

97-06-22b

Okay, we're back now from our break and we resume our study in Romans chapter 14 and 15. The end of chapter 14, verse 22, depending on which text you take and the evidence is about evenly divided, this is either a question or a statement. It either says, if you have a conviction, have it to yourself before God, or do you have a conviction? Do you have faith? Do you have understanding of the plan of God? Whichever the case, have it to yourself before God.

Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves, but he who doubts is condemned if he eats because he does not eat from faith, for whatever is not from faith is sin. This passage is cited a lot in the academic discussions of theology. What does it mean that whatever is not of faith is sin? And one of the things that we notice when we look around us in the Christian world, we look at Christian history, how many bodies of Christ are there in the true sense? There's one.

And what is the consistent calling of Scripture to that body? That it be unified, that it be one in mind, one in soul. And yet, at last count, I think I counted up all the denominations listed in my handbook of denominations back there, and there were well in excess of 400 separate denominations. Well, why are there so many different denominations? It boils down to the way we look at the truth of the Word of God, the way we view God's will, the way we understand and interpret the Scripture, or fail to do so.

And there is a distinction that may be helpful to us that is of long standing, I didn't make it up, in terms of how to view the truths of the Word of God. And there are three categories. You might make a note of these because all of us either consciously or unconsciously observe these categories.

The first is dogma. And this is not dogma with a negative connotation when you're talking about theology, academically speaking, dogma is not a dirty word. Dogma means that this is an essential truth.

It is a truth that is at the core of Christianity. These would be things, and there's almost universal agreement, not universal, but almost universal agreement on these things. The fact that God exists, that He has requirements for His people, the deity of Christ, the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work, and so forth, are almost universally acknowledged as dogmatic truths, divine truths.

The second category is doctrine. Doctrine is that set of truths that a particular group of believers considers to be essential in terms of fellowship, in terms of association, in terms of the meaningful living of the Christian life. How is that distinct from dogma? Dogma would be those things that if someone does not believe them, they're considered to be outside salvation.

They're not within the realm of Christianity. To be a Christian, you must at a minimum adhere to the dogma truths. You can have a strong disagreement with a Christian and not worship with

them, not fellowship with them, because you have a difference in doctrine.

If you're a Baptist, you probably have water baptism in the doctrine category. We'll go back and get some examples of these as soon as I give you the third category, which is generally labeled with a Greek word, *adiaphora*, A-D-I-A-P-H-O-R-A. You'll recognize the prefix there, the letter A is the negative.

Diaphora is the word translated when Paul says, I pray that you will come to discern the better things, the *diaphoranta*, I pray that you will come to know the difference. These are things that make a difference, but in English you might say these are opinions. We've recently looked at views about what happens after death.

Is your soul in conscious bliss before the throne of grace until the resurrection takes place, or do you basically go directly forward from the point of your death to the point of your resurrection? That, at least in my mind, falls in this third category. It's an opinion. It doesn't make a hill of beans of difference for fellowship, for the essentials of the faith.

No one should separate or get themselves wrapped around the axle over things in that category. These are things where we have a difference in understanding or a difference in interpretation, a difference in emphasis perhaps, but it isn't an essential. They are completely non-essential to faith and practice.

It doesn't mean that they don't have importance. Anything we view in the Word of God is important, but in terms of our relationships with one another, they just don't or shouldn't make a difference. Now, why do we have 400 plus denominations? In many cases, it is the way we take the truths that we find in Scripture and categorize them in these categories that produce denominations.

Some people take infant baptism and put it in the dogma category. Some people put water baptism in the dogma category. If you're not baptized, you're not saved.

Well, that's different than where other people might place that. You can think about this and draw your own conclusions. If you think about your personal beliefs, each of us as a believer, we have some things that we consider to be primary, ground floor, this is Christianity truths that we place in the dogma category.

We have probably the bulk of what we believe that we put in the doctrine category. Then we have some that we put in the opinion category. I think, based on my reading of Scripture, that this is the case, but I wouldn't die for it.

I wouldn't kill another believer over it. This is just what I think. It's helpful sometimes in our discussions to label these things as such, especially for someone who's teaching and is publicly going over these things, to differentiate between what we consider to be a sound, demonstrable

truth from Scripture and what we consider to be our best understanding and opinion based on things that are not as clearly revealed in Scripture.

