

**A Convergent Christian and Wise Decision Making  
(A Missiological, Theological & Practical Matrix)**

**The Corinthian Challenge. 1 Cor. 6:12-11:1; 13:1-13**

- 1) Will this action be helpful to me? 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23
- 2) Will this action potentially enslave me? 1 Cor. 6:12
- 3) Will this action encourage my brother or sister in Christ? 1 Cor. 8:13; 10:24, 32
- 4) Will this action help or hinder my gospel witness? 1 Cor. 9:12, 19-23; 10:32-33
- 5) Is this action consistent with my new life in Christ? 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 19
- 6) Will this action violate my conscience? 1 Cor. 10:25-29
- 7) Will this action follow the pattern of the life of Jesus? 1 Cor. 11:1
- 8) Will this action show love to others? 1 Cor. 13:1-13
- 9) Will this action honor my body which belongs to God? 1 Cor. 6:19-20
- 10) Will this action glorify God? 1 Cor. 10:31

## A Convergent Christian and Wise Decision Making

**Introduction:** 1) A “Convergent Christian” is another name for what Don Carson calls a “world Christian.” What does he mean by that? Four things will stand out and be true of such men and women:

1. Their allegiance to Jesus Christ and his kingdom is self-consciously set above all national, cultural, linguistic, and racial allegiances.
2. Their commitment to the church, Jesus’ messianic community, is to the church everywhere, wherever the church is truly manifest, and not only to its manifestation on home turf.
3. They see themselves first and foremost as citizens of the heavenly kingdom and therefore consider all other citizenship a secondary matter.
4. As a result, they are single-minded and sacrificial when it comes to the paramount mandate to evangelize and make disciples. (*The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 117).

2) A Convergent or World Christian then recognizes that he or she is a citizen of a different kind of nation, a different kind of kingdom, a different kind of community. And yet, he also recognizes that he lives in the world as well, a world that is not his home, but one in which he serves as a royal ambassador fulfilling for his master the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21). This assignment calls for wisdom and winsomeness. It calls for conviction as well as compassion. It requires that we plant our feet in the Scriptures while keeping a watchful and discerning eye on the culture.

3) I want to provide for us a biblically based strategy for faithfully accomplishing this assignment. I believe a great place to discover this strategy is found in 1 Corinthians, a

book that addresses what Mark Driscoll has called “Christians gone wild” or a “Church gone wild.” They had the awesome task of being the Church in a radically secular, immoral, non-Christian context. They were struggling, and struggling big time both inside and outside their community. Maintaining a clear gospel witness was difficult and problematic. Paul responds to a letter sent to him by the Corinthians, and in between 6:12 - 13:13, sets forth a number of universal, non-negotiable principles that will help them stay true to the gospel of Jesus Christ both in what they say and how they live. I have identified 10 that speak not only to those who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but also those of us who are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well. These principles, as Ed Stetzer says, will enable us to be biblically missional, to “live as missionaries in our context” (*SBC Life*, Sept. 2007).

**1) Will this action be helpful to me? 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23**

- “All things are lawful for me” (6:12; 10:23).
- Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them” (6:13).
- “Every sin that a man does is outside the body” (6:18).
- “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (7:1).
- These were all Corinth slogans rooted in a misunderstanding of the gospel of grace. The first 3 erred on the side of antinomianism, the last one erred on the side of legalism/ascetism.
- All were infected with a Platonic-type philosophy that saw matter as evil or inferior. One side said it is of no matter, so indulge. The other said bad matter, so punish.

- Paul says there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> and better way. The Lord is for the body (v. 13) and He is going to raise it (v. 14). It is a good thing when handled properly. So ask:
  1. Is a particular activity helpful, profitable, beneficial?
  2. Will a particular activity make me better in Christ and build me up?

In other words the question should not be, “am I free to do it?” The question is, “is it good for me to do as a man or woman in Christ?”

## 2) **Will this action potentially enslave me? 1 Cor. 6:12**

Believers have one master and His name is Jesus. No on or no thing is to “be master” (NIV) over us other than Him.

