

Debated Issues

By David A. DeWitt

What about things like...drinking alcohol, gambling, body piercings, tattoos, eating junk food, euthanasia, funding businesses that support sinful issues, interracial marriage, political involvement, smoking cigars, smoking marijuana, using medical marijuana, R-rated movies, karate, playing video games, is a license required for marriage, cohabitation, using violence to defend your family, debt and loans (personal, business, and college), or owning worldly goods to encourage time with your family.

[This list of specific issues is not intended to be exhaustive. For example, homosexual and divorce/remarriage issues are not listed here because, although they are debated, most Christian organizations have a decided position about them. Theological debates are also not considered here. Theology focuses on the nature of God, whereas this is about an application of godliness to some commonly debated moral issues.]

A Definition

On the one hand, we have liberal Christians who want to have a “discussion” about everything. On the other hand, there are conservative Christians who say, “This is just plain wrong, so there is no need to debate it.” So, I will define it this way:

A debated issue is an act that is not today, nor has been historically, generally agreed upon as being wrong by a plurality mature Christian leaders.

I realize this definition is a general guideline, not an iron-clad (absolutely determinable) rule. Many things are debated today that have not been debated throughout history, either because they did not exist historically or values have changed (some of which should not have changed and some of which have changed for the better). Who is mature and who is a Christian leader may itself be debated. But usually, for the most part, most of the time, Christian leaders will be recognized as *those who led you who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, [believers will decide to] imitate their faith* (Hebrews 13:7). For example, drinking alcohol has been debated all through history (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:7-9) and violence in video games has not existed as an issue until recently. What they have in common is, all these are debated by Christian leaders today.

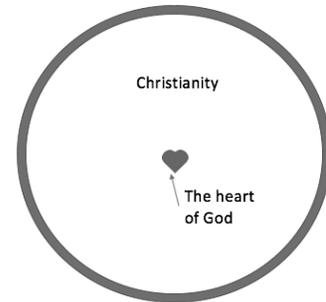
Debated issues are issues that are debated. That means, rational, biblically-based, Christian arguments can be made for both sides of the issue. And the arguments are made (formally or casually) by those who are considered by a plurality of Christians to be mature leaders. Debated issues are not those which are clearly right or wrong. For example, the *deeds of the flesh* and the *fruit of the Spirit* are not debatable among mature Christian leadership (Galatians 5:19-23).

Three Basic Questions

1. What Is Closest to the Heart of God?

The first question we should ask ourselves when thinking about a debated issue is, “Am I trying to find a loophole or am I trying to please God?” Debated issues are usually about things we want to do for some perceived personal benefit. And personal benefit is a good thing (Matthew 6:20). The question is whether the debated issue will be beneficial or does it bring us pleasure (or less pain) at

the expense of our relationship with God and eternal future. If we think of Christianity as a big circle and imagine the heart of God being in the center of that circle, many Christians are asking how close they can stand to the edge and still remain in the circle. But the question we need to be asking is, “What is closest to the heart of God?” Actions we perceive as desirable, that move us away from the heart of God, are not beneficial. For example, when someone comes in and asks me what I think about divorce or remarriage after divorce, I give them several passages (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:3-9; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2-3; and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Then I tell them to go home and read those passages and, rather than ask “What can I get away with?” ask “What would God prefer?”



2. Is This Wrong for Me Personally, or Is It Wrong Generally?

Is It Wrong for Me Personally?

Paul discussed four debatable issues which he said should be only decided personally, not generally. Those were: eating meat offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8:7-10), eating only vegetables (Romans 14:1-4), circumcision (Galatians 2:3), and regarding one day above another (Romans 14:5-6). All but circumcision carried the warning of not offending a weaker brother. So, one way to decide about debatable issues is personally, with discernment for the weaker brothers and sisters around us.

If I decide a debatable issue is wrong for me personally, it may be a preference, a personal conviction, or something that is sinful for me due to my own temptations (1 Samuel 24:5; James 4:17). But that also means the debatable issue itself is not wrong/sinful generally. I should feel no need to warn others about it or criticize them for it. For example, suppose you think interracial marriage is wrong for you personally. Since it is only a personal decision, that means you do not think interracial marriage is wrong generally. You don't think it is sinful or will lead to sin. The decision will be evidenced by the fact that you don't warn others about it, nor feel critical about others who marry interracially.

Here are some questions that we might ask in determining if something is personally wrong:

- Is there a danger for personal addiction?
- Has my personal experience led to a prejudice about this issue?
- Am I against this because of my Biblical understanding, or is it about my conservatism?
- Am I open to revisit my decision about this in light of further Bible study?

Is It Wrong Generally?