So that pertains, that bears on what we see here in Romans 14 and 15. Why? Well, what category do you think Paul put eating meat that had lain before an idol? Do you think he put it in the dogma category, the doctrine category, or the opinion category? It's in the opinion category. It's not worth breaking fellowship over.

It doesn't affect whether or not you can sit side by side with this believer and worship together, or it should not. And really, what we find is that we have to be careful to not compromise the essentials of the faith, and we have to not cling excessively to our opinions in the faith. Either one of those can create problems.

And one of our well-known pastors and teachers in the past has expressed this very succinctly, and I will borrow his summation of this principle. We have to be inflexible about the essentials, and we have to be flexible about the non-essentials. The trick, of course, and this is my addition to that very nice summary, the trick is knowing the difference, and that's why our denominations come up.

This is another way of saying the same thing. How do we know what is dogma? How do we know what is doctrine, and what is simply adiaphora, what is a non-essential? We can take it or leave it. And that is the task that this principle and that this passage brings us to.

We have to look at our life, our lifestyle, the effect that our actions and decisions and priorities have on other people, and decide whether these things fall into one category or the other. Having said that, I will say this from Scripture. Wouldn't it be nice if we just had a list? And Scripture said, here's your essentials, here's your doctrines, here's your matters of doubtful things, indifferent things, matters of opinion, to each his own type of things.

But there's not a list, and there are probably many reasons for that, but here's one of the main reasons. The answer to that question is, it depends. Think about the first century and the transition out of Judaistic religion into first century Christianity.

One of the big issues was circumcision. We have looked in the past at Paul's example, his dealings as he traveled around with his assistant Timothy and with his assistant Titus. If you go back and research that out, you find that Paul had Timothy circumcised before he went into the Jewish communities to minister, because he did not want the fact that Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father and was uncircumcised, he didn't want that to come up and be an issue amongst the believers to whom they were going to be ministering.

And so Paul said, let's just make this a non-issue, we'll get you circumcised, we'll go down there and nobody's going to raise it. Later on, when Paul took Titus around with him, he makes a big point of not circumcising Titus. He says there were people who went into the bathhouse to try to

spy out our freedom in Christ and try to raise a big issue about whether Titus was circumcised or not, and Paul purposely did not circumcise him and made an issue out of not circumcising him.

So which category did Paul put circumcision in? Was it an essential? Was it a doctrine that he would not compromise, or was it an opinion, and he would just, any time it became an issue, he'd just circumcise the person and be done with it? Well, it depends. In the case when he went to these Jewish communities, groups of Jewish believers, Timothy being uncircumcised would have been a stumbling block. In the case of going to the Gentile communities, do you remember where Titus was going to function, where was Titus when Paul wrote the letter to him? This is the reason that I left you in Crete.

Remember there's a saying in Crete that all Cretans are lazy gluttons or whatever? Well, is that a Jewish community or Gentile? Titus is out there amongst the Gentiles, and it's important that the Gentiles not be caused to stumble over the issue of circumcision. So Paul made sure that they were not caused to stumble. It's the same reason Paul made an issue of Peter's behavior when the men from James came, and Peter had been eating with the Gentiles, and then he stopped, and he started being hypocritical in that area, and Paul called him on it because this was going to cause the Gentiles to stumble.

They're going to think they have to observe the dietary laws if you pull back in this manner. So it depends, and we can begin to see why our calling in this age is a great challenge, because we just don't have a mosaic law we can turn to and just follow the rule and we're off the hook. We have to think, oh boy, we don't get the little simple numeric problems.

We're given story problems, and we've got to ferret out the equation and solve for the unknown in each different situation, and we've got to operate in faith. We've got to look to God to give us the knowns in that situation so that we can solve for the answer, so we can solve for the solution. God in every case will give us that answer.

That's what it says when it says that in every test there is a way of escape. We're not tested beyond what we're able to bear. If God put us in a situation and we didn't have the clues to the solution, that would be a test we'd have no way of passing.

But in every case where we find ourselves tested in these areas, tested in areas of application, we can have faith based on the promise of God that there is enough information to arrive at the right answer, to arrive at the decision and the conclusion that pleases God. If we're looking for it, if it matters to us to find that solution, it will be there. So, how does this work itself out? We find this principle expressed in a number of places.

Turn with me back to Acts, Acts chapter 15. We find the answers to some of our questions about passages of Scripture when we understand this principle and why things were done that were done. You remember that once Peter saw the vision of the sheep being let down, what God has cleansed, let no man call defiled and so forth, and that the gospel had been opened up to the

Gentiles.

Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles and so forth. This created a dilemma for the Jerusalem church and for the almost exclusively Jewish church of that generation. Well, if we're not going to hold them to the law, what do we teach them? There wasn't a New Testament laying around.

They couldn't just say, well, go down there and get a New Testament in Psalms and hand it to them and they can go by that. So, what sort of guidance and teaching did they need to adhere to? Well, this came up to the church there, and so they, in chapter 15 of Acts, they assembled a council to solve this puzzle. What should we do? And the answer is kind of surprising.

If you read Paul and all of his arguments, you're not under law, you're under grace. What have we studied in Romans all this way through? By the works of the law, no flesh is declared righteous. We don't have to observe days and rituals and so forth.

And yet, what is the conclusion of the council? Look at Acts 15, verse 19. Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols. Whoa! The Jerusalem council is going to send out a piece of guidance here that the Gentiles be taught to abstain from things offered to idols.

Paul has just said over here in Romans and in 1 Corinthians, well, we know that there's nothing the matter with these things, that they're not polluted, they're not defiled, what God has created and cleansed and let no man call unclean. And yet, the council says they need to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled and from blood. Well, what's the story here? This sounds like, well, we're just going to give them a little bit of the law.

And it'll be like a concession. As long as we get them to adhere to a little bit of the law, well, then we can agree and we can go. What's really happening here? Well, think about this.

At this point in the history of the church, who is the church, almost exclusively? They're Jewish. And what are they wrestling with? What is it that can easily cause them to stumble? It's the requirements of the law. Transitioning away from their dutiful obedience to the Levitical code and adjusting to the freedom in Christ.

This is a hurdle for them. They're trying to grow. They're making progress.

They've got good apostles and disciples down there teaching, but they've still got a big problem with this. We know that from the effects of the visits by the men from James in Jerusalem, what it does to Peter and what it does to Paul eventually. But this is an issue for them.

And it's not just the law of Moses, but the Old Testament altogether. This abstaining from things strangled and from blood, this predates Moses, doesn't it? What did God tell Noah after the ark landed on Mount Ararat? Remember, we have a change of dispensation, and along with it we

have a change of diet. One of those little-known dispensational flags.

Any time the age changes, so does the menu. And what does God tell Noah? You can eat the meat, but not the blood. These things were known and understood well before Moses.

Sexual immorality was a known sin well before the law of Moses. Read the accounts in Genesis. The rage of the brothers of Dinah, the sons of Jacob, when they get all upset because their sister has been violated.

What's the basis of that? They know what's right and what's wrong with regard to marriage and immorality and so forth. But what about these things polluted by idols? Why would the apostles here tell the Gentile believers who are coming into this largely Jewish church to abstain from things polluted by idols? Well, we have our answer in the law of love. Even though these things are okay, and they may learn and come to understand that these idols are nothing, and that in fact is the basis of their salvation, is understanding that truth, this prohibition is for the sake of their Jewish brethren.

It's for the sake of others in the church. Abstain from these things, and it's not going to create that rift that Paul writes so often to try to heal in the church between the Jews and the Greeks, between the Israelites and the Gentiles, between those who are coming out from under the law and those who have never been under the law. Where is the meeting ground? Where is the area of unity? These things polluted by idols is over in the area of non-essentials.

And by telling the Gentiles to refrain from that, this doesn't mean that it's an essential. It means that here's the law of love in action. That's one way of understanding why this edict comes out.

It's not necessarily a failure on the part of the Jerusalem Council. They couldn't quite tear themselves away from the law. It's out of the desire to see the church unified and not causing different factions problems.

So back in Romans 15, Paul says, We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. Even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

But whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we, through the patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope. I will digress briefly here to say that surprisingly, in a lot of, especially in academic circles, this truth is not observed, that the things written in the Old Testament were written for our instruction. I've run into this many times.

I experienced it again this past week. Where the idea is that the text of Scripture can have only one meaning. It's not subject to multiple meanings.

Any passage has one right answer, one right message that it carries. And any other message

that you see in it is wrong. And the application of that principle is, if you go back to the Old Testament, when God spoke to Moses and said, A, B, and C, Moses understood it a certain way.

Moses hadn't seen Christ. Moses didn't have the benefit of the New Testament. So whatever God said and the meaning of that text can't be any more than what Moses could have understood.

