

“HOW TO GET DISQUALIFIED IN THE BIGGEST RACE OF YOUR LIFE”

or

“THE TRUE BOUNDS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM”¹

Text: I Corinthians 9:24 – “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.”

INTRODUCTION:

There are many ways to get disqualified in a race. You can false start twice, upon which you are not allowed to run the race (e.g. Linford Christie in the finals of the men’s 100 metre dash at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, USA). Or you can make an error during the race, such as stepping on a lane line for 3 consecutive strides in a 100m or 200m sprint, or drop the baton or exchange it outside of the exchange zone in a relay race, whereupon you will be immediately halted (e.g. the United States men’s 4x100 team at the 2008 Beijing Olympics). However perhaps the most embarrassing as well as tragic way to be disqualified, is to finish the race and appear to win the prize, only to be stripped of it due to an inadvertent or deliberate disregard & breaking of the rules, such as failing a drug test (e.g. Ben Johnson being stripped of his gold medal for the men’s 100 metre dash at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, South Korea or Marion Jones of the United States, who was stripped of all 4 of her gold medals from the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia).

In the spiritual realm it is no different. These notes are given to help us to avoid being “*disqualified*” after going through our entire race in this life. Almost nothing could be more tragic than to finish our life here on earth and stand before the judgment seat of Christ, only to have Him tell us that all of the rewards we thought we were going to receive have been stripped from us, due to a failure to run our spiritual race according to His rulebook the Bible! How devastating that would be. So let us stand fast, anchored to the Word of God & the principles it teaches!

In light of those thoughts, it’s extremely important that we understand what the Bible teaches in regard to the subject of *Christian liberty*, and also in regard to the subject of *legalism*. There is a tremendous amount of confusion in Christian circles today as to what those words mean, and what they entail for a believer.

For instance, Chuck Swindoll says that believers are “*under grace*” and as such, are free to do whatever their conscience gives them peace about doing as long as it is not blatantly unbiblical.

*******WHAT FOLLOWS FROM HERE THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF PAGE 10 ARE QUOTES BY SWINDOLL FROM HIS BOOK “*The Grace Awakening*”² (along with my brief comments in blue ink):**

- **“A new movement is on the horizon.** It is a movement of freedom, a joyful release from the things that have bound us far too long. More and more Christians are realizing that the man-made restrictions and legalistic regulations under which they have been living have not come from the God of grace, but have been enforced by people who do not want others to be free. It is not an overstatement to describe this movement as an awakening that is beginning to sweep across the country. **Nothing could please me more. This awakening to freedom is long overdue. It fits the times in which we are living.**”³ **[Which is exactly the problem! –my comment here & in all blue lettering that appears in brackets in the following pages]**
- **“The world has been witnessing an astounding political awakening to freedom in Eastern Europe** [written in 1990, right after the fall of the Berlin Wall]...The cry of *Freiheit* has been shouted at border gates and in the

¹ By Rev. Mike Edwards. These notes are from two sources: 1) a sermon I preached at Choppins Baptist Church, St. Vincent, West Indies and subsequently at chapel at Baptist Bible College of the Caribbean (Nov. 2010) & 2) notes & thoughts shared during a class period in a course I taught on I Corinthians at BBCC, Aug-Dec, 2010. My prayer is that something here will be helpful in regard to this very important & controversial subject of “*Christian Liberty*” & “*Legalism*.” – Dec., 2010 (revised & updated, Mar., 2018). The subtitle is taken from a book by the same name, by Samuel Bolton, a Puritan pastor & author. **Note: All comments in blue ink are mine.-mwe**

² **Note:** British spelling is used throughout. Almost all italicized words from Swindoll appear as such in the original. All bolding, underlining & colorizing throughout have been added by me-mwe

³ Charles Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Word Publishing: Dallas, TX, 1990), p. xiii. Note: All italicized words in the Swindoll quotes appear that way in the original.

streets of Budapest, Prague, Bucharest, and East Berlin. Not since the liberated victims of German concentration camps caught their first glimpse of hope back in the mid 1940s have so many enjoyed the reality of being released. After years of enforcement, they are free...*free at last*. We who live in ‘the land of the free’ applaud their liberation. Free people find delight in others’ freedom. **Only the politically enslaved resist it...**

“The same is true spiritually. But as much as I would like to say that all are in support of our pursuit of grace-awakening freedom, I cannot. **Be warned, there are grace killers on the loose! To make matters worse, they are a well-organized, intimidating body of people who stop at nothing to keep you and me from enjoying the freedom that is rightfully ours to claim. [i.e. Anyone with standards or convictions are boogeymen!]** I know whereof I speak; I was once numbered among them. Legalism was my security, and making certain that others marched to my cadence was a major part of my daily agenda. No longer. For years now, I have become increasingly aware of an awakening of grace in my own life...and nothing has brought me greater relief or, for that matter, more intense criticism. It was safer back then, but since when have we been commanded to take the safe route? Christ certainly didn’t...

“When the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century revival spread across Great Britain and into America, preached fervently by John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and a handful of other risk-taking spokesmen for God, it was again grace that led the way. **And there was again strong resistance from those who frowned upon their message of freedom in Christ [Really? Jonathan Edwards was a “freedom-loving loose cannon?” Hardly!] ...**

“What I am sensing these days is yet another awakening in the genre of those history-making movements. Perhaps it is best defined as ‘The Grace Awakening,’ a message whose time has come. Scarcely a day passes when I am not reminded of the need for a book emphasizing the full extent of grace, giving people permission to be free, absolutely free in Christ. Why? Because so few are! **Bound and shackled by legalists’ lists of do’s and don’ts, intimidated and immobilized by others’ demands and expectations,** far too many in God’s family merely exist in the tight radius of **bondage, dictated by those who have appointed themselves our judge and jury...Long enough have we been asleep while all around us the grace killers do their sinister nighttime work.** No longer! It is time to awaken. The dawn is bright with grace...