If we determine some debated issue is wrong generally, then it's a whole different thing. Now we must not only avoid it but **we must continually judge it as sin** and speak out against it when it comes up. Let's illustrate it with a non-debatable issue (so we won't be focused on the issue itself). Adultery is always wrong because God said so in the Bible. So, it is impossible to avoid being judgmental against anyone committing adultery. When we determine a debated issue to be wrong generally, then we have decided it offends the character of God, and it must be condemned, not just personally avoided.

But we must not just be conservative about everything. If in condemning a debated issue, we create a prohibition which God would not, then we have become like the Pharisees, creating laws not

supported by Scripture and judging others by those laws. Even though Paul knew freedom in Christ has the danger of turning *your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh* (Galatians 5:13), he still insisted we maintain that freedom. Paul told the Galatians,

But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. [Later he wrote,] It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (Galatians 2:4-5; 5:1).

The debatable issue here was circumcision (v. 3). The Jewish believers, especially those who came to Christ from among the Pharisees, thought all Gentiles who became Christians should be circumcised. Paul called that bringing them *into bondage*. What Paul was concerned about was *that the truth of the gospel would remain with you*. If they could create bondage by bringing an Old Testament law into the church, truth would be lost in legalism. It would become a boring, if not threatening, man-made regulation that challenged the freedom believers have in Christ, which is needed for spiritual growth (Matthew 23:4).

Here are some questions that might be asked in determining if something debatable is wrong:

- Do I have Scripture, in context, which clearly supports my view on this issue?
- Is the concern about the debatable issue itself, or what it might lead to?
- Is this issue treated differently in the Old Testament than it is in the New Testament?
- Am I open to revisit my decision about this in light of further Bible study?

3. Can I State Both Sides of the Issue Rationally?

When Solomon contrasted wisdom with foolishness, he understood the thinking of the fool. When the prophets challenged the sin of the Israelites, they understood the thinking of the Israelites. When Jesus challenged the legalism of the Pharisees, He understood their position so well He stated it to them, often better than they stated it themselves. Matthew 23 is an analysis of the Pharisees, based on a complete understanding of what they believed and taught and why they did what they did.

Consider the example Matthew gave us when some Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem, asked Jesus, *“Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”* Jesus responded with an explanation, not just of what they asked, but of their own position on the subject. He gave them an example where they reasoned, since they gave to God, they didn’t have money to help their parents. He concluded, *“And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition”* (Matthew 15:2-6).

When Paul criticized the legalists, he did it with a thorough understanding of their belief in a need for Christians to continue to keep the Mosaic Law. He told the Galatians,

...how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years, I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain (Galatians 4:9-10).

The tendency of both liberals and conservatives is to label, or think of their opponents as, “idiots” or “morons” or “stupid.” But in the case of debated issues, there is a rational debate about the issues. That means someone on the opposing side has thought the issue through and made a rational case for it. If we are going to hold to a position on a debated issue, we need to be able to state the opposing position with the basic thinking that has led them to that position. We need to understand why they

believe what they do, before we can make a case for why we believe what we do. If we simply tell people what we believe, our case will be defeated by someone who makes the opposing case. Solomon said, *The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him* (Proverbs 18:17).

One reason Christian young people, from conservative parents, go away to college and come back as liberals is because their parents did not make the case of the liberals and deal effectively with progressive thinking. For example, if the thinking of evolutionists and progressives is not understood, stated, examined and debated in our homes with better reasoning and information, then our children will likely become evolutionists and progressives.

Debating Debated Issues

I will not attempt to exhaustively, or even adequately, discuss these issues. Rather, I will present a few basic arguments on each side, to illustrate how we should go about debating debated issues.

Drinking Alcohol

Arguments Against

Drinking alcohol leads to drunkenness and drunkenness is clearly condemned in the Bible (Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 11:21; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:7; 1 Peter 4:3). For some people, drinking alcohol leads inevitably to drunkenness and addiction, and you might not know you are one of those people until it's too late. Paul said, *...not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in a brother's way* (Romans 14:13). Even drinking a little alcohol causes some drunkenness. A dizzy buzz is a form of being drunk. Wine in the Bible was not nearly as alcoholic as it is today, if it was alcoholic at all. It may have just been what we call grape juice. The wine Jesus created at the wedding in Cana may not have been alcoholic. It was better than that. *Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise* (Proverbs 20:1).

Arguments For

Which is it, drunkenness, which comes from drinking wine (Acts 2:13), is condemned in the Bible, or the wine in the Bible was not alcoholic? There is no question that the Bible condemns social drunkenness, but there is no condemnation for drinking alcohol itself. The idea that drinking and drunkenness are automatically tied together is unwarranted. We should avoid excesses, but that's true of nearly all good things. Drunkenness in the Bible is connected to excess and debauchery (Romans 13:13; 1 Peter 4:3), not sipping on a glass of wine. The Bible describes wine as a gift from God (Psalm 104:14, 15; Ecclesiastes 3:13; 9:7), and Jesus drank wine during His time on earth (Matthew 26:29; Luke 7:34). It is unreasonable to suppose Jesus created grape juice at the wedding in Cana. No one would understand that just reading John 2. Paul even recommended wine for health reasons to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23). There are many good statistics healthwise for drinking red wine. God even suggested drinking *wine or strong drink* (Deuteronomy 14:26). *Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart* (Ecclesiastes 9:7).