And there's been this large hermeneutical movement. Hermeneutics is the interpretation of the Bible. What are your rules? Do you just freely see anything you want to see in it? Do you see a number and say, go into numerology? Or do you see an allegory and so forth? How literal are you? How much fantasy do you crank into your observation of Scripture? Well, this keeps you at a very literal level, so much so that you don't ever read anything of New Testament truth into the Old.

Well, that has come about as a reaction to people who see too much in the Old Testament. In my class this week on the introduction to theology, which I suppose I need here at the end of my seminary career, and everybody else in the class is basically a first-year seminary student, it's very interesting when I manage to suppress myself and just observe to see the mistakes that it's easy to make when you first come out of being a congregation member and are seeking to make the transition into becoming a teacher or a leader in some way, shape, or form. That's what seminary training is supposed to do in the THM program.

And there's a transition that you have to undergo, and you can no longer accept things in an uncritical fashion. And hopefully you're not going to just take these things and pass them on to others without understanding their basis for yourself. But as a first-year student, of course, you haven't been through that conversion process yet.

And so we were looking back at the idea of theophanies, and don't panic, I will get back to Romans here, even though I'm going far afield. We were talking about theophanies. What's a theophany? That's an appearance of God in bodily form in the Old Testament.

One of the classic examples of this is Genesis 18. Abraham's out there near the Oaks of Mamre. He's out there living in his tent.

He and Sarah, they've wandered around, they've had a lot of experiences, and all of a sudden they get a visit by three men. And there isn't any getting around it. It's the standard Hebrew word for man, three men.

But verse 1 of chapter 18 of Genesis says, the Lord appeared to Abraham by the Oaks of Mamre. And then it says, three men appeared. And then it says, they spoke and they said.

And then in the next verse it says, the Lord spoke and the Lord said. And it appears that these three men and the Lord are sort of interchangeable in the passage. Well, what do you do with that? Is one of the men Yahweh and the other two are attendants, attending angels or

accompanying honor guard? Some people look at that passage and think that all three of the men, that this is a picture of the Trinity, that all three of them as a group are God or represent God in some fashion.

Well, this is one of those great puzzles. What category, dogma, doctrine or ideophora might we put that in? What is the identity of the men in Genesis 18? If somebody thinks that they're just men, are you going to divide and separate from them? If somebody thinks it's the Trinity, are you going to say, get thee hence? This subject of how did God appear in the Old Testament came up. Well, many of us have been taught, I'm sure all of you have heard and have perhaps agreed with this conclusion, that when you see God in bodily form, who is the revealed member of the Trinity? Christ.

So this is the pre-incarnate Christ. This is Jesus. This is the Son, the second person.

There are people who have tried to tie this to vocabulary and say that Yahweh is one thing and Adonai is another in the Old Testament. And this view was expressed when it came up. And the professor, in a calculated fashion, knowing what he was about, said, well, who is this? And several hands went up and a lot of the first-year students said, well, it's Jesus Christ.

And he asked a very good question, well, how do you know? Much stammering and stuttering and spluttering and very little by way of answer. Could any of us make a case from Scripture that one or more of the three men in Genesis 18 is the Lord Jesus Christ? It is an assumption, it's an opinion, an inference based on principles that we've observed elsewhere. We believe that Jesus is the revealed member and so forth.

But you also run afoul of some Scripture or you have to account for some Scripture when you draw that conclusion. What does he say in Hebrews 1, 1, and 2? God in diverse parts in various ways spoke to the fathers beforehand through the prophets, but in these latter days has spoken to us by a Son. Well, if this is a unique communication from God in the person of the Son, then what's the Son doing, appearing and communicating in the Old Testament? You've got to account for that passage.

Is it impossible for God to manifest himself in bodily form as God the Father or as the triune God without a distinction between his Father, Son, and Spirit component members? It's a question. Scripture says no man has seen God at any time. And then you go to the experience of Moses and Aaron and the 70 elders.

What does it say? They went up on the mountain and they saw God. No man has seen God at any time. Moses, Aaron, the 70 elders saw God.

Not only did they see him, they described what they saw. And they sat down and had lunch with him up on the mountain. Well, did they see God or did they not see God? It says the Lord, Yahweh, appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18.

Well, did he see God or not? No man has seen God at any time. It was not God or it was God. Well, you know, you can puzzle over that and we'll eventually in our fundamentals class address the issue of theophanies.

