

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

What to Do in the Gray Areas

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:25-29; 1 Corinthians 10:32-33; Romans 14:23

Code: A332

One of my joys as a pastor is to guide people through God's Word and explain its implications on their lives. It thrills me to help others by clarifying a point of doctrine, interpreting a difficult verse, or answering any number of other questions. Among the concerns people raise, I can't remember the last time someone asked me if it was wrong to lie, to cheat, to steal, to commit murder, to commit adultery, or to covet. It's also been a long time since anyone wanted to know whether a Christian should read the Bible, pray, or tell others about salvation in Jesus Christ. The Bible is pretty clear about those things.

There is, however, one class of question that falls somewhere in the middle. These are the issues dealing with Christian freedom-things that fall in the "gray" area. What entertainment is acceptable? What kind of music is okay? What can a Christian do or not do on Sunday? What about what you wear, what you eat and drink, or how you spend your free time-does the Bible address those things?

Some would say, "No, the Bible doesn't address them. Do what you want to do-you're free in Christ!" While it is true that the Bible doesn't *specifically* list every possible decision you'll face in life, it does address all choices with *principles* that govern Christian freedom. When you run your choices in the "gray areas" through the following grid of principles from God's Word, I trust you'll find both clarity *and* true freedom to live your life to God's glory.

Will it benefit me spiritually?

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify (1 Cor. 10:23).

A "profitable" thing is useful, helpful, or to your advantage to do; and the idea behind "edify" is to build up spiritually. So based on this verse, ask yourself, "Will doing this enhance my spiritual life? Will it cultivate godliness? Will it build me up spiritually?" If not, you should seriously question whether that behavior is the best choice.

Will it bring bondage?

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything (1 Cor. 6:12).

In the second part of this verse, Paul is saying, "I will not be brought under the power of anything." If what you are considering can be habit-forming, why pursue it? Don't allow yourself to be in bondage to anything or anyone. You are a bond-servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and Him alone.

Will it defile God's temple?

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? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Don't do anything that you know will harm your body or bring shame-it is the only instrument you have to glorify God. Romans 6:13 says, "Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." How you choose to use your body should always reflect your concern to honor Jesus Christ.

Will it cause anyone to stumble?

Food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak (1 Cor. 8:8-9).

This is the principle of love. As Romans 13:10 says: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law." If you know that your choice-what you consider "in bounds" and approved-causes another Christian to stumble and sin, love that brother or sister enough to restrict your own freedom. That is not very popular in our self-absorbed society, but it is biblical. To continue to indulge in a legitimate freedom that causes problems for another Christian is a sin. For "by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore," Paul said, "if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might

not cause my brother to stumble" (1 Cor. 8:12-13).

Will it further the cause of evangelism?

Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:32-33).

Whether you are aware of it, what you allow or disallow in your behavior affects your witness for Christ-and the world is watching. It's an issue of *testimony*-what your life says about God. Your testimony either tells the truth about God, or it tells a lie. The choices you make in the "gray" areas should reflect your concern not to bring offense to God's reputation but to bring Him praise instead.

Will it violate my conscience?

He who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).

First Corinthians 10:25-29 contains three references to abstaining from a certain practice "for conscience sake." Never train yourself to violate your conscience. If your conscience is troubled by what you consider, don't do it. If you aren't sure about it, don't do it. It is hard to overstate the value of a clean conscience, but it is worth keeping your conscience clear so that your relationship to God will not be hindered. If you'll keep yourself in prayer and the study of God's Word, you will inform your conscience so you can "walk as children of light...finding out what is acceptable to the Lord" (Eph. 5:8, 10).

Will it bring glory to God?

Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

That verse is clearly both the summary and the goal of all the principles I've shared. Isn't our heart's cry to glorify our Lord and Savior with our lives? Think about your decision-Will He be glorified,

honored, and praised through it? May we say along with Jesus, "I glorified You on the earth" (John 17:4).

So what questions do you have? Run them through the principles above and enjoy your freedom in Christ - the freedom to be what He created you to be!

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