Gambling

Arguments Against

Gambling is based in greed and coveting money, and God hates greed (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Ephesians 5:3, 5). Gambling is a hope to gain money through the losses of others, which the Bible also condemns (Exodus 20:17; Romans 7:7; 13:9, 10). Gambling comes from and cultivates a love of money which Paul said *is a root of all sorts of evil and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of*

God (1 Timothy 6:10-11). Lotteries rob the poor. Gambling places, like casinos, card games, and horse races, do not attract wholesome people. Gambling is an addiction that causes many, like retired people, widows, and widowers, to lose all their retirement savings. Rather than promote a desire to get something for nothing, the Bible encourages hard work (Ecclesiastes 2:24; Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10, 12).

Arguments For

The reality is, no form of money gambling, like our casinos, lotteries, card games, and horse races are ever mentioned in the Bible. The Bible has many lists of sins from the Ten Commandments, to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, to Paul's deeds of the flesh. None of those lists ever mention gambling. If it is such an obvious sin, why is it never mentioned? Certainly, it existed in Biblical times. All arguments against gambling, assume it is done for greed, the love of money, or easy financial gain without work. But what if someone just wants to go to a casino, play cards, or bet on horses for fun? How can the critics of gambling know the motives of all gamblers? Once again, excess does not define existence. People who oppose gambling never seem to define the word. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th edition defines "gambling" as, "an act having an element of risk; something chancy." Isn't that true of all business ventures, new ministry outreaches, marriages, and church plantings?

Body Piercings

Arguments Against

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19; also 3:16). Since our body is God's temple, we should leave it as God made it, not pierce it with decorations. God condemned Israel for their pride (Isaiah 3:16) and illustrated their pride, saying, "*In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger rings, nose rings*" (Isaiah 3:18-21). When God told Jacob to go to Bethel and make an altar, Jacob told his sons to put away their foreign gods. *So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears* (Genesis 35:4). Part of their purification seems to be to get rid of their pierced earrings. And the Jacob's example is before the Mosaic Law. Peter (1 Peter 3:3) and Paul (1 Timothy 2:9) both warn about wearing gold jewelry, which would include body piercings. Nearly all body piercings, except for earlobe piercings, have a high potential for physical complications. Piercing is not like adornment or enhancing natural beauty. Piercing sets you apart from your natural looks, and is often permanently disfiguring or scarring.

Arguments For

Here is something good, that God said He did to favor Israel. "*I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck. I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head*" (Ezekiel 16:11-12). It is a metaphor of God's blessings, but why would He use body piercing as a symbol of His blessing if it was something bad? The same argument goes for Isaiah 3:18-21. If God says He will take away their body piercing jewelry because of their sin, then He must have given it to them in the first place. Peter and Paul are condemning outward adornment replacing inward adornment, not outward adornment per se. They also make the point that moderate adornment is more attractive (1 Timothy 2:9). *Your adornment must not be* [NASB adds the word *merely*] *external—braiding [more like elaborate plaiting] the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses* (1 Peter 3:3). If Peter was forbidding wearing any jewelry, was he also forbidding wearing any *dresses*? If we can't show that it's prohibited, then it's wrong to prohibit it. Purposefully not wearing any jewelry at all may also have the motive of attracting attention to yourself, like the Pharisees praying on the street corners to be noticed by men.

Tattoos

Arguments Against

“You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:28). This is in a list of sins that includes soothsaying, divination, and making your daughter a harlot. Ryrie says, “Both cutting and tattooing the body were done by the heathen.” Having tattoos is an identification with the world, not a separation from the world. Many of the arguments against tattoos are similar to those against body piercing. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

Arguments For

The Leviticus prohibition against *tattoo marks* was part of the Mosaic Law, which ended at the cross of Christ (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3–4). We must apply the Law (2 Timothy 3:16-17), but we are not commanded to keep its specific directives. The verse before the tattoo verse (Leviticus 19:27) says, *You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard*. If the Mosaic Law is still to be followed, men shaving the side-growth of their beards would be just as prohibited as wearing tattoos. Paul told us, *Nothing is unclean in itself* (Romans 14:14). Many things, including tattoos are *unclean* when they have a godless message or are done in excess. Tattoos representing things similar to soothsaying, divination, and harlotry should be forbidden because of their content. But the apostles never forbid tattoos themselves.