- There is a danger in living “too close to the edge.” Later, in 10:14-22, Paul will point out that living near the edge of sin makes one vulnerable to demonic attack and influence. There is little, if any, wisdom in hanging around out here.
- The boast: “I have liberty in Christ” and “I am free under grace” becomes something of a moral rationalization that is more likely a personal idol erected for satisfying sensual pleasure. In the long run what you convince yourself will hurt no one will lead you yourself into a world of slavery and bondage to the cruelest taskmaster of all: yourself and your own carnal desires.
- True spiritual freedom is not the right to do what you want, it is the supernatural enablement of Christ to do what you ought and enjoy doing so!
- Gordon Fee says, “There is a kind of self-deception that inflated spirituality promotes, which suggests to oneself that he/she is acting with freedom and authority, but which in fact is an enslavement of the worst kind – to the very freedom one thinks one has.” (Fee, 253).

3) **Will this action encourage my brother or sister in Christ?**

**1 Cor. 8:13; 10:24, 32**

- Paul, for the sake of others, was willing to adjust his life that they might not be hurt or harmed. His brother or sister in Christ mattered more to him than his rights or liberties.
- This principle is grounded in the “mind of Christ” text of Phil. 2:3-5. For the sake of the body of Christ, your community of faith, you “esteem others better than yourself.”
- John McArthur says, “Right or wrong is not the issue, but offending someone is” (*Giving Up To Gain*, 5).

4) **Will this action help or hinder my gospel witness?**

**1 Cor. 9:12, 19-23; 10:32-33**

- Antinomianism has no place in Paul’s theology, missional strategy or personal life. He would never say I am free to do anything that I want. He is “under Christ’s law!” To say, “to the thief I became a thief to win the thief, to the drunkard, I became a drunkard to win the drunkard” is utter nonsense and a total misunderstanding of what Paul is saying.
- Paul is not infinitely flexible; he is not free from the law of Christ that places the souls of men and women at a premium. Again the insights of Carson are helpful:
 

“All of God’s demand upon him [Paul] is mediated through Christ. Whatever God demands of him as a new-covenant believer, a Christian, binds him; he cannot step outside those constraints. There is a rigid limit to his flexibility as he seeks to win the lost from different

cultural and religious groups: he must not do anything that is forbidden to the Christian, and he must do everything mandated of the Christian... Today that expression, “all things to all men,” is often used as a form of derision. He (or she) has no backbone, we say; he is two-faced; he is “all things to all men.” But Paul wears the label as a witness to his evangelistic commitment. Even so, he could not do this if he did not know who he was as a Christian. The person who lives by endless rules and who forms his or her self-identity by conforming to them simply cannot flex at all. By contrast, the person without roots, heritage, self-identity, and nonnegotiable values is not really flexing, but is simply being driven hither and yon by the vagaries of every whimsical opinion that passes by. Such people may “fit in,” but they cannot win anyone. They hold to nothing stable or solid enough to win others to it!” (Carson, 120-21).

- Bottom-line: nothing must hinder or obscure the gospel!

**5) Is this action consistent with my new life in Christ?                      I Cor. 6:9-11, 19**

- Sometimes in our desire to communicate the gospel clearly and without unnecessary baggage, we go too far and actually miscommunicate the message and send an uncertain sound. To gain a hearing from our “cultural despisers” we adjust our vocabulary, compromise purity and holiness, and thereby hide the glorious gospel that transforms and changes life. The brilliant German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg in a *First Things* article entitled, “How to Think About Secularism” provides needed words of wisdom in this context:

“The absolutely worst way to respond to the challenge of secularism is to adapt to secular standards in language,

thought, and way of life. If members of a secularist society turn to religion at all, they do so because they are looking for something other than what that culture already provides. It is counter productive to offer them religion in a secular mode that is carefully trimmed in order not to offend their secular sensibilities.

Christians should not shy away from the fact that our lives are centered on the divine things. We offer a different way of making sense of reality and a different way of living, which go against the grain of what modern society offers as the norm. We also should not shy away from referring to the wrath of God against human sin even though most moderns ignore, disbelieve, or sweeten the pill with deceptions about God's complaisance over sin." (June/July, 1996, 31).