“I find it tragic that religious kill-joys have almost succeeded in taking the freedom and fun out of faith...Harassment has had the floor long enough. Let grace awaken... But I should warn you, once the smoldering embers burst into full flame, you’ll not be able to extinguish them. Having joined the ranks of **this freedom movement,** you will never again be satisfied with slavery. Having become a part of *The Grace Awakening*, your long-awaited freedom will encourage you and charm others for a lifetime.”⁴ **[Wow! He says there’s a huge cadre of individuals out to harass believers across God’s entire earthly kingdom!]**

In Swindoll’s book a bold quote by a person way outside the mainstream of conservative biblical Christianity (Richard J. Neuhaus) appears right off the bat on the cover page of chapter one, in order to get his point across that we’re free to do whatever we want. It states: “(The) moralizing and legalizing of the Gospel of God’s grace is a dull heresy peddled to disappointed people who are angry because they have not received what they had no good reason to expect. –Richard J. Neuhaus.” [sic]⁵ **[I believe that Neuhaus is a Roman Catholic, thus a member of a church that is totally opposed to salvation by grace through faith alone and truly does fit the correct definition and application of legalism i.e. getting to heaven by good works & deeds done!]**

“DEFINING TWO SIGNIFICANT TERMS

- **“Without becoming needlessly academic, I want to define a couple of the terms that I’ve been tossing around. First of all, What do I mean when I declare that the Christian has liberty? And second, What does it mean to say that legalism puts people under bondage?**

LIBERTY

“Essentially, liberty is freedom...freedom from something and freedom to do something. Liberty is freedom from slavery or bondage. It is initially freedom from sin’s power and guilt. Freedom from God’s wrath...And

⁴ Swindoll, *ibid*, pp. xiii-xvi

⁵ Swindoll, *ibid*, p. xvii

equally important, it is freedom from shame that could easily bind me as well as freedom from the tyranny of others' opinions, obligations, and expectations...

“There was a time in my life without Christ when I had no freedom from the urges and impulses within me. I was at the mercy of my master Satan and sin was my lifestyle...It was an awful bondage. For example, in my personal life I was driven by jealousy for many miserable years...Now that Christ has come into my life and I have been awakened to His grace, He has provided a freedom from that kind of slavery to sin...In addition, He has also brought a glorious freedom from the curse of the Law. By that I mean freedom from the constancy of its demands to perform in order to please God and/or others...**Freedom from the demands of other people, from all the *shoulds* and *oughts* of the general public...** [cf. I Cor. 6-10]

“Grace also brings a freedom *to do* something else—a freedom to enjoy the rights and the privileges of being out from under slavery and allowing others such freedom... **It is a freedom to become all that He meant me to be, regardless of how He leads others. I can be me—fully and freely.** It is a freedom to know Him in an independent and personal way. And that freedom is then released to others so they can be who they are meant to be—different from me!”⁶ [*It's all about “you” i.e. centered on self!*]

“You see, God isn't stamping out little cookie-cutter Christians across the world so that we all think alike and look alike and sound alike and act alike. The body has variety. We were never meant to have the same temperaments and use the same vocabulary and wear the same syrupy smile and dress the same way and carry on the same ministry... This freedom to be who we are is nothing short of magnificent. It is freedom to make choices, freedom to know His will, freedom to walk in it, freedom to obey His leading me in my life and you in your life. Once you've tasted such freedom, nothing else satisfies.

“Perhaps I should reemphasize that **it is a liberty you will have to fight for. Why? Because the ranks of Christianity are full of those who compare and would love to control and manipulate you so you will become as miserable as they are.** After all, if they are determined to be ‘cramped, somber, dull, and listless,’ then they expect you to be that way, too. **‘Misery loves company’ is the legalists’ unspoken motto, though they never admit it.**”⁷ [*So anyone who observes biblical standards of conduct is a joyless, miserable wretch!*]

“LEGALISM

“Now is a good time for us to become better acquainted with the staunch enemy of liberty. Legalism is an attitude, a mentality based on pride. **It is an obsessive conformity to an artificial standard for the purpose of exalting oneself.** A legalist assumes the place of authority and pushes it to unwarranted extremes. As Daniel Taylor states so well, it results in illegitimate control, requiring unanimity, not unity. [**His definition is faulty. He uses the term legalism in a “bait & switch” way, changing it from a correct definition to an incorrect one, complete with illustrations which blur it completely. mwe**]

‘The great weapon of authoritarianism, secular or religious, is legalism: the manufacturing and manipulation of rules for the purpose of illegitimate control... [Oh come on!]

‘Legalism is one more expression of the human compulsion for security. If we can vigorously enforce an exhaustive list of do's and don'ts (with an emphasis on external behavior), we not only can control unpredictable human beings but have God's favor as well...

‘Legalistic authoritarianism shows itself in the confusion of the Christian principle of unity with a human insistence on unanimity. Unity is a profound, even mystical quality. It takes great effort to achieve, yet mere effort will never produce it; it is a source of great security, yet demands great risk.

‘Unanimity, on the other hand, is very tidy. It can be measured, monitored, and enforced. It is largely external, whereas unity is essentially internal Its primary goal is corrected behavior, while unity's is a

⁶ Swindoll, *ibid*, pp. 78-80

⁷ Swindoll, *ibid*, p. 80

right spirit. Unanimity insists on many orthodoxies in addition to those of belief and behavior, including orthodoxy of experience and vocabulary.’

“In so many words, **legalism says, ‘I do this or I don’t do that, and therefore I am pleasing God.’** Or ‘If only I could do this or not do that, I would be pleasing to God.’ Or perhaps, ‘These things that I’m doing or not doing are the things I perform to win God’s favor.’ [A false definition again. However, using his definition, Bible-believing churches, Christian schools & colleges, etc., who have standards & policies do NOT fit the definition of being “legalists anyway, since they don’t have policies thinking the observing of them earns God’s approval!”]

“**Legalism is rigid, grim, exacting, and law-like in nature. Pride, which is at the heart of legalism,** works in sync with other motivating factors. Like guilt. And fear. And shame. It leads to an emphasis on what should *not* be, and what one should *not* do. It flourishes in a drab context of negativism. [No, Chuck, not pride. Maybe Scripture & maybe a zeal & jealousy for His Name, His glory & for other believers (e.g. opposing alcohol, etc.) e.g. Rom. 14; I Cor. 6-11; Titus 2:11-12; Gal. 5:13; Jude 3, 8ff; II Pet 2:10-14, 19; I Jn. 2:18-25; etc.]