Eating Junk Food

Arguments Against

Junk food, like chips, candy, frosting-filled cakes, and greasy food loaded with fat and cholesterol are bad for your body, and your body should be disciplined (1 Corinthians 9:37). These foods lead to obesity with heart and other health problems. *Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank, [Daniel said,] let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink*. The result was Daniel and his friends were healthier than the others (Daniel 1:8-16). God gave Moses a very specific list of food for the Israelites to eat and not eat so they would get *none of the diseases* the rest of the world had (Exodus 15:26).

Arguments For

Eating “junk food” in moderation or on certain occasions does not result in obesity and health problems. Many healthy people, who discipline their bodies, eat junk food on occasion. Excessive eating of any food is what causes obesity and health problems. Excesses and extremes are always problematic in the area of consumption. Daniel 1:8-16 says Daniel chose to not eat choice food for a short period of time, for a specific purpose. It was not his way of eating for his whole life. Daniel 10:3 says that Daniel did eat tasty food, meat, and wine. God’s warning to the Israelites concerning diseases was not about staying healthy by eating the right food, it was about God not giving them the plagues God gave the Egyptians. *“If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer”* (Exodus 15:26). Good food is a good stewardship of your body, but that should not result in food prohibitions. Jesus said, *whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?”* (Thus He declared all foods clean) (Mark 7:18-19; see also Acts 10:10-16).

Euthanasia

Arguments Against

Saul asked an Amalekite to take his life when he was dying (2 Samuel 1:1-16). Later, the Amalekite told David he had killed Saul, so David sentenced him to death for his euthanasia of Saul. Life is a gift from God (Genesis 2:7), and God is sovereign over life and death (John 5:21). Ecclesiastes 8:8 tells us, *no man has authority...over the day of his death*. Only God has the final authority over life and death (1 Corinthians 15:26, 54–56; Hebrews 2:9, 14-15; Revelation 21:4). Euthanasia and assisted suicide are man's attempts to usurp that authority from God.

Arguments For

Euthanasia is mercy killing. The question is, "Are we being more merciful in preserving life or are we ignoring mercy by prolonging death and suffering?" Today, we have many techniques that can keep a person alive much longer than what is natural for the human body. Disallowing those technologies is not the same as taking a life. God is sovereign over everything, including our life and death, whether we assist in it or not. Is prolonging the life of someone who would otherwise die of cancer or heart disease an attempt to usurp authority from God? The David/Amalekite example is not a good one. David did not kill the Amalekite for euthanasia but for killing God's anointed king.

Funding Businesses that Support Sinful Issues

Arguments Against

With all the choices we have for purchasing today, why would we choose to fund businesses with anti-Christian policies? Israel was to avoid being part of the heathen world. *The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners*, when those foreigners publically supported sinful activity (Nehemiah 9:2). *You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me* (Exodus 23:32-33). Refusing to support such businesses is also a good testimony because it takes an outward stand against sin. If others know I do not buy from a business that supports what the Bible calls sin, then I am taking a stand for the fact that the truth is in the Bible.

Arguments For

One of the most specific differences between Israel and the church is that Israel was to be neither in the world nor of the world. In the church age, we are to be in the world but not of the world. Jesus prayed, *"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one"* (John 17:15). Paul told the Corinthians, *"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world"* (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). It is unrealistic to think we can avoid funding businesses that support sin in some way. And, although it is good to take a stand against sin, is boycotting non-Christian businesses really a good testimony for the gospel? The gospel is about reaching people out of this world, not fighting to shape the world into God's kingdom. *Our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly wait for a savior, The Lord Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:20). How can non-Christian businesses have the conviction of the Holy Spirit? Boycotting businesses just puts our focus on earth.

Interracial Marriage

Arguments Against

Israel was strictly forbidden to marry into other races. *"Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons* (Deuteronomy 7:3). Even though we are not under the Mosaic Law, it does apply to us today,

so we must ask how the interracial marriage prohibition applies. There is also the practical factor of the mingling of races in family relations. With a divorce rate near 50%, marriages and families have enough problems without adding racial tensions.

Arguments For

God forbid the Israelites to marry Canaanites and a few others but not every race. The second wife of Moses was a Cushite (Numbers 12:1-6). Hagar was an Egyptian, as was Joseph's wife. Rahab was a Gentile from Jericho, who married a Jew. Their son was Boaz who married Ruth, who was a Moabitess, and David, then later Jesus, were their descendants. The reason for the prohibition against foreign marriages is that the foreigners would bring their gods into Israel. The apostles prohibited believers marrying unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14), but not believers of a different race. They were clear about there being no racial distinctions in the church (Acts 10:28). *There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all* (Colossians 3:11).

