal fundamentalist.

Atmosphere and. The father in the house. Had signed a covenant with his church.

That he would not go to movies. That he would not play cards that he would not participate in dances and a whole list of things that he would not do. He signed that covenant because he wanted to be he wanted to be right with God.

Then he spent the rest of his life. In a lot of misery and condemnation. A lot of frustration and a lot of anger over trying to do what he thought God wanted him to do, and he brought all of that, of course, upon his family as well.

I was attending a funeral and they were talking about him and talking about the fact that he signed that covenant. And he promised to enforce it and his son, who was telling the story, said the only problem was

none of us signed the covenant. But we were all bound to it.

And it's interesting, because as I was talking to one of them. One of the sons, he told me a story about how. He was at school.

This is back in the early 50s. At school and there, you know, back in those days and grammar school, I think, or maybe junior high. I don't remember.

I think it was sixth grade when I got into that class where they had square dancing. And he told the story about, you know, being there in the class and they had the square dancing thing going on. And I was fine.

And he was just doing it like all the rest of the kids and enjoying it. And. But next week, when it came time for square dancing and he got up to square dance, the teacher in front of the whole class said, oh, no, I'm sorry, you can't dance today.

And he was puzzled. He thought, well, why? What did I do? I said, well, you know, you you're just you're not allowed to dance. And well, how come I'm not allowed to dance? Well, actually, your parents sent us a note and they said it's against your religion.

And therefore, you have to sit down. And, you know, for a 10 or 11 year old kid. That was a. That was hard.

And, you know, all of the. Mockery and everything that would have gone on to get your religion, you can't dance and all of that sort of stuff. And it had an impact, a negative impact, and.

You know, you look at those kinds of things and you just think how unfortunate it is that. Those teachers, those pastors, those those leaders, they did not fulfill. Paul's admonition here.

They were not good ministers of Jesus Christ because they did not instruct them in the right things, they instructed them in the wrong things. And brought a lot of unnecessary frustration and misery and guilt and condemnation and all that upon people. I love the grace of God.

It is such a wonderful thing. To be saved by grace and to know that God is good and to know that he came to set us free. And, you know, that just makes that sets Christianity in that in that category all by itself.

There's nothing else like it. That's not the fruit of any other religion, joy, peace, liberty. That is to be the fruit of the Christian message.

And if as a Christian, I'm all tied up in knots, if I'm all bound up in rules and regulations, do not touch, do not taste, do not handle all of that kind of stuff, then I haven't been properly instructed. Or I haven't paid close enough attention or I've somehow let some other thing come in and distort my understanding. But you see, like I said, if we just stick with the scriptures, if we just stick with the word of God and if we meditate on it.

And if we study it. And if we have this as our standard and as our guide, Jesus said it, he said, if you continue in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will do what? It will set you free. Yeah.

See, a person who's all who's all bound up, what do you know about him? You know that. But. They're not abiding in the word.

Because the word, the truth of God sets you free, we need to be free. God wants us to be free. You know, God, God wants us to be real people.

And there's far too much phoniness in the church. It's a battle that's constantly there. You got to fight against it.

There's too much phoniness. People aren't real. A lot of times there's not an authenticity.

Many times there's a. There's there's a veneer of phoniness. A hyper spirituality. You know, when people just run around all the time, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, you know, you know, if it's genuine, if it's flowing from a heart that is truly praising the Lord, praise the Lord.

That's great. But, you know, sometimes you just look into anything. This isn't real.

This isn't real. You ever watch what they call Christian TV, you know, praise God, bless God. You know, they just throw these these phrases around.

And when you listen closely, you listen to the context. You realize these people don't even know what they're saying. They're not praising God.

They just use these words instead of words that other people, you know, somebody else might go, hey, cool. And they go, bless God. It just, you know, it means the same thing is cool.

It doesn't mean bless God. Really, it's just jargon. It's just lingo.

And, you know, don't get me wrong. I mean, those those are wonderful phrases to use if they're flowing from a heart that's blessing God and praising God. But if it's just jargon, if it's just this is the lingo, then forget it.

It's it leaves a bad taste in the mouth. I'll never forget listening to one of the listening to one of the guys rant and rave about someone and talk about how he'd like to see him shot down with a holy ghost machine gun. Praise God.

