

1Tim 24-05-29b

We're looking at this very interesting question about whether it is okay to eat meat offered to idols, which again, like forbidding to marry, is representative. There can be many issues that fall in this category. You could say, what about movies that have questionable content? In my earlier years, there were people that said, rock music is evil.

It's got the beat and it's driving teenagers insane and causing unwanted pregnancies. They turned on the radio and heard the Eagles. And next thing you know, people are having to make decisions about adoption or abortion and so on.

The moderate use of alcohol. There are people who believe that teetotaling is the only way to go. And there's others who say, you know, the Bible doesn't say don't drink.

It says, don't be drunk. Jesus made wine at Cana. He used it at the, in the upper room and so on.

And yet there are people who in good faith and in good conscience make decisions in these areas. How should a Christian dress? Is it okay to have body piercings or tattoos? Is it okay to ride a Harley? Is it okay to fill-in-the-blank? There are practices, there are social, cultural and personal issues that some find to be contradictory to Christian faith, out of keeping, not proper, not right, potentially sinful. Other believers freely indulge in these and say, I know the truth and the truth has set me free.

So which is it? This meat offered to idols question is clearly shown in our New Testament scriptures from two different perspectives. Paul in first Corinthians chapter 10 and first Timothy chapter four, advocates in general, eating meat offered to idols, unless it causes someone else problems. Left to yourself, God made it.

It's good. Bless the neighbors, bless the kin, let's sit down and cram it in. It's all good.

The apostle John who wrote the book of revelation and don't let anybody tell you different. That's has become such a minority view that I'm the last guy I know who teaches it. But revelation to his servant, John, the Lord Jesus dictates these letters to the seven churches.

And in chapter two to the church in Pergamos, the Lord Jesus says, "These things says he who has the sharp two-edged sword, I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is." This is a clue. This is a key.

There is never a wasted word in scripture in my estimation. People might think there are wasted words. I don't think so.

So when you come to Pergamon, Pergamos, Pergamum, depending on if you're going Greek or Latin, let me read you a little bit about this city. Pergamos was a wealthy city established as one of the major cultural centers of the ancient Greek empire during the

second century BC, second century before Christ. Rome took over, Augustus Caesar established the cult of emperor worship close to the turn of the first century.

Pergamos was chosen as its headquarters. Pergamos was specifically designated and established as the headquarters for emperor worship. And a temple was built in honor of Rome and Augustus around 29 BC.

This evidently lies behind the statement in chapter two, verse 13, that this town is where Satan's throne is. Satan's seat is. This is likely a reference to the temple of Augustus and its prominence in the practice of emperor worship.

There was also a temple to Zeus at the top of the Acropolis there. and this may also be a reference to Satan's seat. You can see it at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

This temple was, was reconstructed, there in Germany. So what is the issue in Pergamos? Today, this town in Turkey is Bergama, B-E-R-G-A-M-A. Um, it's on the Northern Aegean coast.

There's an extensive archaeological preserve there that's open to the public. at one time, this was the most famous and magnificent city of Asia Minor, but despite its splendor, it carried an undertone of spiritual darkness. again, in verse 13 of chapter two, the martyrdom of Antipas is mentioned.

You did not deny my faith. You held fast to my name, even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was killed among you where Satan dwells. Antipas was, Antipas was the bishop of the church at Pergamos, and he would not bend to or participate in the cult of emperor worship and refused to proclaim Caesar as divine.

So he was sentenced to death. And, according to church tradition, they put him inside a bronze bull, reminds you of the old worship in Canaan where they would put children in a statue of Molech and cook them alive. So Antipas, according to church tradition was placed inside a bronze bull and burned alive.

So think about these words about association with idol worship and pagan temple worship in Pergamos. Unlike many other places in the Roman empire, this is the center of emperor worship and any association, this is a polarizing issue. There is a sharp conflict.

Antipas loses his life over this issue. So what would be the result of trying to express the freedom to eat meat offered to idols in Pergamos? Any compromise with this central and defining issue would be confusing to say the least, right? In that case, we're abstaining altogether. We are standing for the faith.

We are standing for the truth. Let there be no mistake. Let there be no confusion. Let there be no compromise. It is a symbolic issue. It is a central issue.

It is a defining issue in this particular town. Let's talk about Thyatira, the second place where this issue, you know, of, of the very few issues that are specifically mentioned in the letters to the churches. This one comes up twice.

The other place is in Thyatira. What's the issue in Thyatira? The Lord Jesus says there was in the church at Thyatira, this woman who is a dominant leader. She's referred to as Jezebel.

