

An Exercise To Discern Both Good and Evil (Hebrews 5:14)

Bible Class Innuendo

Scenario:

The congregation you are a member of assembles twice a week for Bible Classes. The classes are topical. The classes are open so that members can ask questions, offer answers, and discuss spiritual matters. As you attend these classes you notice that certain members of the congregation continue to, regardless of the topic of discussion, focus in on the same subject matters even when it does not fit the actual discussion everyone else is involved in. This continues over an extended period of times (greater than six months). The topics that continue to be brought up are all matters of authorized liberties. Two subjects that seem to be focused upon more than others are about unhealthy food choices and why people choose the sport of fishing when they are not fishing to eat the food. You are in a class wherein the topic of discussion is Paul's willingness to leave behind all carnal things that profited his flesh so that he could serve Christ and gain the reward of eternal life (Philippians 3:1-21).

Statement That Arises From Our Scenario:

During this study one of the individuals that often makes statements about foods and sporting choices says: "One thing is for sure, if Paul liked fishing for no reason and eating donuts he would have given those things up for Christ. Why can't people see that? How can a brother think he's going to Heaven if he's out stuffing his face with donuts and fishing?"

A Later Statement Is Made:

"I am just wondering if everyone in here is listening to what we're reading? Do you want your coffee, donuts, and fishing or do you want Heaven?"

For Discussion: What do you see in those statements?

- It is good and authorized for a congregation to meet for times other than worship wherein spiritual things are discussed (**Acts 14:24-28**).
- The decision to teach topical, textual, etc. should be based upon the needs of the local congregation (**Jude 1:3**). Those lessons should be developed around where they are spiritually (**I Corinthians 3:1-3** and **Hebrews 5:1-6:3**) and as they are able to be taught (**Mark 4:30-34** and **John 16:12**).
- Open discussion is good, aside from a worship assembly, wherein the "whole church" is involved (**Acts 15:6-35**).
- When someone starts "teaching from the seat" there can be some legitimate questions arise about motives (**Mark 12:18-27**, **Luke 11:53-54**, **Luke 20:19-26**, **Acts 20:28-31**, and **Jude 1:4**).
- From the jump, certain members focusing on something brings questions. Are there sects in the congregation? Is there a party spirit? That is what the

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Scriptures call “heresies” and such is sinful (**Galatians 5:19-21**). Are there some things needing addressed, but is not being addressed? What’s going on?

- With matters of authorized liberties, like food... Even when it came to things restricted in the New Testament from eating (**Acts 15:29**, **Acts 21:25**, and **Revelation 2:14**; **2:20**); there was some liberty for those strong enough in the faith to receive such (**I Corinthians 8:1-13** and **I Corinthians 10:23-33**). So, these things often come down to individual choice rather than collective agreement.
- The questions about motives really rise when the discussion points come down to authorized liberties. There is little need for continual discussion about what is both authorized and certainly what is a liberty (**Romans 14:1-13**). Again, a congregation cannot have a collective conscience. Growth rate, learning, babe in Christ vs. mature in Christ make such impossible for most congregations.
- When someone begins to press and condemn someone’s authorized liberties, that is dangerous. A person can easily be guilty of teaching a doctrine of devils when one infringes on the authorized liberties of another (**I Timothy 4:1-9**). In fact, if you study the text I just referenced, you’ll notice the phrase “bodily exercise”. “Bodily” means: “corporeal or physical; having a bodily form or nature; pertaining to the body” (Strong’s # 4984). “Exercise” means: “training, i.e. (figuratively) asceticism: — exercise; the exercise of the body in a palaestra or school of athletics; any exercise whatever; the exercise of conscientiousness relative to the body such as is characteristic of ascetics and consists in abstinence from matrimony and certain kinds of food” (Strong’s # 1129). By such a phrase and what it means, we see that brethren have no right to judge the eating habits or workout regime [or lack thereof] of their brethren. What YOU do in such areas is for YOU. Lest someone reading this think I am some unhealthy eating lazy preacher, I am not. I workout six days per week most weeks and I eat a restricted diet. That is my individual choice and I have no authority to teach it to others. No one else has to live by my choices nor should anyone measure themselves by me or someone else in such things (**II Corinthians 10:12-18**). The only time you should be concerned about such things is if a person is showing a lack of self-control [temperance] (**II Peter 1:6**). In that event though, you have to be very cautious not to misjudge (**John 7:24**). Additionally, if you read **II Peter 1:3-11**, self-control is a growth issue and there is not blanket standard to apply. Again, be careful there.
- To use **Philippians 3:1-21** and state: “One thing is for sure, if Paul liked fishing for no reason and eating donuts he would have given those things up for Christ”, is a false statement. What Paul gave up in Philippians 3 were things that he had to leave behind because the Law of Moses was done away with (**Colossians 2:4-23**). Even in that though, he continued to observe some liberties that being in Christ granted for him (**Acts 18:18-21**, **Acts 20:16**, and **I Corinthians 16:8**). This ignorant person who says something like this is equating persecuting Christians with eating a donut and fishing for leisure.
- Leisure is authorized, even for those busy in the Lord’s work (**Mark 6:30-32**).
- Paul was the penman of several texts that authorized liberties involving eating, drinking, feasts, keeping of days, etc. We’ve considered some of those already, but take the time to read through those contexts to get a good understanding of

