

**The Ease of Decision Making: Esteem**

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8:8–13; Philippians 2:1–5

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It's easy to forget that there are always people watching how we live. They might be your children, siblings, coworkers, friends, or neighbors—it might even be total strangers who regularly see how you behave. Regardless of who sees, very little of our lives takes place in total privacy.

So as we consider some key principles from God's Word that help us determine how to behave in the gray areas of life—the issues and activities about which Scripture does not directly speak—we need to remember that our behavior also has repercussions for others, as well.

Regarding the eating of food offered to idols—which was a pivotal gray area in the early church—Paul wrote, “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 that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:8-9).

In exercising our Christian liberty, we must be sensitive to weaker believers who might have more sensitive consciences. We need to prayerfully consider the question: *Will this activity benefit others or cause them to stumble?*

How you conduct yourself in life's gray areas isn't just a question of your spiritual maturity. The quality of the example you set for other, less-mature believers ought to inform your decisions. It really comes down to esteem. What matters more to you, exercising your freedoms or encouraging the spiritual growth of other believers? And when you esteem them as more important than yourself, putting their spiritual interests above your own freedom, you are following the example of Christ (Philippians 2:1-5).

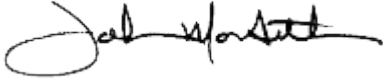
This is the principle of love. As Romans 13:10 says, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” If you know that your choice—even something you consider to be well “in bounds” and approved by God—will cause another Christian to stumble and sin, love that brother or sister enough to restrict your own freedom and abstain.

That selfless attitude is not very popular in our self-absorbed society, but it is biblical. In fact, to cause a fellow Christian to violate his or her conscience is ultimately to sin against the Lord. 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, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:12-13).

When it comes to the exercise of our freedoms, we need to be less concerned with enjoying our Christian liberty to the fullest extent, and more focused on how our behavior in the gray areas can build up and encourage the spiritual growth of others.

Have you had opportunities to sacrifice your freedom for the sake of other believers? Afterward did you really miss the item or activity you sacrificed, or was the benefit to the other believer far greater than the pleasure you might have enjoyed?

Or has another believer abstained from an activity for your benefit? How did their sacrifice encourage your spiritual growth?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

(Adapted from [\*Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong\*](#).)

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