I'll just leave that to fester in your brain until then. But what's the point? I was struck by the fact how easy it is for us to speak up and say, Oh, well, that's the Lord Jesus. Do we know? Do we have a conviction in our soul? Are we convinced of that because someone that we respect told us that or because it's faith based on knowledge of the Scripture? We have to be careful about those knee-jerk reactions.

And we have to be careful about adhering to an opinion like that, which is not an easily provable thing one way or the other. My answer in a lot of these areas is what does Scripture make an issue out of? Does Scripture spend any time trying to tell me who this is? It says it's the Lord. Whoever it is is speaking with the authority of God.

I'll give you an interesting homework assignment if you want to pursue that a little bit and perhaps get a head start on what my conclusion is going to be. Compare Matthew chapter 7 and Luke chapter 7, which is Jesus healing the centurion's servant. Those are parallel accounts.

If you read that closely, you'll find my conclusion for Genesis 18. And you'll think, now, what on earth could that possibly have to do? Well, read it closely. See who is talking to whom.

How messages are exchanged between the centurion and Jesus. Lay those two accounts side by side in Matthew 7 and Luke 7, and then go back and read Genesis 18. But here's the point.

Our opinions should not cause other believers to stumble. I have been somewhat reserved in expressing some of my opinions from Scripture about what happens to us after we die, one thing and another, infant salvation. Why? Because they're not essentials.

And sometimes people who put those in a different category than I do, who put them in the realm of dogma or who put them in the realm of doctrine, if I go around trying to convince people or making an issue out of things that are merely opinions, I would be guilty of creating a distraction, causing someone to get caught up and wrapped around the axle on something that isn't an essential. And so we have to be careful. We understand things, but we have to be sensitive to where other believers are in their growth and in their knowledge.

And just because we know something doesn't mean we have to make sure everyone else knows it. And there are times when, even when someone asks, we have to refrain and not... we have to make a judgment call. Is this going to be helpful? Is this going to build up? Or is this going to be a discussion for its own sake? Is this going to be how many angels on the head of a pin? That's what Paul is talking about when he says in chapter 14, verse 1, Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not for the purpose of disputing over doubtful things.

What is a doubtful thing? It's adiaphora. It's not an essential. It doesn't make or break fellowship.

It doesn't make or break Christian life and growth and function. We've got to be sensitive in these areas. Sometimes we like to wow somebody with a thing that we've heard or seen or come to understand in Scripture.

This has been labeled in the past as somebody having a breakthrough. And it's stimulating. Everybody, even in secular things, you love to be the first with a fresh piece of information.

Oh, did you hear? Did you see on the news? Do you know? And we love to be the one who imparts a new thing. And we have to really discipline ourselves in this area because it's not always helpful. It's not always beneficial.

And the breakthrough idea has been detrimental in many cases because people live for the next stimulating tidbit rather than looking for their growth and understanding and application in having a worthy walk. And there are people who live and who scour different sources for stimulating tidbits that relate to the Bible. And that's not the same as spiritual growth.

It's not the same. I would rather have five good solid truths that I can put into application than a hundred interesting stimulating breakthroughs that do no good. If we can't answer the question, so what, in a beneficial way, there's no point in even bringing that thing up.

It's going to cause someone to stumble. So, having said all of that, what about issues that come up that one person classifies as an essential and another classifies as an opinion? We have an example in our news here recently, it came up during the break, where right here locally we've got the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. They've all gotten together and said, we're going to take a stand against Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and all of the Disney Corporation with all of their satellite amusement parks and movie outlets and so forth.

And the basis for this is the well-documented and well-known policy that Disney has about homosexuals, as employees, homosexuals, as patrons of their Walt Disney World and Disneyland. It isn't just a matter of being required by federal law or something. This is something that they are proactive in.

They have gone out of their way to smile upon and be beneficial to people who are pagan abomination types, in God's eyes, in the view of Scripture. There's no getting around it. This is a blatant catering to people who profess and practice an abominable, evil lifestyle.

And they're just welcoming them with open arms. Well, here's a group of believers who have said, this is essential and we're going to take a stand against this in a public way. They're careful to say it's not a boycott.

It's basically a boycott. They're saying don't buy videos, don't attend movies, don't go to

Disneyland, don't go to Disney World. Well, what should we do? This has been made an issue for us and it seems to be a case where some of these truths we've been studying apply.