Obviously it's probably not her real name, but this is associating her by way of character with the Old Testament figure by that name and her leadership in bringing people away from their covenant relationship with God and into Baal worship. She is signally associated with that. So in the worship of Baal, there were male and female temple prostitutes.

She's got over 800 prophets of Baal soaking the region with this cult and this, demonic form of worship. 450 of those prophets show up, at Mount Carmel to face down, Elijah. She saw to the murder of Naboth over his vineyard that Ahab wanted.

She was ruthless. She's immoral. She is an idolater.

She's a murderess. And ultimately, she gets thrown off the balcony of the palace and, dogs come and eat her body and lick up her blood. This woman in Thyatira calls herself a prophetess.

Now, good or bad? Is being a prophetess, a lady prophet, is this good or bad? Are prophets all supposed to be men? Do you remember in Acts talking about Philip and his daughters who prophesy? Huldah is a prophetess. you have references that, so to cut to the chase, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with women prophesying. There may be a symbolic message if God employs women to prophesy as in the days of Deborah, when God raised her up as a judge, because evidently there weren't any courageous men.

Barak wouldn't go anywhere without Deborah and it requires her leadership. And this is in the days of spiritual, weakness in Israel. And there seems to be an implication there that, you know, what's the matter with the men, that, that God uses a woman as a prophetess, but there's nothing intrinsically wrong with being a prophetess.

It's not her office. It is her teaching. First of all, she calls herself a prophetess.

She isn't acknowledged as a prophetess by the church. Generally a group recognizes spiritual gifts that exist within its number. And the spiritual gift that Timothy has, Paul talks about it in our letter, a first Timothy, that the gift he had was recognized and acknowledged by the laying on of hands by a number of fellow believers.

She has declared herself to be a prophetess. And, so unlike the four daughters of Phillip, she is declaring herself to be a prophetess and she is teaching heresy. She is teaching falsehood and that it is okay to indulge in sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols.

Again, in Thyatira, you don't have a center of emperor worship. You don't have a giant temple to Athena or one of the other Greek or Roman gods. Thyatira was a blue-collar town and it was a center of trade unions.

And in order to work in these guilds or unions, you were expected to attend their meetings and their meetings were held in pagan temples. And these meetings were devoted to debauchery, to idol worship, to temple prostitution and so on. And you had to go along to get along in Thyatira.

If you wanted to work, you had to join a union. If you joined the union, you were expected to attend the meetings. And it took a very staunch character to either face up to the unions and not join them or join the union, but don't participate in their debauchery.

there's a British Bible scholar named William Barclay, very well known in scholarly circles. He says these guilds met frequently and they met for a common meal. Such a meal was at least in part, a religious ceremony.

It would probably meet in a heathen temple. It would certainly begin with a libation to the gods. The meal itself would largely consist of meat offered to idols.

The official position of the church meant a Christian should not attend those meals. So this is the problem they faced. Jezebel, this lady prophetess, whatever her actual name was, was telling Christians, it's okay to, to participate in the ways of the world.

Much as you could think of a sort of a crude analogy today that, churches in cities think it's okay to, to practice marketing strategies, to take surveys and see what the neighborhood wants. And, well, what's your favorite color? And well, we like brown. Well, we'll paint our church brown. And what sort of, do you like contemporary? Do you like classical? Do you like traditional? What, what kind of music do you like? What, and we'll, we'll, we'll bend to whatever you want because we want to be popular. We want to go along to get along. Are you big on social justice? Well, we'll be big on social justice too.

And we want to harmonize. We want to share your view on issues. We want to be seen as good guys and not as bad guys. We don't want to stand for anything that might offend. And so if you find it offensive, we'll just, we'll back that down. And if you've got moral issues, well, we'll just accept you anyway. If you've got pattern sins, we won't hold that against you. You know, come on in. We're welcoming of all. We don't hold anything against anybody. We have no standards other than acceptance. We just accept anything and everybody.

And this woman prophetess evidently was teaching Christians in Thyatira that, look, God doesn't expect you to starve. God doesn't expect you to be harassed and persecuted and ostracized for not going along. It's fine.

She might've even quoted the apostle Paul, but out of context and out of harmony with when does it count? Paul himself, you remember the issue of circumcision, he circumcises Timothy, but not Titus. Why? For reasons of conscience, for reasons of when it is important to make the issue clear. And in these two cities, it is important to be completely distinct and distinguished from compromise and to have these things accompanied by, and in both of them, notice it's not just eating the food.

Both of them are linked with the connective word *chi* in Greek, sexual immorality is a part of this. So think about modern issues, the use of alcohol, whether or not people smoke, whether or not people take CBD or whatever else it might be. These are decisions that individual believers need to make and to make decisions about in their periphery, prayerfully, carefully.