So basically, he's expressing his desire to see this person murdered and blessing God at the same time that creates a huge problem. But, you know, we just we need to be real people. And when it's time to bless God and praise the Lord, then let's do it.

And let's do it from a heart that is absolutely genuine. But let's not walk around just mouthing phrases and being phony. Because, you know what people see through it, we need to be we need to be real in as much as people know that we fail.

You know, the person who walks around acting holier than thou, the person who puts themselves forth as they've never failed. They've you know, I can I can see where you stumbled, but not me. You know, that's that's phony.

It's repulsive as well kind of stuff is just a turn off and something happens. You know, it's it happens in churches and it happens usually the longer things go on. These things kind of just tend to build up.

Man, when that when a work is new and fresh and you don't a lot of time, you don't really see any of that stuff. So it's what I say to the guys in Europe all the time, you know, they they will often tell me and not just

in Europe, but in any place, a lot of times when you go out and you start a new church and you get people coming in, a lot of times your most difficult people are the people that have come out of churches and the most wonderful people are the ones that get saved just out of whatever. And but going back to Europe, especially in Europe.

Many of the churches that have gone through struggles and difficulties and have had problems, if you trace it back, it's to these people from churches and traditions that have come in. And I tell the guys, I say, you know what? Don't bother with them. Just.

Just go out to the highways and the byways. Make your own converts.

Because then you can bring them in and they have no excess baggage, they have no church baggage, they don't have any junk that they're going to. Stuff they're going to bring in and clutter up the ministry. Some of the biggest problems have been with people from church backgrounds with heavy legalism, so this is what we want to be established in.

We want to be established in the goodness of God, the grace of God, and when we are, we're going to be experiencing that wonderful freedom. That great liberty, and you know, when we are at that place. I'll tell you what, people are attracted to that.

Remember, the people, they were repulsed by the Pharisees, they were absolutely repulsed by them, they sensed the contempt coming from them, they sensed the disdain. Jesus comes along. And what's the story there? Man, the multitudes were flocking to him.

Now, Jesus was truly holy, he was truly righteous. In all of his holiness and all of his righteousness, they sensed an acceptance from him, a welcome from him. Because his holiness and his righteousness, of course, were there blended together with his love, and so where they were, they were repulsed by the self-righteous religious elite of the day, they were, they were drawn into Jesus, they were attracted to him.

You see, we want to be like Jesus. We don't want to be like those other guys. We don't want to get caught up in that stuff, because it'll just hinder what God wants to do in and through our lives.

You know, I really believe that in these days, we have to be careful as Christians. We have to really be wise. You know, today there is a great need for wisdom.

It really is, I think, more so than maybe there has been in the past. You see, in the past, because there was. To quite an extent, sort of a Christian veneer upon the culture, you could conduct yourself in a certain way, and it didn't it didn't change things that much one way or the other, because there was a general mindset and attitude among the culture that was somewhat favorable toward Christianity, at least in the ethical sense and the moral sense.

But as you know, that's that's quickly vanishing. And we are living in a culture that is no longer a Christianized culture for the most part. And what we know as truth and what we believe morally and so forth at one time was sort of taken for granted.

It's no longer taken for granted in the culture. So we have to be, I think, more wise in these days to navigate these days, because in the midst of this, the Lord wants to use us. We don't have that.

Sort of that that prop that earlier generations might have had. To refer back to tradition or to refer back to what everybody knew was right or it's different now. And so we need great wisdom from God and how to be.

The salt and the light and how to communicate to people in these days, and we have to be careful not to just. Assume that everybody thinks or feels or believes, just like we do, because, of course, everybody knows that these things are right and everything else is wrong. That all might be true.

But. We need to have wisdom in how we navigate that, you know, again. Just a quick reference to Europe, you know, being there this past week.

You know, you read the papers, you know, the the general mindset. Among some is a mindset that's negative toward the United States, toward American foreign policy and things of that nature. And for me personally, I have my political opinions and views and all of that sort of thing.

But, you know, I find that when I'm there and I'm traveling there and I'm meeting people, the last thing I want to do is get in any kind of debate with them about U.S. foreign policy or politics or, you know, I don't want to go there. I want to go right to the real issue. I want to go right to Jesus Christ.

You know, because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what, you know, political party you belong to or whether you believe in capitalism or socialism or, you know, whether you think the war is right or wrong or, you know, all of that stuff can be things that can polarize you. It can be things that can, you know, really prevent you from being able to be a witness, perhaps. So we have to stick to the important thing.

