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## PERMISSIVE SOCIETY?

This is Heartbeat. And I'm Landon Saunders.

It is impossible to state what the average American thinks about sex, family or marriage—not to mention other ethical concerns. Perhaps it has never really been possible, yet there was a time when "everyone" assumed that the "normal" thing was to remain chaste until marriage and faithful to one's companion during marriage. Pre-marital sex, adultery, homosexuality, divorce—no longer can one say that Americans regard these things as "abnormal" or even "immoral."

Today, an official line doesn't seem to exist. A norm would be difficult to define in modern society. There no longer seems to be a standard, which, if one violates, will bring censure or condemnation from society. A politician need no longer fear divorce as he once did.

To feel the depth of this change, I think one has only to look about and become aware of what you are seeing and hearing. Think of the blood, gore, carnage—the sustained violence—that has become so common in cinema. To say nothing of the language, nudity, double standard morality that's now taken for granted.

Or, take a look at almost any newsstand. Book titles and covers.

Or, note the explicit use of sex in advertising. More than merely pretty girls selling anything from toothpaste to automobiles. The lines become increasingly suggestive. And frank.

And we haven't mentioned Playboy and Penthouse. And Playboy with a circulation of some 6 million. Penthouse with perhaps half that many.

As Newsweek pointed out: "The old taboos are dead or dying.

A new, more permissive society is taking shape. Its outlines are etched most prominently in the arts—in the increasing nudity and frankness of today's films, in the blunt, often obscene language seemingly endemic in American novels and plays, in the candid lyrics of pop songs and the undress of the avant-garde ballet, in erotic art and television talk shows, in free fashions and franker advertising."

How do we explain all of this? What accounts for this change? NBC news reported that we are now "witnessing in this country an intense preoccupation with the pursuit of pleasure." And maybe it's all summed up in the words of one young woman who said: "I honestly believe that being bored is a sin."

Boredom—empty, meaningless existence--questions with no answers—life with no fire—death without hope—this and much more has driven us toward drowning the noise of our hearts in a pursuit of pleasure, of happiness.

But, the great rip-off hasn't paid off. Because we're still alone. And we're still hurting. So, what do we do? Return to old standards? Turn the clock backwards? Mock those who disagree with us? Condemn those who violate our own personal standards? Or, do we close our eyes to what is around us and desperately hope that things will get better? Is there no answer? Are there no solid principles? Is there no way to determine what is right and what is wrong?

I think we must recognize that, first of all, the problems are not confined to violence, nudity, profanity and sex. The problem also extends to our attitudes toward others. Mistreatment

of another person simply on the basis of race, for example, is considered by many as immoral as murder. And so the problem gets deeper. And tougher.

Also, we probably won't find any simple set of rules that everyone will accept and live by. No, we will have to face greater questions. Like, is there any universal law? Is there any central purpose for man? If there isn't, then does it make any real difference how a man lives or what he does? It seems to me that these are some of the questions that must be faced before we can get far in a discussion of right and wrong behavior.

I'm Landon Saunders. How do we determine what is right and what is wrong? Maybe you would like to share your ideas. Send them to: Landon Saunders, Box 7401, Chicago.

This is Heartbeat.