Political Involvement

Arguments Against

In the Bible, every appeal for involvement in earthly political matters was for Israel and the Millennial Kingdom, not the church. Jesus and the apostles never commanded, recommended, or even suggested Christians be involved in politics. When Pilate asked Jesus if He was King of the Jews, Jesus answered, *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36). When asked about paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus said, *"...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Luke 20:24-25). While living under the oppressive insane government of Nero, both Peter and Paul said, *"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities"* (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13). And the lack of political involvement was not because they were unable to do anything about it. Christ and the apostles never avoided the right thing to do, just because it was difficult. The reason they avoided it was because political involvement had nothing to do with the gospel and would only dilute the prime objective of a heavenly focus. For example, if you take a conservative political stand, you will likely alienate liberal unbelievers. Paul told the Colossians, *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth* (Colossians 3:1-3). Political involvement only mirrors other religions' goals of world domination (like the Muslims).

Arguments For

Christ is king over everything and that includes this world we live in. Christians should not be so heavenly minded that they are of no worldly good. Jesus prayed, *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10). Our job is not just to spread the gospel but to bring in His Kingdom *on earth as it is in heaven*. That's a call for Christians to be involved in all aspects of society. We need to have more Christian doctors, lawyers, scientists, and also politicians. Opposing the evils in politics is one of the best ways to take a stand for what is right and wrong. In Exodus 18:21, Moses was told, *"...you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens."* We should also choose such political leaders *who fear God, men of truth*. God said if *"My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land"* (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Smoking Cigars

Arguments Against

Cigar smoking parallels the previously mentioned arguments of Eating Junk Food and Drinking Alcohol. They have to do with the potential harm it can do to your body, which is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Cigar smoking is also offensive to some people.

Arguments For

These arguments are about doing all things in moderation when they are not forbidden in the Bible, and God recommending the Israelites enjoy themselves with wine and strong drink. So why not cigars? That some take offense to it, only regulates proper use. It says nothing about the action itself.

Smoking Marijuana

Arguments Against

The idea that God created all plants and every plant and tree was good for food (Genesis 1:12; 29-31) does not take into account the Fall that allowed the ground to grow weeds and thistles. Poison hemlock and poison mushrooms are also created by God but are not good for consumption. Some Biblical arguments also stem from wrong translations. Ezekiel 34:29 in KJV reads, *and I will raise up for them a plant of renown*. But the word for plant is actually a *planting place* [as corrected by the NASB]. At any rate, it refers to the future Millennial Kingdom, not life today. Marijuana is often compared to alcohol use, which is permitted in the Bible when it does not lead to intoxication (Ephesians 5:18). But marijuana use is different. Although wine will only intoxicate with sustained use, marijuana intoxicates immediately. Intoxication jeopardizes one's ability to discern the will of God, and marijuana does that in a way that moderate use of wine does not. Marijuana is also a "gateway drug" to more dangerous drugs. Since we do not have a Biblical discussion of intoxication from other drugs, we can only apply the Biblical prohibition against drunkenness. Peter did not just forbid drunkenness but commanded, *Be sober, be vigilant* (1 Peter 5:8 KJV). Also, if you live in a place where marijuana is illegal, then using it is breaking the law (Romans 13:1-4).

Arguments For

If we go about creating sins that the Bible does not, we are acting like the Pharisees of the gospels. The Bible does actually give a use for intoxication from wine. After warning about wine and strong drink, Lemuel's mother said, *Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more* (Proverbs 31:6-7). Intoxication seems to have a medical and psychological value. So why not also marijuana? The idea that marijuana is a "gateway drug" to more powerful drugs has no medical confirmation. For example, if someone gets marijuana from friends that also use heroin, they will probably also be offered heroin. But it's the friends, not the marijuana, that are the "gateway" to other drugs. Forbidding marijuana use is putting the focus on external practices rather than internal morality. Jesus said, *"It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man"* (Matthew 15:11). Paul wrote, *"I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 14:14, 17).

Using Medical Marijuana

Medical marijuana is just marijuana, and the active ingredient can be produced synthetically. Marinol is a commercially produced FDA approved medication containing the active ingredient THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) which comes in capsule form and is a synthetic form of marijuana. The webmd.com says, "Medical marijuana uses the marijuana plant or chemicals in it to treat diseases or

conditions. It's basically the same product as recreational marijuana, but it's taken for medical purposes." The leaves and buds of the plant can be smoked, crushed and put into food or drink. Medical is just when it is being used for medical purposes. In addition to the arguments for and against recreational marijuana, there is one more point.

Argument Against

There are many other drugs available for treating the same things that marijuana treats. Why allow another addicting drug when it is not necessary?

Argument For

Any drug can be addictive. An argument that there are other drugs available is the same as saying we don't need ibuprofen because we have aspirin, or we not need Cipro because we have penicillin. Similar but different drugs can give different relief to different people.