“Few people have described legalism better than **Eugene Peterson** does in his fine book *Traveling Light*, where he contrasts the healthy walk of faith with legalism.

‘**The word *Christian* means different things to different people. To one person it means a stiff, uptight, inflexible way of life, colorless and unbending. To another it means a risky, surprise-filled venture, lived tiptoe at the edge of expectation.**

‘**Either of these pictures can be supported with evidence.** There are numberless illustrations for either position in congregations all over the world. **But if we restrict ourselves to biblical evidence, only the second image can be supported:** [Really?] the image of the person living zestfully, exploring every experience—pain and joy, enigma and insight, fulfillment and frustration—as a dimension of human freedom... If we get our information from the biblical material, there is no doubt that the Christian life is a dancing, leaping, daring life. [???

‘How then does this other picture get painted in so many imaginations? How does anyone get the life of faith associated with dullness, with caution, with inhibition, with stodginess?... [Who said it did?]

‘But in fact the community of faith, the very place where we are most likely to experience the free life, is also the very place where we are in most danger of losing it.’

“**Be honest, how many congregations do you know who are ‘dancing, leaping, daring’ congregations—**congregations whose individual grace awakenings are motivating people to live out their freedom in Christ? I’m afraid the number is much fewer than we might guess... Isn’t it surprising to anyone who has been set free that anybody would ever want to return to bondage? I suggest that you ponder the final sentence in Peterson’s quote once more. As usual, he is right on target. **The one place on earth where we would most expect to be set free is, in fact, the very place we are most likely to be placed into slavery: the church.** Surely, that must grieve our God. [i.e. a church with biblical standards is a legalistic slave-master. *Oh please!*]

“What happened in the first century can surely happen in the twentieth. Paul writes the Galatians of his surprise: ‘You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?’ (5:7).”⁸ [What about Gal. 5:13 Chuck? Apparently he didn’t read that far?]

“IDENTIFYING THREE TOOLS OF LEGALISM

“**Let’s get down to brass tacks.** What are the inroads most legalists make on a life, on a church, on a missionary outreach, or on a denomination? **How do legalists get in?** Who are they? Furthermore, why are they effective? As a result of studying the first and second chapters of Galatians, **I’m prepared to identify at least three different**

⁸ Swindoll, *ibid*, pp. 81-83

tools used by century-one legalists: those of doctrinal heresy, ecclesiastical harassment, and personal hypocrisy.

“**First, let’s consider those who disturb and distort by interjecting doctrinal heresy.** [a quote of Gal. 1:6-10 followed]... Legalists were disturbing others and distorting the truth as they spread doctrinal heresy. Their heretical message was that the Galatian Christians should let Moses finish what Christ began. In other words, salvation is not by faith alone, it requires works... A salvation that begins with God’s love reaching down to lost humanity and is carried out by Christ’s death and resurrection results in all the praise going to God. But a salvation that includes human achievement, hard work, personal effort, even religious deeds distorts the good news because man gets the glory, not God. The problem is, it appeals to the flesh... Nevertheless, the heresy goes on. Most every cult you could name is cult of salvation by works. It appeals to the flesh... Please allow me to be absolutely straight with you: Stop tolerating the heretical gospel of works! It is legalism. Wake up to the fact that it will put you into a bondage syndrome that won’t end.”⁹

“**The second tool I find legalists using is ecclesiastical harassment;** they are *those who spy and enslave*: [quote of Gal. 2:1-7 followed]. I know of few scriptures that more boldly expose the damaging style of legalism. Earlier we analyzed those who disturb and distort the gospel. **Now, we are considering those who spy on and enslave individuals who wish to be free.** In a few sentences let me give you the background to what Paul wrote about here in Galatians 2 [explanation & interpretation of the passage by Swindoll followed]... Why didn’t Paul tolerate their disagreement and submit to their legalistic demands? Because liberty is worth fighting for!

“...There were those who not only disliked Paul’s freedom but who also wanted others to live in the same bondage they did. (By the way, people like that still exist.) [**Cute sarcasm, Chuck!**]

“In verse 4 Paul says they ‘sneaked in’ to bring them into bondage. In verse 5 he states, ‘I didn’t submit, to make sure you kept free.’ **Good principle: When there is a sneaking in of legalism, there will also be the need for those in leadership to stand fast. The strong must defend the weak.** Paul was undaunted, unintimidated, unrelenting in his determination... **He withstood legalism, and so must we. Trust me, legalists don’t get the message if you’re unsure and soft with them.** No need to be mean-spirited, but there is the need to be firm.’ [**“Boy, these legalist people are just plain evil!” ☺ In reality, he has deliberately done another “bait & switch” since the Galatian problem was not Christians with biblical standards, but individuals who insisted that the obedience to rules & regulations earned you salvation!**]

“Earlier, I quoted **Eugene Peterson**. Because his words fit what I am trying to communicate, let’s return to one further paragraph:

‘**There are people who do not want us to be free.** They didn’t want us to be free before God, accepted just as we are by his grace. **They don’t want us to be free to express our faith originally and creatively in the world. They want to control us; they want to use us for their own purposes.** They themselves refuse to live arduously and openly in faith, but huddle together with a few others and try to get a sense of approval by insisting that all look alike, talk alike and act alike, thus validating one another’s worth.”¹⁰ [**Oh Pleeze!**]

[Swindoll immediately followed this with an illustration about former missionaries who quit the field due to colleagues thinking it was unspiritual & wrong for them to have someone send them jars of peanut butter (pp. 93-94), concluding with “*What we have here is a classic modern-day example of a group of squint-eyed legalists spying out and attacking another’s liberty. Not even missionaries are exempted.*”(!) [**By doing that he completely switched & misapplied the definition of legalism—even as he had earlier defined it!**]

