

SOCIAL CUSTOMS vs BIBLICAL LAW ELM JUL 1996

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These notes, composed from 2013 on, are based on taped lectures given between 1977 and 1997 by Dr. Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., formerly the Head of Theology for the Worldwide Church of God; he resigned in January 1974 because of his unresolved doctrinal issues with the administration. Sadly Dr. Martin died in January 2002, a great loss to the world and to those who seek Biblical truth.

Any Biblical law is more important than any social custom. Those to whom any law applies or directed are to keep them.

Luke 4:3 And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. 4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

So we have to obey every Word and every law of God that is directed to me as a person that are applicable to me at the time I am living in.

1 Corinthians 14: 36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? 37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

Paul is making the very clear statement that he speaks with the authority of one who Christ taught personally.

Commandments are stronger than ordinances or statutes.

The most important thing is that we keep and obey the Words of God that apply and pertain to us.

II Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Some of the last words of Paul before his death were written to Timothy. The emphasis here is on **rightly dividing** the Word of Truth.

The 22 books of the O.T., the 27 of the N.T., the perfect 49 books are to be studied, says Paul. Not read it and used it as you think fit. Divide it, partition it carefully and rightly for me.

If you take all the laws in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and attempt to apply them to everyone, which many ministers do, that simply will not

work as that is not what was intended by God in His Word. You will also see some apparent contradictions if we attempt to apply them to all people at all times. Many of the laws regarding social customs were for that people at that time

For instance, sacrifices were important types commanded until Christ's death. Circumcision of the flesh applied to Israel until Christ changed the law to circumcision of the heart.

We have to test the applicability of each part of God's Word to us, and to understand what applies to us and what does not.

To enter any part of the Temple, one had to be an Israelite, but not everyone was allowed in every area. Priests could enter the priest's area, but not the Holy of Holies, the type of God's throne, into which only the High Priest could go and only at certain times. God needs privacy like we do! These laws do not apply to me at all since there is no Temple.

The laws of the Temple were a mirror of the organization of God's family. In any social group you have to have rules. We have scriptures for children, and scriptures for adults. There are times in the Bible when it is clear that it was perfectly fine for a man to have more than one wife, but this is not true today. Mormons flout the laws of the land by living bigamously in our era.

Many of the laws in the book of Leviticus apply to and are directed mainly to the priesthood and to the ecclesia. Some can do certain things and others cannot.

One of the gravest errors by religious people is to take parts of the Bible and apply them indiscriminately, usually according to their own ideas and purposes, usually involving some aspect of their wish to control those they are teaching.

Customs have changed greatly over time. Many of the customs and practices that applied in New Testament times do not apply now. Many customs and laws that applied in the 1800's concerning vehicles do not apply in the automobile age. Principles on the other hand are usually eternal, like being respectful and careful for others safety on the thoroughfares.

Paul knew he was writing inspired 'scripture' that would become part of God's Word, and that he had the authority to do so. (1 Corinthians 14:37).

In 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 the end of the chapter, and it would be good to read it all in review, Paul is explaining the application of the law of food that had been offered to idols, and how to behave towards others. He made it clear that a 'blanket' application of the law was not always applicable or loving to others, and to avoid offence where possible without compromising our own conscience or breaking God's wishes for our behaviour.

Paul says "all things are lawful for me", but this is obviously seriously conditional upon the context in which he said it! I can do anything I like so long as it is done in the spirit of doing it to please God the Father and Jesus Christ. That means I have to really know what their wishes are for me, and that comes from studying the Word with the help of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 32 **Give none offence**, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church (ecclesia) of God:

Righteous living in an idolatrous and pagan and gentile environment, with people keeping Christmas, Easter, Hallowe'en, surrounded with idols and pictures of a false Christ in their religious places of worship and homes is not always at all easy. Paul gives us guidelines how not to give offence to people who might be 'little ones'. Jesus made a really strong statement about not offending others.

Matthew 18:6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

This does not mean we are ever to compromise ourselves and sin, but as Jesus says, to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves in our behaviour towards others!

Matthew 10:16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, **as I delivered them to you.**

Paul's understanding was given to him directly by Jesus Christ, and he did not want his (or Christ's) ecclesia (that is us!) making up their own mind which ordinances they should keep and how to keep them, but as Christ had directed Paul to teach them, and the Bible teaches us today.

Laws regarding clean and unclean foods, utensils, plates, things that have been touched by an unclean person that applied to ancient Israel, none of these are issues for us unless it be a matter of proper healthy cleanliness. This is what it means by 'rightly dividing' and properly understanding the scriptures.

B Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 how to apply God's laws anywhere in the world. Verse 31 emphasises that everything we do should have the motivation of giving glory to God.

When Paul says all things are lawful, he is not talking about adultery or murder, or any such things, of course not. The context is customs, not the laws of Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14, they are a different matter, and are dealt with elsewhere in principle.

If the emphasis of the gathering is an idolatrous feast for him that he wishes to keep that is his affair. It does not become my business unless I am told that what I am doing is considered my taking part in that idolatrous activity. That is the time to leave.

Another overriding principle to guide our behaviour are the fruits of the Holy Spirit, these show us where our boundaries and guidelines are.

Galatians 5: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

A social custom in the time of Ruth was to remove a shoe to bind a bargain or a testimony, this custom has long fallen by the wayside, and is not a custom for us today. Customs change, some of God's physical laws have changed, but God's Laws of the Holy Spirit and principles do not change and will never change.

Breaking the law of adultery in the O.T. was punishable with death, but Jesus Christ showed a different approach in the N.T.

John 8:3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, 4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? 6 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But

Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. 7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Does this mean that Jesus was condoning adultery? Not at all, but He was showing a new way forward. The new law of the Spirit not the letter, and Grace was on its way, and forgiveness is there for all to benefit. This was a huge lesson hard to swallow by those stuck in the operation of Mosaic Law.

The ten commandments which so many attempt to keep to the letter were also changed at different times. In the next chapter after they were given, the Israelites were commanded to make likenesses of Cherubims after being told not to make any image of any thing.

In Ezekiel 18 the curse on disobedience to parents given with the ten commandments carrying forward to the third and fourth generation was lifted.

Ezekiel 18:1 The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, 2 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? 3 As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. 4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. 5 But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,

Ezekiel 18:19 Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. 20 The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

Moses had two wives. David had plural wives and concubines. Polygamy was allowed at certain times, but not now! Paul says a minister is to be the husband of one wife regardless of customs.

Divorce was only allowed in circumstances of fornication, (Greek: pornea a type of sex sin) but divorce under today's law and customs is allowed for other reasons. Not recommended, but allowed.

Social customs can be in agreement with the Biblical Laws of God if we put the spiritual principles into effect when considering them. If they are not, then the solution is not to involve oneself with such customs.

The laws of God are governed now by the fruits of the Spirit, and if they are being developed in me, that is to the glory of God, as it is He who works in me both to will and to do.

Philippians 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.