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this point (**Romans 14:1-15:9**, **I Corinthians 8:1-9:27**, and **I Corinthians 10:23-33**).

- The later statement clearly shows the sinful mindset that violating the things that God has authorized is wrong. As Peter was told in a heavenly vision, "...*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common*" (**Acts 10:15**). Jesus taught against the mentality we are reading here (**Matthew 15:1-20**). It is not about the foods that we eat, but the things that come out of us that matter (**Mark 7:1-23**).
- The Hebrew writer stated: "*Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein*" (**Hebrews 13:9**).
- The Jews that erred in such things as we are discussing here were to be shut up from speaking (**Titus 1:10-15**).
- If the word of God is not being clearly violated, as such is our only standard in determining right from wrong (**II Timothy 3:15-17**); we'd better be very cautious in condemning our brethren (**James 4:11-12**).
- We live under the perfect law of liberty (**James 1:25; 2:12**). Therefore, knowing yourself more than you know others, it is best that we spend more time focusing on ourselves (**II Corinthians 13:1-5**) than looking to judge the liberties of other saints. Consider how that judging your brother or sister creates a stricter judgment that will be used on you by our Lord (**Matthew 7:2**).
- In this scenario, there are incorrect judgments being made and a twisting of Scriptures to do so (**II Peter 3:15-18**).
- When it comes to someone abusing a liberty and having too much of an authorized thing... Each of us ought to examine ourselves when it comes to self-control (**Proverbs 16:32**, **I Corinthians 9:27**, **Galatians 5:22-23**, and **II Peter 1:3-11**) and moderation (**Proverbs 25:16; 25:27**). In many cases, lacking self-control will not be able to be determined by someone other than the person with the problem.
- If a brother or sister has legitimate concerns about the lack of self-control or moderation in another saint, subtly taking them to task in a public setting is not the approach. In such a case, talking to the one you have concerns with rather than judging based upon appearances is the right approach (**Proverbs 18:13** and **John 7:24**).
- If I am teaching a class wherein this is happening as stated above, I am going to approach those involved with serious concerns [not charges at the onset] that are stated above as well as concerns about being divisive. Also, the fact that several are involved might indicate, and such would be looked into (again; **Proverbs 18:13**), that there are cliques (**I Corinthians 1:10; 12:25**) in the congregation and discussions going on of a sinful nature behind the scenes. That can all, quickly, lead to some serious actions as a result (**Romans 16:17-18** and **Titus 3:9-11**).
- Like all scenarios, there are many other things that can be going on and considerations I have not made above. Talking to the people with the problem would be the only way to help resolve the problem. Letting it continue would not be an option. The congregation has to be unified (**Philippians 2:2**). The work needs to be done here to bring that about (**Ephesians 4:1-3**).