⁹ Swindoll, *ibid*, pp. 86-87

¹⁰ Swindoll, *ibid*, pp. 89-92

****Swindoll concluded his chapter five by “**SPECIFYING FOUR STRONG STRATEGIES**” explaining them thusly:

“**Killers cannot be mildly ignored or kindly tolerated. You can no more allow legalism to continue than you could permit a rattlesnake to slip into your house and hide.** Before long, somebody is going to get hurt. So then, since liberty is worth fighting for, how do we do it? ...I can think of four strong strategies:

1. “**Keep standing firm in your freedom.** I’m reminded of what Paul wrote in Galatians 5:1: ‘*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*’ **Stand your ground.** Ask the Lord to give you courage.
 2. “**Stop seeking the favor of everyone.** This may be a stubborn habit to break, but it is really worth all the effort you can muster. If you’re in a group where you feel you are being coerced to do certain things that are **against your conscience** or you’re being pressured to stop doing things that you see no problem with, **get out of the group! [!!!]** You’re **unwise to stay in situations where your conscience tells you it is not right.** That is nothing more than serving men, not God. I don’t care how spiritual sounding it may be, stop seeking the favor of everybody. [**Actually, in reality, that’s what Romans 14 & I Cor. 6-10 are all about! But it’s the opposite of what Swindoll teaches & means in this passage & his book!**]
 3. “**Start refusing to submit to bondage.** Call it what it is: **slavery.** It’s trying to be ‘spiritual’ by performance. [**So for a church to have standards & policies is slavery!?! Hardly! Maybe it’s trying to have a godly testimony before the world! Cf. Jas. 4:4-5; 1 Pet. 1:14-19; 2:1-3, 11-12; 3:16-17; 4:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:8-11; 2:19-22; 3:11, 14; 1 John 2:3-6, 15-17, 29; 3:3, 10, 18-21; 5:4, 18-19; 3 John 11-12; Jude 8, 16; etc.]**]
 4. “**Continue being straightforward about the truth.** That means live honestly. If; you don’t agree, say so kindly but firmly. **If you are the only one, be true to yourself and stand alone.** ... And the next time your kids spot hypocrisy, even though you may feel embarrassed, agree with them... It may sound embarrassing to you now, but they will admire and respect your admission. And they won’t grow up damaged. Best of all, they will learn to model the same kind of vulnerability and honesty, **even if you are in vocational Christian work—especially if you’re in vocational Christian work.**”¹¹
- “With all this talk about grace and liberty, perhaps it’s time for me to clarify something. Some may be asking: **Doesn’t liberty have its limits? Shouldn’t folks restrain their freedom and occasionally hold themselves in check?** Yes, without question. Grace can be—and sometimes is—abused. By that I mean exercising one’s liberty without wisdom—having no concern over whether it offends or wounds a young and impressionable fellow believer. **But I must hasten to add that I believe such restraint is an individual matter. It is not to be legislated, not something to be forced on someone else.** [!] Limitations are appropriate and necessary, but **I fail to find in Scripture any place where one is to require such restraint from another.** [*What about Acts 15; Romans 14; etc.*]-mwe] **To do so is legalism.** It plugs up breathing holes. It kills grace. The best restraint is self-restraint that comes from the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit through the person and presence of Jesus Christ in each individual life. **It’s been my observation over the last thirty years that the vast majority of believers need to be freed, not restrained. Our job is to free people; God’s job is to restrain them.** [!] God is doing His job much better than we are doing ours.”¹² [**So throw away church covenants, etc.? Wrong! And the latter half is another “bait & switch” on the biblical definition of legalism.**]
 - “**Legalism requires that we all be alike, unified in convictions and uniform in appearance, to which I say, ‘Let me out!’ Grace finds pleasure in differences, encourages individuality, smiles on variety, and leaves plenty of room for disagreement. Remember, it releases others and lets them be,** to which I say, ‘Let me in!’ I agree with and often quote the old saying, ‘Comparisons are odious.’ Not until we put a stop to them will horizontal grace flourish in the body.”¹³

¹¹ Swindoll, *ibid*, pp.

¹² Swindoll, *ibid*, pp. 127-128

¹³ Swindoll, *ibid*, p/ 156

REGARDING ROMANS 14

- “In his letter to the Romans, Paul goes into great detail regarding the issue of personal freedom—greater detail than almost anywhere else in his writings. [That much we both agree on!] In the fourteenth chapter, for example, he sets forth four very practical guidelines that can be followed by all who are serious about releasing others in grace. My hope is that we not only learn what they are but, equally important, that we spend our days following them.

“The first guideline is based on Romans 14:1-4 [he then quoted the passage]...

“**Guideline 1: Accepting others is basic to letting them be.** The problem was not a meat problem. **It was a love problem, an acceptance problem. It still is. [He’s correct about that, but takes it the wrong way.]** How often we restrict our love by making it conditional: ‘If you will (or won’t), then I will accept you.’ Paul starts there: ‘Accept one another!’ In other words, ‘Let’s allow each other the freedom to hold to convictions that are unlike our own—and accept them in spite of that difference.’ ...All of this is fairly easy to read so long as I stay on the issue of eating meat. That one is safe because it isn’t a current taboo. It’s easy to accept those folks today because they don’t exist!

“**How about those in our life who may disagree with us on issues that are taboos in evangelical Christian circles today? Here are a few** [He then gave a list of 19 items, including] ...Going to the movies or live theater... **Listening to certain music, Dancing—square, ballroom, disco—whatever, Wearing your hair a certain way, Working out in leotards.** There are a dozen other things I could list... But don’t assume that all areas are identical when it comes to taboos. **The list changes from culture to culture even to this day.** I read this past week about a pastor’s conference where a group of German Lutherans had gathered. Part of their reception included serving beer. No one thought anything of it because in that culture a mug of beer is absolutely accepted. But if one of the men lit up a cigar, the place would go up in smoke! Strange, isn’t it? They shouldn’t smoke, but if they choose to enjoy a swig of beer, no problem. [**So should we drink beer, wine, etc., because it’s the norm in certain cultures?**]

“I know of churches where you are frowned on if you go to live theater or attend a movie, no matter what the rating is... But some of those same people will sit up late into the night and watch movies on television. Some even have cable TV and may watch movies that are far worse than those at the theaters. [**Good point**] Funny, to me movies are movies, no matter where they are viewed.