And that's keeping our focus on Christ and the cross. In the conference that I attended last week in one of the sessions, we had a question and answer time, and one of the guys asked a question about. Well, I had to do with Israel and to do with the Jewish state and had, you know, all of that, you know, what should our perspective be and, you know, how can we here in Europe show more support for the state of Israel and all of this? You know, these were the questions that were asked and.

And they were asked to me and I said, well, I'm going to answer your question, but it might not be the standard answer that you would expect. And I said, you know, from a political standpoint or from just a historical standpoint or whatever, I believe that Israel fought for the land they want it fair and square and they have a right to it. But I said, you know, I don't want to jump in the middle of that situation because.

I'm I'm not called to support a political entity anywhere in the world. I'm called to be an ambassador of the kingdom of God and to preach Jesus Christ. And the last thing I want to do is put a stumbling block or a roadblock between myself and the person that I want to get the gospel to by taking a political position.

And, you know, as I was saying this, another friend of mine was there and I had never had the discussion with him about this. And I was kind of wondering in my mind, I wonder what he's thinking about what I'm saying. I went because he's very he's been historically he's been very, very much a supporter of Israel.

And so finally, at one point, I just I just shouted across the room and I said. I said, what do you think? And he said, you know what, I absolutely agree with you. He said, I think sometimes we've gone over the top in our sort of blind support for Israel.

And he said, the Lord has spoken to me about it, and he said, you know how God turned me around on it? And I said, no, he said he sent me into the West Bank to minister to the Palestinians. And he said it really

brought things into perspective that these are people to their people for whom Christ died and were to preach Christ and him crucified, not a political entity or anything like that. And so we want to be established in the goodness of God, the grace of God, the liberty that's in Christ Jesus, the cross.

Those are the things. And, you know, when when that's the reality in our lives, you know, a life that's. That's being lived enjoyably.

Is a life that is going to strike curiosity in other people. And that's, I think, what God wants to do. He wants us to understand his grace to the extent that, man, we are just digging life.

We are having a great time here because we know Jesus and this will be the thing. And, you know, sometimes that that translates into. You know, a lot of times holding your peace, not saying something you you don't agree with somebody's position or something like that.

But instead of just automatically condemning or jumping in or judging, you withhold that you just hold back, say, you know, Lord, I just wait and see, see what happens here. And you'll be amazed. And I've done both things.

I've jumped the gun. Somebody says something and you're right, oh, that's wrong. What do you mean? That's stupid.

You think that what are you? Where's your brain, man? And, you know, you might be right, but you just lost an opportunity. And I found that. More and more, the Lord will have me in conversations with people and in situations, and there's a lot of weird stuff going on, and I'm just, you know, I'm just quiet and just sort of and in my heart, I'm saying, Lord, I don't know what to do here.

So just give me wisdom, just show me when to say something and what I ought to say at this point. And God's faithful, he will do it. So in closing, these are the things that we want to be taken up with.

Godliness is profitable in all things. And like I said earlier, I want to leave you with this. It's not a matter of denying the flesh, but rather it's a matter of building up the spirit.

Just build up the spirit. Seek the Lord, be in the word, not again out of a legalistic, I've got to do this. You know, John has a great little.

Saying it's not a got to, it's a get to like that, because that's what it is, I get to be in the world, got to be in it, I get to be, it's a privilege. And as I'm just in the word of God and I'm in fellowship with my brothers and sisters and I'm in communion with God in prayer and I'm just going about life, you know what's happening? The flesh is just it's not even a factor. It's it's being controlled by the spirit of God.

That's what we do. Rather than trying to drive out the darkness, you just turn on the light. And the Lord will take care of the rest of it.

These are the things that Paul said to Timothy, instruct the brethren in them and you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ. Let's pray, Lord, we thank you that you. Lord, that you're the wonderful God that you are.

Lord, that you're full of grace. Oh, Jesus, just think of that statement in John's gospel that the law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through you, Jesus Christ. Lord, thank you for your grace, for your goodness.

Thank you, Lord, that you came to set us free, not to bind us up in religion. And Lord. May we be free indeed.

Free, just loving you and loving each other, being real people, genuine, authentic, sincere, without hypocrisy. Without putting on. A religious front.

Help us just to be real people who love you, we pray in your name, amen.

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