Are you going to cause someone else's conscience that's weak to stumble in either direction? There are things that are essentials and there are things that are nonessentials. There are non-essentials that become essentials when they serve to divert in a clear and obvious way into bad ways. Perversion, sexual immorality is tied to this eating.

Eating food in and of itself is not a problem, but the context in which it is eaten is. The reasons for which someone drinks. Are you drinking to get drunk? Are you drinking to solve your problems? Are you drinking because you want to be socially acceptable to a group that considers that to be important? And if you don't hoist one with the crowd, you're liable to be ostracized and so you are compromising your standards on that basis.

The summary principle here is it can be important what we do and what we don't do. It is always important why we do what we do, why we don't do what we don't do. This is the function of conscience.

That's why it is essential for us to have a healthy conscience. To know when freedom can be expressed and no harm done. That something in moderation, in good faith.

And the reason I'm doing it is because God made it to be received with thanksgiving. I'm doing it because I know that it's from God. It is part of God's provision for me.

It is not leading me into anything bad. This isn't a link in a chain that leads me down a bad road. And well, you know, I only drink in moderation, but once I drink, then I smoke.

And once I smoke, then I want to go party. And once I party, then I get in with a bad crowd. And once I get in with a bad crowd, the wrong people are driving.

The wrong people are, you know, the conversation turns bad. My example, people say, well, what kind of Christian is that? And one thing leads to another. And so you do the Barney Fife. You "nip it in the bud." You don't start down that road. What if moderate drinking leads to a loss of inhibitions? Loss of inhibitions for single people leads to improper advances being tolerated or perpetrated.

And next thing you know, physical intimacy is on the table where it should not be. Or in the car or in the bedroom or on the couch or wherever else. And to recognize that even though a thing itself is not bad, what it leads to, what it causes, the effect it has on others is bad.

That is the answer to the question of meat offered to idols. Paul tells the Corinthians, be sensitive to those around you. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating meat that laid in front of a rock for an hour.

But if it is associated with the licentious and lascivious debauchery that is a part of a trade union meeting, and you're doing it because you feel like you can't survive without support from these people, that makes it wrong. If you are associating yourself with emperor worship as a Christian, there were people who died because they refused to say the words, Kurios Kaisar, Caesar is Lord. They said, Kurios Iesu, Jesus is Lord.

And when arrested and brought before the tribunal and the demand was made, affirm the divinity of Caesar, and they refused to do so. They lost their lives over it. It's just a few words.

Why not say them, be set free, go on about your business. Because the effect of that faithful witness on others versus compromise and self-preservation, and I don't really have enough faith to believe that if I die for the faith, God will bless that decision and I'll be back in the resurrection and I will have reward and opportunity in the eternal future. And if this is God's will for me, so be it.

But I am not going to lie and say that Caesar is divine. The Lord Jesus is my God and savior. You think, but it's just words.

Why not go along to get along? Well, it's just food. Why not eat it at the temple with your fellow union members? Why not go along to get along? We have to have a conscience that tells us it isn't as simple as law. Thou shalt, thou shalt not.

Oh, well, I never do this and I always do that. There are times when a thing is right and there are times when a thing is wrong. Look at physical intimacy.

In a marriage, it's wonderful. Outside of marriage, it's devastating. Same action, but what is the context? What is the purpose? What is the thinking? What is the relationship? Is it legitimate or illegitimate? Is it sanctioned? Is it encouraged? The marriage bed is

undefiled or is it fornication and adultery and done outside faith in God and understanding of his will and his word and the example that you put before others and the effect you have on someone.

The glorifying of physical intimacy in entertainment and in other places does not follow up to see what happens with unwanted pregnancies and what happens with abortions and what happens with broken families and broken trust, broken covenant, broken promises. When it comes to adultery, and the inevitable corrupting of conscience and of soul, so that even if you do eventually meet the person of your dreams, I'm talking about young people who fool around before they get married, there are memories, there are experiences that you can't shake, that are there because they're there. And there's not a magic memory wipe where you can now come to a relationship with the person God intended for you all along with a pure heart and a clean soul, and you're not dragging baggage, and you're not making comparisons, and you're not thinking back and losing the blessing both for yourself and for your partner that was originally intended by God. Now there is grace, there is forgiveness, there are many remedies from the Lord but why go down that road? This is what happens when good things are taken out of context and they become bad things. Perfectly fine to eat food that God intended to be received with thanksgiving. Not good if it associates what us with, causes us to participate in clearly illegitimate things.