“**Guideline 2: Refusing to dictate to others allows the Lord freedom to direct their lives.** I especially appreciate the statement at the end of verse 5: ‘...Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.’ **Give people room to make up their minds. Do you have a few new converts who are a part of our life and ministry? Do you want to help them grow toward maturity? Here is how: Let them grow up differently. Let them learn at their own pace,** just like you had to learn, including failures and mistakes. If you really want grace to awaken, be easier on them than others were on you. Don’t make up their minds—let them! Don’t step in and push your weight around—give them plenty of space.¹⁴

“**Guideline 3: Freeing others means we never assume a position we’re not qualified to fill.** This, in one sentence, is enough to stop any person from judging another. We’re not qualified. We lack full knowledge...”¹⁵

“**Guideline 4: “Loving others requires us to express our liberty wisely.”** (This is code for, be careful where you do the “questionable” things. -mwe) In other words, love must rule. I’m not my own, I’m bought with a price. My goal is not to please me, it is to please my Lord Jesus, my God. It is not to please you, it is to please my Lord. The same is true for you. **So the bottom line is this: I don’t adapt my life according to what you may say, I adapt my life according to the basis of my love for you because I answer to Christ.** And so do you.

¹⁴ Swindoll, pp. 157-160, 163

¹⁵ Swindoll, p. 164

“To paraphrase those verses we just read from Romans [14:13-18]: **Nothing that is not specifically designated as evil in Scripture is evil—but rather a matter of one’s personal preference or taste. So let it be. Even if you personally would not do what another is doing, let it be.** And you who feel the freedom to do so, don’t flaunt it or mock those who disagree... And let’s all remember that God’s big-picture kingdom plan is not being shaped by small things like what one person prefers over another, but by large things, like righteousness and peace and joy.’ [Rom. 14:17]

“One of the marks of maturity [?] is the ability to handle liberty without flaunting it. **Mature folks don’t flaunt their privileges. They enjoy them fully, yet quietly—privately—with those of like mind**, who aren’t offended by the liberty. **(In other words, be a hypocrite & only do the “questionable” things among friends of like persuasion. Otherwise it could cost you. – mwe)**

“When our children began to grow up, we (like you) increased their privileges. One of the first privileges our oldest child enjoyed was not having to take a nap and not having to go to bed so early. He could miss his afternoon nap, and he could stay up later with his mom and dad. The problem was, the other three weren’t old enough to have the same privilege. So he had to be mature about handling this new freedom. If he flaunted it, chaos would break out. In other words, he couldn’t walk by their closed bedroom door and taunt them by shouting, ‘Na-na-na-na-na...I don’t have to take a *na-ap*’ or ‘Ha! You’ve got to go to bed early—not me. I’m free to stay up *reeeel* late!’ **We warned him about staying quiet and handling his liberty very wisely.** Paul cautions you and me to do the same. **Otherwise, the grace killers will get ammunition and have reason to load up and fire in our direction.** [So according to Swindoll, the reason to be careful & clandestine about it is not in order to avoid offending others, but so that they don’t give us a hassle!!!] Grace never gives us the right to rub anyone’s nose in our liberty. When I see that happening, I realize I’m watching religious childishness in action...

“I want to close this chapter by **focusing our final attention on the concluding verses in Romans 14.** Read verse 19 slowly and thoughtfully. ‘So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.’ **On the basis of that great statement, consider the first of four action steps.**

1. **Concentrate on things that encourage peace and assist others’ growth.** An idea that works for me is to filter whatever I do through a twofold ‘grid’... (a) Is this going to make a lot of waves, or will it encourage peace? (b) Is this going to hurt and offend, or will it help and strengthen my brother or sister?
2. **Remember that sabotaging saints hurts the work of God.** ‘Don’t tear down the work of God for the sake of food...’ (v. 20)... **Enjoy your liberty with discretion.** [i.e. **do questionable things on the sly and only with others who do it too! A bad philosophy, to say the least. Cf. A number of Christian colleges changing their policy to allow drinking by staff & faculty—but not in the presence of students. In other words, “When you grow up you can do ‘big people’ things too!”**]
3. **Exercise your liberty only with those who can enjoy it with you.** I repeat, that means to keep it private and personal. Remember my story about our oldest child. **What others don’t know can’t hurt them. That’s not deception, it’s wise and necessary restraint.** [sic] It isn’t prompted by hypocrisy but by love.” [Actually it IS deception & the philosophy of “what others don’t know can’t hurt them” is wrong. - mwe]
4. **Determine where you stand and refuse to play God in anyone else’s life.** ...Be absolutely sure you are right, then press on, regardless. **By letting others be, you free yourself to give full attention to what God is trying to make of you.** You have neither the time nor the energy to keep holding on. Love demands that you let go.”¹⁶

- “Even the godly will sometimes disagree. When I was younger I had difficulty with this one. I... discovered that there were not only various opinions on the same subject, but that God had the audacity to bless those who

¹⁶ Swindoll, pp. 166-169

disagreed with me... **I'll go one step further, for I am now convinced that God is not nearly so narrow as many of His people are. I find that God is much easier to live with than most of His followers...**¹⁷

- “When a person truly experiences a ‘grace awakening’ and begins to understand and demonstrate the kind of love I have been describing, there is not only the amazing desire to extend encouragement, affirmation, support, and reassurance to others, **there is also an accepting attitude that allows others to reciprocate in like manner...** [“i.e. *Hey, if you're good with that, we're good. Who am I to say?*”]

“We who believe so firmly in the pursuit of strong character often forget that such pursuits have a downside. I can think of four off the top of my head:

“**First, with a commitment to excellence there comes an attitude of intolerance...** [Horrors!]

