

Chapter One

IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF IT

Evangelicalism has never chased relevance more determinedly than it does now. And yet, we've never been more irrelevant. —Os Guinness, **Author**.¹

Where Do You Draw the Line?

How far is too far?" and "Where do you draw the line?" are questions Tim and I hear all the time from people whenever we are in a discussion about film, dance, drinking, or really any other thing associated as taboo within the Christian community. These are great questions because they bring up great concerns about living holy in a fallen world. However, these are ultimately the wrong questions to be asking.

Cease Fire, the War is Over

A young dating couple might ask their youth pastor, “Where do we draw the line physically before we have gone too far?”, but the focus of this question obsessively places our attention on morality or the Law in which Christ came to set us free, instead of putting our attention on the proper context of sex. The focus is on the act as sinful, or secular, as opposed to sex finding fulfillment in its Biblical context. In short, the focus is on the “*what*” and not on the “*why*”, on the individual and not on God’s intentions.

The Pharisees were constantly coming to Christ asking moral questions like, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” (Matthew 12:10). They also interrogated the disciples about Jesus, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” (Matthew 9:11).² They even called Christ a “glutton and a drunkard” (Matthew 11:19).

These people knew the law forwards, backwards, and upside-down. They even made up extra laws just to set further boundaries on things that should have been left alone. Instead of helping people to live better, these laws only further enslaved people to a set of rules and regulations that even the Pharisees could not keep³. What was Jesus’ response to all of this?

“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean.’” (Matthew 15:16-20)

He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions

ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,'⁴ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.' (Matthew 12:3-8)

From Jesus' response, a better question to ask about "where to draw the line" might be, "How do I prepare myself for the proper context of sex in marriage?" or "thought in film?" or whatever topic your question is directed to.

We want our focus to be on the task at hand, on Christ's mission and work. We do not want the distraction of law and legalism getting in our way, as it provides no escape from sin (John 3:17; Romans 8; Galatians). We already know that no one is sinless (Romans 3:10-12; 1 John 1:1-10). So, why do we try to use law to save us from sin? Only Christ can save us (John 14:6; 1 John 2:1-2) and only the Holy Spirit can lead us through our weaknesses towards proper choices (1 John 2:26-27).

This legalistic thinking has affected Christians and non-Christians alike. I (Eric) was watching *Late Night with David Letterman* when Jessica Alba was on promoting her new film, *Honey*. She was talking about a cast party she had taken her brother to and how it had affected his Christian walk. "I went to this private party that one of the producers threw and all these artists are there and I took my brother. My brother is very religious and he was getting married. He's 21 and I kind of wanted him to see other things and I was like, 'I will take him to this hip-hop party!' cause he likes hip-hop music. So, Puffy, P. Diddy, whatever you want to call him, was there and my brother doesn't drink, because he's a Christian, and he has

one too many of every kind of alcohol that you can have at the party, and he starts rapping to Puffy, his songs—all the words—*Bad Boy*, and the security guards come out and I'm like, 'No! This is my brother. It's okay.'"⁵

Then, there is Ralph Winter, who is a film producer. He told *Relevant* magazine, "People were coming up to me and asking, 'How can you say you're a Christian but make a movie like *X-Men* or *Planet of the Apes*, which implies evolution?' And, with the movie *Hocus Pocus*, people were saying, 'How can you call yourself a Christian, but make a movie about three witches and a talking cat?' But, what I tell them is to look at the movie...look at how the young man in the movie was willing to lay down his life to save another, and look at how at the end, evil—the witches were destroyed. Are these not Christian principles?"⁶

Later in the article, *Relevant* wrote, "Film productions notwithstanding, Winter has also been lambasted, in many instances, not for the content of his films, but for the fact that he professes a belief in Jesus Christ and is even *involved* in the industry. Some of Winter's critics have even suggested that to be employed in an industry that sometimes produces R-rated material is a moral faux pas, if not an all-out Christian violation."⁷

So "in the world, but not of it" was Jesus' call to his people. If this is not about the law, then what is it about? What gets everyone confused, and perhaps on several different tracks, all boils down to one word: *worldliness*. Many people define worldliness as a thing or an idea (such as drinking or "secular" movies as criticized of Jessica Alba and Ralph Winter), but Jesus' words in Matthew 15 say something quite different.

Jesus told the Pharisees, in a nutshell, that worldliness is produced from the inside-out, not the outside-in. Things do not make us worldly, but what we think and do with those things are the results of worldliness. Worldliness, itself,

comes from the heart. This suggests that our method of filtering out worldliness must start from within, sifting out Truth and letting the rest pass through. This is the reason why it is so crucial to think about all things Christianly and redemptively.⁸

The world has certainly been corrupted, but if we are to use things as God intended them to be used, we will have to reclaim them back into God's ownership. To do this, we will have to filter them through Scripture to discover their proper Christian usage. This filtering process is referred to as Biblical Integration.⁹

It will start with our **eyes** (**reading** the passages), then work towards our **minds** (**evaluating** the passages within a larger context), then to our **hearts** (**transforming** our beliefs), and will end by escaping through our **mouths** and **bodies** (**applying** and **living out** the passages). This process will prevent worldliness because it will bring all of life back into a clear focus as a holistic way of life.

The reason this process is so important is based on three fundamental principles:

- 1) In the beginning, all creation was perfect.
- 2) Then, our own sin marred and permeated everything at the Fall.
- 3) Since the fall was our fault, it is our job to redeem everything back into God's ownership. We must provide a synthesis of Scripture with all of the fallen creation, bringing everything together in peaceful harmony with God's Word.

All Creation was Perfect

The message is clear: when God made the world, he made everything good. Nothing was wrong. All of it was

