

LAWFUL OR EXPEDIENT?

The NT church faced the challenge of moving from the OT laws to faith in Christ. Now they were free to do many things that used to be unlawful. Just because there wasn't a law against something, did that mean they should do it?

While we are 2000 years past this transition, we still face this same issue as conservative Anabaptists. While I appreciate our church guidelines and traditions, we can fall into the same rut of following the letter of the law.

ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT ALL THINGS ARE NOT EXPEDIENT: ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT ALL THINGS EDIFY NOT (1Co 10:23). In this verse, Paul was acknowledging that many things were okay to do, now that they weren't under the law, but he conditioned that with the fact that not everything was expedient or edifying. Paul is wanting us to stop and think deeper about our Christian life than just what laws/rules are in place. We need to analyze how this action will affect our Christian life.

One of the questions that sometimes comes up when someone is challenged about something they are doing is, "What is wrong with it?" On the surface, this sounds like a reasonable question, but in reality, it isn't beneficial. This type of person is also often critical of the church for having too many rules. The fact is that if you are asking what is wrong with it, you are still operating from a law mentality. You are wanting someone to find a rule that it breaks or a specific Bible verse that it violates. You are still relying on rules to decide if things are right or wrong.

Paul is calling us to a higher standard. He uses three different thoughts on how to analyze how we should live. Is it expedient or edifying, and the parallel verse in 1 Corinthians 6:12b gives one more, ... **ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT I WILL NOT BE BROUGHT UNDER THE POWER OF ANY.** The word expedient could also be translated as helpful or profitable. The word edifying takes it a step further in that it should be constructive to our character or upbuilding to our spiritual life. How much time and effort do we spend on things that aren't necessarily wrong but add no beneficial value to our lives? We must pursue things that help us grow in our Christian life and character.

In verse twelve, it brings in a different thought that we should not do things that start to control us instead of us controlling them. For one example, when I think about our use of technology, I'm challenged by how practical this verse is. How much control does my phone have over me? How long can I go without checking to see who messaged me, what happened in the news, or what notifications I have? We talk about how addicted some people are to smoking and how they compulsively grab another cigarette and can't seem to stop. But if we step back and watch our technology use for a day, do we act the same way? Are we being brought under the power of our phones?

This could be applied to many areas in life. Are we willing to ask ourselves how helpful or edifying our music choices are? Do they glorify God and draw us to Him, or do they just not break any rules? What about our entertainment or the way we dress? Are we most concerned about “What is wrong with it,” or will we make the hard decision of seeing if these things are upbuilding to our character and Christian life?

We need to learn to make decisions in life based on expediency and not just “What is wrong with this.” The reality is that if we fail to make decisions based on expediency, we will eventually fail to make decisions based on lawfulness. Is what I’m doing helping me to grow in my Christian life, or is it dragging me down? There are many things we can do in life that don’t necessarily break any rules, but if they are hindering our Christian life, they are wrong for us to do.

The challenge with living by what is expedient instead of what is the law is that now you need to deal with the spirit of what is being done instead of just the external action. We might need to defer to someone else’s wishes instead of our own. We might need to give up our will.

The question really comes down to how serious are we about our spiritual walk with God. Do we just want to do the bare minimum to follow God, or are we willing to truly walk with Him and do whatever it takes to be a Christian? Are we spiritual enough to crucify something we want and may have because we realize it isn’t going to be good for us? **AND JESUS ANSWERED HIM, THE FIRST OF ALL THE COMMANDMENTS IS, HEAR, O ISRAEL; THE LORD, OUR GOD, IS ONE LORD: AND THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND, AND WITH ALL THY STRENGTH: THIS IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT. AND THE SECOND IS LIKE, NAMELY THIS, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF. THERE IS NONE OTHER COMMANDMENT GREATER THAN THESE** (Mark 12:29-31).

~Llewellyn Martin