R-rated Movies

Arguments Against

The question is, "Would Jesus go to these movies?" Movie ratings are assigned by the MPAA (the Motion Picture Association of America), a group made up of the large motion picture studios. An R-rating is given "for strong and frequent language and violence, nudity for sexual purposes, and drug abuse." How can there be any value for a Christian to see that? Paul told the Corinthians, *All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify...*[and] *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:23, 31). R-rated movies conjure up mental images that are designed to produce temptations and mental temptations are sinful (Matthew 5:28). Also, weaker believers who are struggling with a temptation may be caused to stumble by insensitive believers who attend R-rated movies (1 Corinthians 10:25-33; Romans 14:13).

Arguments For

The movie industry is hardly qualified to rate movies. The MPAA is a group of unbelievers who know nothing, and care nothing, about the Bible. The real problem is not just bad language, violence, and nudity. Those things are red flags that are easy to identify. One can simply avoid the movies that display things that cause their own personal mental temptations. For example, violence in movies does not tempt me to be violent. You may have to decide that for your children, but no one should program the moral activities of someone else. [For example, the Roman Catholic Church publishes a list of movies that can and cannot be watched—decentfilms.com/articles/vaticanfilmlist]. The subtler and more dangerous aspects of movies have more to do with indoctrination into the liberal progressive agenda. Many G and PG-rated movies glorify divorce, remarriage, cohabitation, lying, pride, vengeance, homosexuality, and godless religions, while displaying Bible-believing Christians as terrorists or perverts. Why is the conservative answer to everything to avoid it rather than evaluate it? Things themselves are not good or bad. Does the Bible say, "Thou shall not relax or enjoy entertainment?" Each of us needs to decide what is *profitable*. "What would Jesus do?" doesn't help. There is no Biblical evidence that Jesus did anything for entertainment. Jesus would not go to ball games, symphony concerts, restaurants, conventions, or county fairs—for entertainment.

Karate

Arguments Against

It is fundamental to the martial arts to understand “The mind and technique become one in true karate” (ska.org/master-funakoshi). The basic idea of karate is not just physical exercise or defense. It is a process of shaping our spirit and our mind into a “way of life” which merges our mental and spiritual life with Buddhist or Zen philosophy. It involves a meditation where you empty your mind, not one where you fill it with the Word of God (Joshua 1:8). The Bible says God *abandoned Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with influences from the east* (Isaiah 2:6). Karate is not something that should become one with physical exercises and self-defense. The Bible tells us *to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, and that you are to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is* (Romans 12:1-2), not open our mind to the ideas of Buddhism. Attitudes common in the martial arts are: egotism, self-sufficiency, pride and a desire for power and control. These are not Christian values. To think the physical “hard” forms of karate can be separated from the religious and spiritual “soft” aspects, is naive. Karate is flirting with idolatry.

Arguments For

Karate is just another form of physical exercise aimed at allowing us to better defend ourselves. It is like the New Testament example eating meat offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8 & 10). It may come from other religions, but it does not connect us to those religions. If we oppose karate because of its origin, then we should oppose studies like astronomy, because of its origin in astrology, and algebra, because of its origin in the non-Christian Arab world. Philip made the mistake of condemnation based on origin when he asked of Jesus, *Can anything good come out of Nazareth?* (John 1:46). The peaceful non-combative nature of karate is consistent with the exhortations of Jesus to be a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9; 26:52).

Playing Video Games

Arguments Against

Multi-player role-playing games (RPGs), are often fantasy games which include magic, murder, and destruction. Female avatars (representations of characters) are often scantily dressed. Some RPGs even encourage players to flirt with each other or have sexual encounters. RPGs are structured in such a way that encourages obsessive or addictive behaviors while players attempt to reach higher levels. Such games leave you confused about God’s views on the occult or desensitize your mind to occult lifestyles. The Bible says, *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father* (Colossians 3:17). How do such games accomplish this? Children engross themselves in video games and sit for hours doing nothing but playing video games. This turns kids into zombies, while encouraging violent behavior. Kids are becoming recluses in their own homes and often turn to violence after being addicted to video games.

Arguments For

If you want to avoid things that leave your children confused about God’s views on life, and desensitize their minds to occult lifestyles, then don’t send them to school—K through college. Blaming child violence on video games, is like saying guns kill people. Nearly all kids in America play video games. Many of those kids excel in sports, spelling contests, debate clubs, engineering and science projects, while getting excellent grades. If video games were the problem, then the problems should be seen in every kid that plays them. Playing soccer or hockey can be more violent, time consuming and mind dominating than video games. The reality is, smarter kids today are more

intelligent, capable, and functional than ever before. People have played chess and checkers for years by staring at a board and tuning out the rest of the world, like zombies. As kids in the 1950s and 60s, we played war and “shot and killed” each other with very realistic looking cap guns and bullets. None of that seemed to turn us into violent gangsters. The problem is not the games kids play. The problem is the absence of fathers in the home. When parents are divorced, taking drugs, sleeping around, screaming at each other in hateful selfishness contests, kids retreat into video games where they can escape. The problem is not the game, it’s the parenting—or lack thereof.