“**Second, with a lifestyle of discipline there comes impatience and the tendency to judge.** Unfortunately, both come in the same package. A person who works hard to stay fit by eating better and less, plus maintaining a consistent, rigorous exercise program, tends to be impatient with those who eat too much and refuse to exercise even a little. The overeaters may view themselves as pleasingly plump. But Mr. Atlas and his iron-pumping wife, Wonder Woman, see them as slobs, plain and simple... My point is this: If you're a jogger who burns off hundreds of calories while clicking off six or seven miles a day, **you have no patience with the fella who eats half an acre of pizza and washes it down with a couple quarts of his favorite cola.** Discipline and impatience tend to occupy the same body. [So the glutton is on the same level with the disciplined guy? Really?!]

“**Third, with a broad education and a love for culture and the arts, there is usually the flip side of exclusive sophistication.** Cultural buffs stick together.. Because **I happen to enjoy most any kind of music other than opera,** I smiled when I read Haddon Robinson's admission. ‘I do not appreciate opera; what is worse, I have several friends who do.’

There is also a **fourth** flip side... **With an emphasis on independence and high production, there is the presence of pride...** How difficult it is for those of us who are able to produce a great deal to be accepting and receiving of the grace of others. [True, but that's not necessarily bad. Cf. **an unproductive missionary colleague who wanted the rest of us to do his work for him!**] We are not only determined, we are driven.”¹⁸

“CONCLUSION”

“I stated at the outset that **this is essentially a book about freedom—claiming it for ourselves and extending it to others...** While I was writing on the importance of letting grace awaken—**which necessitates our pursuing freedom at any and all cost**—the daily newspaper, the magazines, and the television screen have been pulsating with the same message... I watched, as you did, and I wept and sang as they did. I shouted as one section after another of the infamous [Berlin] wall tumbled to the ground... The people of East Berlin no longer awaken each dawn to face another grim and bleak day of colorless existence due to enforced restrictions. Now free at last, they awaken to the glorious new dawn of liberty. [So believers & churches who seek to maintain standards are like the vile, oppressive Communist government of East Germany. Thanks a lot Chuck!]

“There is another wall that is now being torn down. **Because it is invisible it is all the more insidious. And because it has been standing for centuries [centuries?] instead of decades,** it is far more overpowering and stubborn. The stones that comprise the wall are formidable, intimidating, and thick. **They would hold us back from all the things that God intended His people to enjoy.** [Hardly!] **They still keep untold millions in bondage.** I have identified many of them throughout these pages; **from without: legalism, expectations, traditionalism, manipulation, demands, negativism, control, comparison, perfectionism, competition, criticism, pettiness,** and a host of others; and **from within: pride, fear, resentment, bitterness, an unforgiving spirit, insecurity, fleshly effort, guilt, shame, gossip, hypocrisy,** and so many more—grace killers, all!”¹⁹

¹⁷ Swindoll, p. 176

¹⁸ Swindoll, pp. 279-282

¹⁹ Swindoll, pp. 301-302

“My hope has been to create an appetite for grace that is so strong nothing will restrain us from pursuing the freedom and spontaneity it can bring—a longing so deep that a new spiritual dawn, a ‘grace awakening,’ if you will, cannot help but burst through the wall of legalism... much of my involvement and exposure is in the realm of the church and Christian organizations. It has been my observation that even here most folks are not free; they have not learned to accept and enjoy the grace that has come to us in Jesus Christ. Though He came to set us free, it saddens me to say that many still live behind the wall of bondage... [cf. “Be spontaneous” advertisement of a couple getting married in St. Vincent.]

“In vain I have searched the Bible, looking for examples of early Christians whose lives were marked by rigidity [Really Chuck? Try Acts 15:7; I Cor. 5:2-5; Gal. 1:8-10; 2:11, 14; II Thess. 2:15; 3:6, 12-15; I Tim. 1:20; III Jn 10-11; etc.], predictability, inhibition [cf. I Cor. 6-10], dullness, and caution [cf. Rom. 14; Titus 2:1-8; etc.]. Fortunately, grim, frowning, joyless saints in Scripture are conspicuous by their absence [Oh pleeze. cf. Acts 15:37-39; Phil. 2:14, 19-21; 4:2-4; the OT multitude in the wilderness; etc.]. Instead, the examples I find are of adventurous, risk-taking, enthusiastic, and authentic believers whose joy was contagious even in times of painful trial... Rules were few and changes were welcome [cf. Rom. 14-15; I Cor. 6-10; II Jn. 7-11; etc.] The contrast between then and now is staggering.

“The difference, I am convinced, is grace. Grace scales the wall and refuses to be restricted. It lives above the demands of human opinion and breaks free from legalistic regulations. Grace dares us to take hold of the sledge of courage and break through longstanding stones. Grace invites us to chart new courses and explore ever expanding regions, all the while delighting in the unexpected. While others care more about maintaining the wall and fearing those who guard it, grace is constantly looking for ways to freedom. Grace wants faith to fly, regardless of what grim-faced officials may say or think or do.”²⁰

“It has been a stimulating challenge to write these thoughts. In many ways, I feel as though I have been plowing new ground, blazing new trails. Not much has been written on personal, liberating grace from an evangelical perspective—at least I have not found much along these lines. [That’s for sure! And Swindoll’s efforts have had disastrous results over the past 35 years!] Perhaps this book is enough to encourage you to join the movement and get you started on your own venture. I hope so. But as you strike out on your own, beware. As surely as Bunyan’s hero encountered every test and temptation enroute to the Celestial City, you will come up against one legalistic stone after another, each existing for the same purpose: to keep you from the freedom you have in Christ. [Unbelievable! He likens Christians with standards & convictions to all of the bad guys in Pilgrim’s Progress! Oh pleeze!]

“Whatever you do, don’t quit! Press on. It is worth all the effort. The good news is that you are not alone.

“There is a ‘grace awakening’ loose in the land. Will you become a part of it? While you take your turn with the sledge hammer and pound away, a host of us are standing near, and some of us may be half a world away, cheering you on. Don’t think of it as a lonesome, isolated task. You are breaking through to freedom, and no one is more delighted than the Lord Jesus Christ [!!!], who has promised you His grace. Never forget His words: ‘If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.’ Stay at it. By the grace of Almighty God, the new movement will someday sweep across every continent and the longstanding wall that has kept people in bondage for centuries will come tumbling down. And we shall all, at last, be free indeed.”²¹[So supposedly, for centuries believers have been in bondage?! Come on! And is there not a bit of chutzpah in using MLK’s famous line as the closing?]

