

Personal Separation

Christians are to "walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light" (I John 1:7). Holiness is to be the hallmark of their lives (Titus 2:12; I Pet.1:16). The plain admonition of Scripture is, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom.13:14). We are so to walk that we "grieve not the holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30).

Separation unto God is the essence of personal holiness. There can be no real holiness without a forsaking of sin. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). Thus Christian holiness goes much deeper than merely doing some things and refraining from doing other things. It does include actions, but it goes all the way down to the love of the heart.

SIN IS WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS IT IS

Obviously all that the Bible identifies as sin is sin and must not only be forsaken by God's people but judged by the church. Church discipline on sin is an essential function of every true church. While elders must not become spiritual tyrants, they are to "watch for [the] souls" of the people under their care "as they that must give account" to the Lord (Heb. 13:17).

In exercising that discipline we will wholeheartedly accept the Biblical definitions and descriptions of sin. There are those who want to break free from "the tyranny of Bible texts," as they put it. According to these people, while Bible texts openly condemn homosexuality, for example, there is nothing inherently sinful or unchristian in the practice. One major U. S. denomination's Special Committee calls homosexual love "justice love." It includes many other practices that the Bible terms immorality in that description and refuses to condemn them if "there is genuine equality and mutual respect" in them because Christianity's overriding themes are justice and love. We reject this flagrant abuse of Scripture. We repudiate modern humanistic psychology's anti-Christian notions and enthrone the Word of God as our final arbiter in judging sin.

CONFORMITY TO CHRIST

Holiness is likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul described it as Christ being formed in us (Gal. 4:19). When God predestinated His people, it was that they should be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). He commands us to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5) and to live with Him as our example (I Pet. 2:21).

This means that what to a carnal man appears to be deprivation--"Christians have to give up so much!"--to a Christian is essential to real happiness. A true Christian cannot rest happily in known sin. We believe the old Puritan dictum that a man must first be made holy before he can be made happy.

PERSONAL STANDARDS OF MEMBERS

The only written standards that are required of members by the Free Presbyterian Church's General Presbytery in matters not directly commanded or prohibited in Scripture are voluntary abstinence from alcohol, dancing, gambling, and "the pleasure crazes of the world."

Obviously this requirement is not intended as an exhaustive list of dos and don'ts. For example, there is no mention of using tobacco or narcotic drugs. In fact, the drug problem had not arisen when the Presbytery addressed the matter of personal standards. Also, there are things such as women's headcovering in public worship that are the constant belief and practice in every Free Presbyterian Church that are not mentioned for the simple reason that at the time the Presbytery statements were drawn up no body of Christians had the slightest doubt of their necessity. Our Presbytery has not sought constantly to update a list of commands and prohibitions because for the most part our members spontaneously adopt a course of personal separation. Furthermore, the elders of each local church have the primary task under God of upholding what they know to be the historic position of the denomination. The broad reference to "the pleasure crazes of the world" is a reminder that our elders are to keep a constant watch that the spirit of worldliness does not come in to destroy our fellowship with the Lord and our usefulness in His service.

WHY HAVE SUCH STANDARDS?

Some churches see no reason to have any standards in areas not subject to a specific Biblical command or prohibition. One church leader recently wrote that Christians could enjoy in moderation whatever the Bible did not forbid, including drinking, dancing, and playing cards (and he was not referring to games like Uno). By the same logic they should be able to enjoy marijuana, especially in places where it has been cleared by the government for legal use. We do not hold this view. We

believe there are guiding truths in God's Word that not only authorize the kind of standards we have adopted, but necessitate them.

First, a church just as much as an individual Christian has the duty to do all that is necessary to guard its testimony so that it can most effectively witness for Christ in the situation in which He has placed it. "Let not then your good be evil spoken of" (Rom. 14:16) means just that. Even in reference to things that may not in themselves be sinful, we are to judge our participation not by the standard of what is our personal right, but what will best safeguard our testimony.

Second, every good church has exercised the right to take the steps it has considered necessary to protect its testimony and advance the cause of Christ, even where it had no explicit Biblical command. Thus Presbyterians historically "fenced the table" at communion and imposed the use of communion tokens. They also demanded that every elder and minister subscribe to The Westminster Confession of Faith. Though no such demands are made in Scripture, they were perfectly Biblical in establishing these standards. The overall principles of holiness among communicants and the oversight of the congregation by elders true to the Word of God are clearly Scriptural, and these principles were best served by the standards they adopted.

We believe that the broad standards laid down by our Presbytery are equally right and Biblical.

GAMBLING AND DANCING

Gambling is the expression of covetousness. It is a violation of the clear principle of Scripture that financial gain should come from honest labor or legitimate investment (II Thess. 3:10; Matt. 25:27), or by inheritance.

Dancing in the modern context is openly sensual. By definition it depends on an appeal to sensuality, and we are expressly commanded not to walk after the flesh, but to abstain from fleshly lusts (Rom. 8:13; I Pet. 2:11).