Is a License Required for Marriage?

Arguments Against

The Bible never says marriage requires a license or a ceremony. The only Biblical requirement for marriage is physical sexual relations. The basic principle of marriage is stated by God when Adam and Eve became husband and wife. *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24). Becoming *one flesh* can only mean having sexual relations. This exact same principle was restated by Jesus (Matthew 19:25) and the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 5:31). In the Bible, marriage never required a ceremony, nor any formal license. Marriage actually existed for many years before any government established rules for marriage. To define marriage as a ceremony with a certificate is problematic. Could a couple stranded on a deserted island not get married? What about governments that don’t require a certificate? Isaac *took Rebekah and she became his wife* when he *took her* into his tent (Genesis 24:67). Jacob was married to Leah, when he *went in to her* (Genesis 29:23). This is not to say every sexual relation is marriage, any more than every killing is a murder. A killing becomes a murder when there is an intention to murder someone. Sexual relations become marriage when the intention is to be married.

Arguments For

One obvious reason marriage needs a ceremony with vows and a license is that today’s governments require it. And we are to be in submission to our government (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:17). Even if this was not true in ancient history, it is today. In the ancient world of, say, Abraham’s day, marriage was arranged by, or approved by, the extended family patriarch. But the patriarch **was** the government. Therefore, marriage, even then, was according to government. Nearly every ancient human culture has observed some official wedding ceremony. That was certainly true in Jesus’ day. In John 2, Jesus attended a formal, official, wedding at Cana. Jesus also used many parables and metaphors which recognized an official formal wedding. Actually, sex does not define marriage. Through Malachi, God said the wife of your youth is *your companion and your wife by covenant* (Malachi 2:14). What defines marriage is a socially recognized, government-authorized *covenant*. The most basic proof of marriage is the ability to be divorced. The woman at the well **had** five husbands and the one she was living with was not a husband (John 4:18). When an Israelite wanted to get rid of a wife, *he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house*. If you can’t get divorced, then you aren’t married. Splitting up the dishes and going your separate ways is not divorce. Divorce is a legal thing requiring a certificate. So, therefore, is marriage.

Cohabitation

Arguments Against

Cohabitation is an arrangement where two people, who could be married, live together without being married. “On average, marriage preceded by cohabitation is 46% more likely to end in divorce. Forty percent of cohabiting households include children ... After five years, one-half of these couples will

have broken up, compared to 15% of married parents” (foryourmarriage.org). So, there is no marital advantage to cohabitation. Even if it “works” for unbelievers with a worldly perspective, it is not right for Christians. The implication of cohabitation is that those living together are having sexual relations. Everyone who knows about two people, who could be married but are living together, assumes they are having sexual relations. Paul said such immorality *must not even be named among you* (Ephesians 5:3). Having sexual relations before marriage is fornication and is condemned in the Bible and is just like any other sexual immorality (Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Jude 7).

Arguments For

The goal of most cohabitation is to see if a couple is ready, or compatible, for marriage. The reason more cohabitating couples get divorced does not mean cohabitation causes divorce. The reason they cohabitated may be because they were not capable of being married. Currently, 60% of all marriages are preceded by cohabitation, but fewer than half of cohabiting unions end in marriage. So, cohabitation often helps couples decide that they do not want to be married, saving them from bad marriages and divorce. Justin Wolfers, an economist at the University of Michigan, said that progressives thought marriage would just die or be seen as obsolete. “What’s happened instead is that it’s become a fundamentally different institution” (thinkprogress.org). Since women have equality, the roles of each partner must be established before marriage, and cohabitation might be the best way to determine that. The divorce rate has actually been dropping since its peak around 1980. Cohabitation may have contributed to that. Consider the whole area of older people cohabitating, without sexual relations, for financial reasons. Since there are different kinds of cohabitation, all cohabitation arrangements must be discussed, rather than putting them all into the general category of always being sinful.

Using Violence to Defend Your Family

Arguments Against

The Bible promotes personal non-violence. The Old Testament violence and wars were about establishing Israel in their land without the influence of the idolatrous Canaanites. It was not about personal violence. Solomon wrote: *Do not envy a man of violence, and do not choose any of his ways... If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you* (Proverbs 3:31; 25:21-22; Romans 12:17). Jesus clearly ruled out violence as a response to evil when He said, “*But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also [and] But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” (Matthew 5:39, 44). Paul gave the same perspective when he wrote, “*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*” (Romans 12:17-18). If we believe God is sovereign over every part of our lives, then we should trust Him to protect us and our families, not violate His commands as a means of self-defense.