A FEW BRIEF COMMENTS & OBSERVATIONS BY ME (MWE):

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY, IN MY OPINION, HAS BECOME AN EXCUSE FOR A NUMBER OF THINGS THAT HAVE INFECTED THE BODY OF CHRIST:

²⁰ Swindoll, p. 303

²¹ Swindoll, p. 304

- 1) **THE USE OF ANY KIND OF MUSIC, INCLUDING THE MOST WORLDLY KINDS IMAGINABLE.**
- 2) **A REPUDIATION OF ANY KIND OF BIBLICAL SEPARATION FROM UNBELIEVERS &/OR DISOBEDIENT BELIEVERS, UNBIBLICAL DENOMINATIONS, ECUMENICAL EVANGELISM, etc.**
- 3) **UNDER THE BANNER OF “FREEDOM & LIBERTY,” SELFISHNESS & AN UNWILLINGNESS TO PUT OTHERS AHEAD OF OURSELVES & OUR OWN DESIRES IS OFTEN MANIFESTED.**
- 4) **WE HEAR A LOT OF TALK ABOUT “BEING A SERVANT” & “SERVANTHOOD,” BUT WE’RE NOT SEEING A LOT OF IT WHERE IT COUNTS: IN REAL LIFE! TALK IS CHEAP!**

THE COMMON REBUTTAL TO MY CONCERN:

THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT WE SHOULD “*BECOME ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN*” IN ORDER TO WIN THEM TO CHRIST! (**I Cor. 9:22b**)

MY ANSWER TO THAT REBUTTAL IS SIMPLE:

Both the immediate context (**I Cor. 8:1-11:1**), as well as the theme of the entire book of 1 Corinthians—especially the first four chapters—which deals with “*Man’s wisdom vs. God’s wisdom*” e.g. **I Cor. 1:17-2:16; 3:19-23**; etc.) clearly demonstrate that Paul is not giving some sort of “*Carte Blanche*” for believers to do nearly anything to reach people for Christ. Paul is absolutely *not* saying that we are allowed to do anything and use any method to reach people for Christ²² i.e. to do whatever they want to in regard to their behaviour and lifestyle). At the very beginning of this epistle he has repeatedly and earnestly contended in the most dogmatic terms that he did **NOT** do “*anything*” in order to reach people with the gospel. In fact he specifically states that he was *not* going to use worldly wisdom, that it was through the “*foolishness of preaching*” that men believe (**I Cor. 1:21**)

Os Guinness has made some good observations about some of the dangers in the currently popular “*become all things to all men*” philosophy that is driving much Christian thinking and methodology today:
(Dining with the Devil, pp. 27-29; 79)

Guinness: “*The problem is not that Christians have disappeared, but that the Christian faith has become so deformed.*”²³

Guinness: “*We should ask three simple questions: ‘What is being said?’ ‘Is it true?’ ‘What should be done?’*”²⁴

“Why was Israel judged in the reign of Hezekiah for fortifying their walls, stockpiling their weapons, and harnessing the water resources, *but you did not look to the One who made it?*” (**Isaiah 22:11**).

“Anyone who ponders such passages can only wonder at the contrast between the enduring realism of Scripture and our dismaying gullibility in the face of modernity.”²⁵

Likewise,

- “*Asa was condemned for resorting to physicians rather than seeking the Lord’s guidance.*”²⁶ **I Chron. 16:12**
- “*God was angry at David for succumbing to the devil’s temptation to rely on numbers!*”²⁷ **I Chron. 21 & 27**
- “*Uzzah was killed and David judged for carrying the ark the wrong way to Jerusalem.*”²⁸ **II Sam. 6:7**

²² See for example my brief 3 page study “*All Things to All Men-Toward a Truly Biblical Understanding of Liberty, Legalism & I Cor. 9:22*” which lists nearly thirty verses from just two New Testament passages refuting the idea that since believers are “under grace” they thus have the “liberty” to do almost anything.

²³ Os Guinness, *Dining With the Devil* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1993), p. 43

²⁴ Guinness, p. 74

²⁵ Guinness, p. 45

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *ibid*

**SO WHAT ABOUT THE EXHORTATION IN I CORINTHIANS 9:22 THAT WE BECOME
“ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN”?**

“A.W. Tozer’s words have a tragic ring of truth about them: *‘It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God.’* But that must never be an excuse for conceding to man’s lack of spirituality. As Paul Bassett says, *‘One of the subtlest ways of flattering man is to communicate the gospel in a way he wants rather than the way he needs.’*” (Blanchard & Lucarini, p. 197)

Guinness makes some more good observations regarding the potential hazards and dangers of misinterpreting or misapplying that verse:

“As Martin Luther warned, many of our human efforts are like those of a drunken peasant who clammers back onto his donkey only to topple off on the other side. For example...

Being ‘all things to all people’ can be a prelude to good communication or to surprisingly, self-subversion and shabby compromise. For a start, many ‘seeker-friendly’ churches have quite deliberately subordinated both worship and discipleship to evangelism, and evangelism to entertainment, and in the process subverted the traditional defining features of the church.

“Further, they are blind to the dangers in the current stress on ‘felt needs.’ Their efforts might lead to one of the mightiest spiritual harvests in Christian history, but they might also lead to a bumper crop of Western ‘rice Christians’ that makes a mockery of the gospel and of the seriousness of the hour. What does it say of the church when Newsweek can note that *‘the least demanding churches are now in greatest demand’* Or when one church can advertise: *‘Instead of me fitting a religion I found a religion to fit me’?*”²⁹

“THE CHURCH-GROWTH MOVEMENT HAS TWO COMMON FLAWS...