So what should we do? Should we join in and say, well, those Southern Baptists are on to a good thing. I'm going to jump right in there with them and boo on Mickey Mouse. Or not.

Well, what is the criteria here that Paul gives us in verse 22 and 23 of chapter 14? Do you have a conviction? If you have a conviction, what do you do with it? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. He who doubts is condemned if he takes this course because he's not doing it out of faith.

As we have seen so many times in Scripture, it is not what we do. It is why we do it. If people jump on the bandwagon and say, I'm going to never buy another Disney video and I'm never going to Disneyland because the Southern Baptists have said this is a bad thing.

What do you think? Is that person acting out of faith or are they acting because other believers have acted? If they say, well, I personally don't care one way or the other, but here's these Southern Baptists. That's what they're going to do and I want to be a good Baptist, for example. Well, they've just failed.

Now there are people who have been aware of Disney's stand for some years. This is not a new thing. It's been known.

It's been published. I get a newsletter that documents all different kinds of... There are hundreds of organizations that have been exposed as having practices that are detrimental. We had a big issue about whether we should switch our phone service.

At my last church, because the company with whom we had our service was brought out and an issue was made of their policies toward homosexuals. We had a board meeting and had a discussion, should we change our phone service because we're paying money and supporting an organization that supports homosexuals. Well, if you stop and think about it, where are you going to find a good or a service that you purchase that you're not paying money to a sinner Unless manna is coming down from heaven, somebody is going to be pocketing our money.

Who knows if the manager of the Albertson store up here is not a cocaine addict. And if I go up there and my money is going to help pay his salary, he's going to go out and buy drugs with it. The first criteria is, has this been made an issue? We listen to music by people and I don't know about their lifestyle, but somebody may make an issue out of their lifestyle.

Once the issue is made, if there is no issue about their lifestyle, if I go out and I hear good music, some piano player is playing a piano and it sounds really good and I buy the CD and I play it and enjoy it, that's great. Maybe this guy's got a candelabra and he's a flaming homosexual. Well, I didn't know that.

And should I throw my CD away and never listen to it again? Well, maybe. What does my conscience dictate? What do I think will please God? Does this, if I listen to Liberace, is that going to throw somebody off track? If somebody has a Jane Fonda workout tape and Jane Fonda did evil things during the Vietnam War and went and gave aid and sucker to the enemy and did an unpatriotic and dishonorable and intensely evil thing in my view, well, here we are 20 or 30 years later and now she's got a workout video. If I buy that workout video, where do I stand? Well, it's a matter of conscience.

It's adiaphora when it's in my personal life. It's between me and the Lord, how I view Jane Fonda. And I may say, well, my purpose in getting this video is not to extol Jane Fonda and lift her up and express my support for her.

My purpose, this is the only one I can find where I don't have half-naked women dancing around and it's not really an exercise video, it's a porno video. Which a goodly number of those are, judging by the covers of them. So, what is your purpose? Just like eating meat offered to idols.

It depends on what's going on in your soul. God is looking at the heart. The Word of God is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

What is your purpose? I can put up with Jane if my goal is to keep myself healthy, I look at my body as belonging to God and I want to glorify God in my body. I don't want to let it go to rack and ruin. I want to take some kind of care of it.

Here's a convenient way to do so. I'm not a big fan of Jane, but I don't think whether or not I buy this video is going to connect up with something that she did a couple of decades ago. That's one view.

Another view says, that woman ought not even be walking on the planet breathing good air and the disservice and the pain and suffering and in some cases death that her actions caused for prisoners of war. Read Admiral James Stockdale if you want to find out what the effect of Jane's visit was for POWs in Hanoi. It may be a very fresh, active principle in some people's mind.

Well, for that person to buy a Jane Fonda video in violation of their conscience might also be a wrong thing. So you begin to see how this thing is going to work itself out. So what do we do as believers with regard to our brethren in the Southern Baptist Persuasion and their boycott of Disney? We do the same thing we have always done.

Do we buy Disney videos now? If we did not know before that they were big advocates of homosexuals and now we know, well we may have to take a fresh inventory of our decisions. Does watching Bambi and watching Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, getting that video for our children, is that somehow going to support the homosexual agenda? Each of us has to make that decision for ourselves. I will tell you this, the Disney company that made those movies is not the Disney company that is in existence now.