Arguments For

The Mosaic Law made a distinction between killing someone breaking into your house at night, when the assumption is the family needs to be protected, and someone who just breaks in during the day to steal. *If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft* (Exodus 22:2-3). God does not categorically condemn violence. David violently killed Goliath (1

Samuel 17) and Samuel violently killed King Agag (1 Samuel 15:33). Jesus added this directive for His disciples as they left the upper room, “*whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one*” (Luke 22:36). The commands of Jesus about turning the other cheek are about forbidding vengeance, not protecting your family. If you are a parent, you have a responsibility to do what is reasonable to defend your family. *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever* (1 Timothy 5:8).

Debt and Loans (Personal, Business, and College)

Arguments Against

There is an old saying, “If money will fix the problem, it’s not a very big problem.” A corollary to that might be, if money will get it for you, it’s not very valuable. The “need” to borrow money is always based on the idea that money will fix a problem or get something valuable. No money will buy *faith, hope, and love...joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:22-23). Paul warned, *For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs* (1 Timothy 6:10). The Mosaic Law states, *If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest* (Exodus 22:25). A loan was seen as a gift that the borrower was to pay back but the lender was not to make money from the loan. David said of the one who *will never be shaken*, that, *He does not put out his money at interest* (Psalm 15:5). Solomon said, *The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave [also] He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor* (Proverbs 22:7; 28:8). Jesus’ alternative to lending was *Give, and it will be given to you* (Luke 6:38). Paul’s conclusion, in a financial context, was *owe nothing to anyone* (Romans 13:8).

Arguments For

The Bible qualifies loans and debt but never calls them sinful. For example, usury (excessive interest) is condemned, but not the loan itself. Under the Mosaic Law, *At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts* (Deuteronomy 15:1). That means the Law allowed debt or there would be no need to have a remission of it. Although Jews could not charge interest to other Jews, the Law said, *You may charge interest to a foreigner* (Deuteronomy 23:20). So, charging interest on loans was regulated, not forbidden. Paul said, *owe nothing to anyone* (Romans 13:8), but a borrower does not own anything until the payment is due. And if my assets are greater than my loan, then I am not actually in debt. Some things like a house or college education are not obtainable without debt. The Scripture does not deal with that because it was not an issue in Biblical times. For example, Peter’s house in Capernaum could be bought today for about a thousand dollars. But such a house is not available today, nor permitted by most building codes.

Owning Worldly Goods to Encourage Time with Your Family

Arguments Against

Materialism is “a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values” (New Oxford American Dictionary). Solomon tried that. Here is his report. *Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun* (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11). In contrast to that, Jesus said of Himself, “*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (Luke 9:58). He warned, “*the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful*” (Mark 4:19) [and] “*not even when one has an abundance does his*

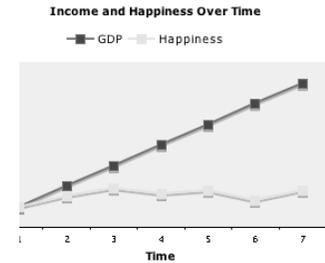
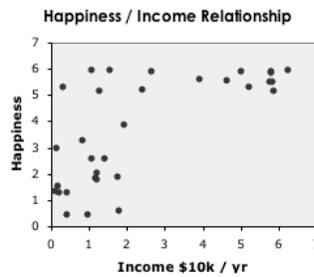
life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15) [and] “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth*” (Matthew 6:19) [and] “*where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*” (Luke 12:34). There is no evidence that families with more possessions are happier. “Over time happiness does not increase when a country’s income increases” (theguardian.com). “What matters a lot more than a big income is *how people spend it*. For instance, giving money away makes people a lot happier than lavishing it on themselves. And when they do spend money on themselves, people are a lot happier when they use it for experiences like travel than for material goods” (wsj.com).

Arguments For

If the Bible is against wealth and worldly possessions, why were godly people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Boaz, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia, and Philemon wealthy with many worldly possessions?

Believers, who hosted churches in their homes, were wealthy enough to own large enough homes. If God is opposed to

possessions, it seems odd that we find many godly people mentioned in connection with their wealth. Wealth cannot buy happiness, but possessions can be used to improve our life if we see them as tools, not treasures. Solomon said *Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money [literally silver] is the answer to everything* (Ecclesiastes 10:19). Paul wrote, *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need* (Ephesians 4:28). Our work should provide for more than our wellbeing, it should assist the needs of others. But that includes our own families and extended families. Studies of Eastern Europe show “Apparently, after a country gets to about \$10k per capita, the correlation weakens, and wealth brings diminishing returns after that” (science20.com). So even though increased wealth does not increase happiness, some wealth does.



Conclusion

The fact that some issues are debated is not a bad thing. It gives us an opportunity to search the Scripture and reason together. When debating them, we need to look first for God’s heart, by being true to a literal, author-intended view of Scripture. Then, we need to determine if the issue is personal or generally sinful. Finally, in debating it, whether formally or casually or even within our own minds, we need to be sure we can state the opposing view in rational terms.