“On the one hand it employs a lopsided application of a biblical principle. Known technically as ‘*contextualization*,’ or more simply as ‘*relevance*,’ this principle is indispensable to communication and obviously rooted in Scripture. The supreme pattern of the ‘*contextualization*’ and ‘*relevance*’ is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. **Such passages as 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 capture its full dynamic perfectly**, climaxing in Paul’s summary: *‘I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.’*

“Thus the record of Scripture and Christian history is equally clear: the principle of identification is basic to communication and is covered well today in such notions as ‘*contextualization*’ and ‘*relevance*,’ as well as in such church-growth principles as ‘*niche marketing*,’ ‘*audience-driven*,’ ‘*seeker-friendly*,’ ‘*full-service churches*,’ and the ‘*homogeneous unit principle*.’ The latter is otherwise known as ‘*the birds of a feather*’ principle...

“**But Scripture and history are also clear: Without maintaining critical tension, the principle of identification is a recipe for compromise and capitulation.** It is no accident that the charge of being ‘all things to all people’ has become a popular synonym for compromise. **If the process of becoming ‘all things to all people’ is to remain faithful to Christ, it has to climax in clear persuasion and profound conversion.** Joining people where they are is only the first step in the process, not the last. Unless it resists this danger, the mega-church and church-growth movement will prove to be a gigantic exercise in cultural adjustment and surrender... it is amazing to witness the lemming-like rush of church leaders who forget theology in the charge after the latest insights of sociology—regardless of where the ideas come from or where they lead to. Carelessly handled, innovation and adaption become a form of corruption, capitulation, and idolatry... Many super-churches are simply artificially inflated local churches with charismatically inflated super-pastors that will not be able to survive their super-growth.”^{30 31}

²⁸ ibid

²⁹ Guinness, pp. 79-80

³⁰ Guinness, pp. 27-29

³¹ Guinness, pp. 28-29; 79-80

A couple of quotes by Les Ollila are worth repeating here in regard to the subject:

*“You will always be relevant if you speak eternal truth.”*³²

*“God owns me, and I am not free to choose my own way.”*³³

“The text of Psalm 23 in one modern version of the Bible has 442 letters of the alphabet. Before they were assembled by the printer, these letters were neutral. They were complete and perfect, but they meant nothing, they had no message. But in Psalm 23 they have grouped together to form an expressive composition. Now they are saying something, **and the order in which they have been composed precisely determines what they are saying**. If you take those same 442 characters and arrange them differently, instead of spelling out a message of assurance, comfort and faith for the Christian believer...they could convey a message of hate, greed or violence. Compose them in some other way and they could form a shopping list...**Benjamin Franklin once claimed that with twenty-six lead soldiers he could conquer the world...** Franklin’s point was that when assembled together in the right numbers and in the right order, they had power to change men’s lives. Once assembled, the soldiers would no longer be neutral—**nor are musical notes and tones when assembled into an expressive composition**.”³⁴

REGARDING WORLDLY MUSIC & SOME JUSTIFICATIONS GIVEN FOR ITS USE:

1) Answering the statement: *“IT HELPS US TO WORSHIP GOD BETTER.”*

“This argument is more difficult to counter because it is so subjective... **Quite simply, there is not even a hint in the Bible that worship is about seeking an emotional musical experience to make us feel God’s presence**. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that we should manipulate anyone into a worshipping mood through musical means, nor does the Bible teach that music has any special powers to invoke the presence of God...

“It is time to get our thinking straight on this issue. As we try to do this, **we need to recognize that throughout history pagans have used music with a strong and hypnotic beat to summon their gods and demons**: as Frank Zappa reminds us, *‘the loud sounds and bright lights of today’s rock are tremendous indoctrination tools.’*

“**We need to ask another question here**: is it possible that the manipulative and *mind—body—soul* altering power of rock music is producing **a counterfeit spiritual experience?** A. W. Tozer thought so: *‘It is plainly possible to have religious experiences and forms of worship that are not at all acceptable to God.’* Does anyone in the rock worship camp (which even quotes Tozer at times—*though very selectively!*) have the courage to admit this may be possible? **Or have we sunk to the pitiful level that Tozer decried: ‘Because worship is largely missing, do you know what we are doing? We use artificial means to try to induce some kind of worship. I think the devil in hell must be laughing, and I think God must be grieving, for there is no fear of God before our eyes.’”³⁵**

2) Answering the statement: *“WE DON’T ASSOCIATE ROCK WITH IMMORALITY & WORLDLINESS.”* ...young Christians who were raised on ‘Christianized’ rock say they see no issue because their generation has its own redeemed version of the music that is not the same as the old, bad rock music...

“This argument seems to rest on two assumptions:

The first is that God wants them to cross into the culture, redeem wicked art forms from the pagans and use them for his glory... Yet nowhere in the Bible does God command us to ‘redeem’ music, nor does Scripture give any examples of God’s people redeeming the evil music of a secular or pagan culture.

³² Judi Coats, *A Man Among Them: The Les Ollila Story*, privately published, 2004, p. 101

³³ Coats, *ibid*, p. 159

³⁴ John Blanchard & Dan Lucarini, *Can We Rock the Gospel* (Evangelical Press: Darlington, England, 2006), p. 201

³⁵ Tozer, cited in Blanchard & Lucarini, pp. 211-213

“The second assumption made by Christians who do not associate rock music with immorality and worldliness is that their form of rock music is sufficiently ‘separated’ by time, distance or source from older, cruder forms of rock... we have already demonstrated the bad reputation of rock, past and present, by using many examples from secular sources. Sadly, many of today’s Christian rock bands, in mimicking the latest secular music styles, freely admit to being influenced by the very bands whose motives and methods are dubious at best and degraded at worst.”³⁶

3) Answering the statement: **“IT PRODUCES EXCELLENT EVANGELISTIC RESULTS.”**

“As ...Shaeffer points out...’The excuse that “*sometimes people are saved*” **is no excuse at all. *People have been saved in concentration camps because God can bring good from evil, but this does not justify the evil.***’ God used a pagan Egyptian Pharaoh as an instrument in releasing the entire nation of Israel from slavery—and even told him that he had raised him up ‘*for this purpose*’ (Exodus 9:16). **Yet this ruler was a godless tyrant and certainly not an example for us to follow.**”³⁷

³⁶ Blanchard & Lucarini, pp. 213-214

³⁷ Blanchard & Lucarini, *ibid*, pp. 217-218