So in Revelation you see it clearly associated with sexual immorality, in Corinthians you see it clearly associated with causing others to stumble, it is not loving to flaunt your freedom and confuse fellow believers. Just leave it off, leave it out. The law of love, the law of sacrifice, love is sacrificial to self to be beneficial to others and Paul says if what I eat is going to cause somebody to stumble, I'll never eat it again.

So there is no conflict, there is no contradiction between Paul's words about freedom and John's recording of the words of the Lord Jesus that to teach others to indulge in this practice is a significant expression of evil. But this principle is helpful to us when we analyze our choices, our priorities, our practices, our behavior. Words are just words, so in my conversation, why don't I just cuss like a sailor? Why don't I throw F-bombs and allusions to the Lord Jesus Christ as an expletive in my language? Words are just words.

Words matter. Our perception by others matters and if people know we're a believer and they also know that we are crude and rude and blending with the world, it is viewed as, and rightfully so, it is viewed as compromise. It's viewed as, well, I'm not willing to stand as a believer in my faith and represent my faith and although I know that words are just words, I do not want to give people the impression that I am one who will go along with whoever's in the vicinity just to be accepted.

I'll go to the trade union meeting, I'll talk like they talk, I'll eat like they eat, I'll fornicate like they fornicate to blend, to be accepted. I consider this necessary. So are you placing

your faith in people? Cursed is the man who trusts in man, makes flesh his arm, his strength, and inevitably your heart departs from the Lord. You're going to end up being the shrub in the desert.

So it takes courage and it takes a good conscience to know when and where to stand for things even though I know in my heart it's okay. If I am eating lunch with some Jewish co-workers, I'm not going to open up my brown bag and bring out a BLT.

Why? Anything wrong with bacon on a sandwich? I'm a Christian. They know I'm a Christian. I know they are Jewish.

I know that pork is off the menu for them and out of respect and sensitivity to their conscience, I'm not going to have a pork chop for lunch when I'm eating with Jewish people, who I hope will come to a recognition at some point that their Messiah has come, and I am his representative on this earth, and I'm not going to be insensitive and selfish and uncaring. How is that attractive? Why would I want to be a part of a faith that's insensitive and flaunts its freedom and pushes itself in my face when it knows better? These are issues of conscience.

For our conscience to be clear, it needs to be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, just like the food, just like the people, just like the practices and the habits that we cultivate. The Word of God and prayer. If I can't bring it before the Lord, if I've got a jug of whiskey on the shelf and I can't pour that whiskey into a glass and thank God for it and throw it down in good faith with no risk to my fellow believers, then I shouldn't do it.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with rum. It is the use of it. Take a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent afflictions, Paul is going to tell this same Timothy. He doesn't say, get a jug of wine and guzzle that thing down in front of the pagan so that they'll know there's freedom in Christ. Sensitivity, this is the proof of faith and hope.

Faith is the means, hope is the motivation, our love is the measure.

Means, motivation and measure, that love has to be the result and the expression of our faith and our hope. To the extent that we are not functioning in faith, to the extent that we are not motivated by our hope of future approval, future opportunities for service and function, to be presented before the Father's throne as a good and faithful servant who was given resources, took them and invested them and made that much more, the talents, the minas. If I've got a practice in my life and it doesn't hold up in that light as an expression of the presence of Christ to others and as an appreciation, God created these things to be received with thanksgiving.

This is a blessing. I partake of this. I indulge in this. I exercise this. I practice this as unto the Lord. If you've got a good conscience, you will know when and how that is doable and when and where it is not.

That is the issue for our passage. Every creation of God is good in verse four of 1 Timothy. Nothing is to be refused. Nothing is to be prohibited by somebody with a seared conscience if I am able to receive it with thanksgiving and have it sanctified by the Word of God. The Word of God says it's okay.

There's no fornication that the Word of God ever says is okay. I can't sanctify fornication by the Word of God and prayer. And participating in fornication isn't something I can thank God for. "Oh, thank you, Lord, that there's a willing person here that I can fornicate with" is atrocious. This is the standard. This is the measure. This is the function of a good conscience.

What a wonderful blessing that God has granted us His Holy Spirit, that God has given us His Word so that we can be cleansed, we can be cleaned through the washing of water by the Word, the Holy Spirit leading us into all truth and enabling us to represent the Lord Jesus Christ before the world and before the throne of God Himself. Well, this brings us to verse six and following, which is where we'll pick up next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the wonderful, helpful, practical guidance that comes from Your Word.

Through the witness of the Holy Spirit, we pray that these things will sink deep into our soul like seeds in fertile soil and will spring up and bear fruit that indicates that we are in Christ, that Your power is active within us, to will and to do for Your good purpose. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.