They may still get the \$7 or \$14 or whatever for the video, but when I buy Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, or when I buy Pinocchio for my daughters, am I visibly supporting and expressing my sympathy for the homosexual agenda? It depends. Who is watching me? Do I have a lot of Southern Baptist friends? Are they going to come over and look in the video shelf and see all my Disney videos? Is that going to be a stumbling block for them? If it is, maybe I need to clean those out. Can my girls live without the Disney videos? That's a good question.

Can we live without them? In my opinion, and I will offer this strictly as an opinion, I don't think there is anything intrinsically wrong with Bambi. I don't think there is anything intrinsically wrong. I think it's a great piece of animation, a great piece of storytelling.

It's a great children's story. It's entertaining. It gives you the occasion to address, even when you find things you don't necessarily agree with in a video, when your children watch it, here's a discussion topic.

Here's an opportunity to start to train your children in discernment. We have some more recent movies from various sources where there are children who talk in a disrespectful manner to and about adults. Do I say, Oh, there's an evil thing.

I'm not going to let my children watch that movie. Or do I let them watch it and then talk about it with them and help them to discern and identify what's good behavior and what's not. Is this a good little boy or a bad little boy when he sasses his mother? When his father says, We had the Johnny Quest thing on the other night and for some bizarre reason we watched that.

I can't even remember Johnny Quest's father's name, but Dr. Quest says, Here's Johnny wanting to run off and pursue the criminal. And Dr. Quest says, No, Johnny, come back. It's too dangerous.

And Johnny runs off anyway. And this is presented in the movie as being a heroic thing. Here's brave Johnny.

It's dangerous, but he's going anyway. Well, he's a disobedient brat. His dad said, Don't go anywhere anyway.

And he stole a snowmobile to do it. And so do we say, Well, Johnny Quest is evil. We're not going to watch that anymore.

Or do we watch it and ask the girls, Well, what do you think about Johnny there? And of course, by this time, they know the right answer to that. Well, he's disobeying. He's doing a bad thing.

He stole and he back-talked and disobeyed his father. And he ends up paying the consequences. You can point that out in the movie.

These things, there is evil all around us in the world. And we can use them as an occasion for

discussion and can turn it to benefit, just the way God takes all things and works them together for good. We have to decide.

And there's not a pat answer. There's not an easy, quick answer. The answer is, it depends.

And the answer is, we have to make that call, standing in the light of the glory that proceeds from the throne room of the Father. Is what I am about to do, is what I am currently doing, glorifying to the Father, is it beneficial to those around me? Is it a stumbling block? Is it a detriment to those around me? That's the deciding factor. And one person can have a room full of Disney videos and it makes no difference.

Some other person in the Southern Baptist Church, it may become a big stumbling block if they recognize that there's nothing intrinsically wrong with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, but it's going to cause their fellow Southern Baptist brethren to stumble. They may wind up going along with this boycott for the right reasons, because they don't want to create a false issue and distract somebody from the more important issues. Somebody else who has no contact or association with those folks, it may be a matter of indifference.

They may not get Disney videos for other reasons. There are some Disney videos I will not buy, because they are, A, they're recent products, and B, they overtly, and I'll just tell you, I put the Pocahontas movie in that category. I think that thing is shot through with New Age thinking.

Listen to the spirits in the wind. I've never seen the thing, but just the clips, just the, I saw the little deal on the making of Pocahontas, and that told me enough that, now have I forbidden my children from watching it? No, Elizabeth and Rebecca have seen it, but I won't buy it. They can see it, we can point out the flaws in it, but I'm not going to keep it on the shelves and expose them to that over and over, and I'm not anxious to encourage Disney to continue to make that kind of movie, and when they make a new product and see how it flies, well, my purchase is a vote.

Now, they can't go back and unmake Snow White and the Seven Dwarves or unmake Bambi, but they can see that people continue to buy those, and if those are the ones that people buy, maybe they'll go back and make more of those. It's all in your context. It all depends.

This is one of the primary criteria. We who are strong need to bear with those who are weak. We may deny ourselves something that is perfectly legitimate for their benefit, or we may partake of something for their benefit.

Paul had Timothy circumcised and refused to have Titus circumcised, because it depends. Who's he with? What kind of stumbling block is it going to be? Everything beforehand was written for our learning, and back to my point in Old Testament studies and theological studies, we need to take advantage of what's in the Old Testament. We have great examples.

Jesus Christ lived in the Old Testament age, and He and Peter give us an example of these things. He says in verse 5 of chapter 15,