- Tim Keller wisely informs us, "All of our personal problems and church problems come because we don't come continually back to the gospel to work it out and live it out....Christians are enormously bold to tell the truth, but without a shred of superiority [remember 6:9-11!], because you are sinners saved by grace. The balance of boldness and utter humility, truth and love-is not somewhere in the middle between legalistic fundamentalism and relativistic liberalism. It is actually off the charts." ("Being the Church in Our Culture." Reformed and Resurge Conference, 2006; p. 6).
- New life in Christ: I am a holy temple.  
New life in Christ: I am a humble temple.

**6) Will this action violate my conscience?**

**1 Cor. 10: 25-29**

- It is risky, even dangerous, to ignore the inner voice of conscience. It is God-given and under redemptive-reconstruction thru the Spirit and the Word. A well-informed, Scripture-saturated, Spirit-sensitive conscience will be an asset in warning us of things that are sinful, evil, and unwise.

- Now, I do not think Paul would say, “Let your conscience be your guide,” as if conscience by itself is a sufficient umpire or arbitrator when it comes to good decision-making. Rather he would say let your conscience guided by Scripture and controlled by love by your guide.
- This will involve some tension in your lifestyle preferences, but it will also result in God conforming you more to the mind of Christ.

7) **Will this action follow the pattern of the life of Jesus?**

**1 Cor. 11:1**

- Recently I was listening to N.T. Wright lecture. As he raised the issue of Christian ethics he noted that a number of his British friends had poked fun at and dismissed the silly, shallow American phenomena of the WWJD bracelet. However, he then went on to note that several of his children were now making their pilgrimage through the teenage years. Suddenly, he did not find WWJD to be a silly and shallow consideration at all. In fact, he rather hoped his children might adopt such an ethic in this post-modern, anything and everything goes culture of the West.
- Of course it is essential to KWJD if asking WWJD is going to be of any benefit. In other words this gospel-centered, Christ-centered ethic requires an immersion into the Scriptures, and in particular the gospels.

8) **Will this action show love to others?**

**1 Cor. 13:1-3**

- “Love is the magnet that attracts others to Christ” (Swindoll, 16). It is also the fulcrum that balances freedom and responsibility, theology and moral behavior. Don Carson is again helpful on this balancing act:

“Strong Christians may be right on a theological issue, but unless they voluntarily abandon what is in fact their right

they will do damage to the church and thus “sin against Christ” (8:12). To stand on your rights may thus involve you in sin after all-not the sin connected with your rights (there, after all, you are right!), but the sin of lovelessness, the sin of being unwilling to forgo your rights for the spiritual and eternal good of others.” (Carson, 125).

I like the balance John MacArthur strikes on this crucial point:

“Now a Christian who is truly well-rounded, positive, and effective, thinks and acts in two ways: conceptually and relationally. He has the ability to understand concepts and communicate to people. He has knowledge plus love and this is the way it should be in the church. Our knowledge needs to be balanced with love. The great fear is that with all our knowledge we would not have love and would therefore wind up being nothing. We have to be conceptual and relational. I think that in the name of liberty some of modern-day Christianity has violated the conscience of weaker brothers and created division in the body. Variations in behavior are the major cause of division in the body, not variations in doctrine. These variations in behavior are not even necessary since we could restrict our liberty for the sake of the weaker brother and create unity. We must make sure that love is the response to knowledge.” (*Giving Up to Gain*, 13).

**9) Will this action honor my body which belongs to God?      1 Cor. 6:19-20**

- Chuck Swindoll reminds us that our bodies are:
  - 1) a physical extension of Christ
  - 2) a moral illustration of the Lord
  - 3) a spiritual habitation of God (1 Cor. Bible Study Guide, p. 12).
- Paul reminds us we are not our own.
 

Paul reminds us we have been bought.

Paul reminds us we are to glorify God in all we do.
- John Piper says 6 things are true because Jesus bought your body:
  - 1) God is for the body not against it.

- 2) The body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) The body will be resurrected from the dead.
- 4) The body is not to be mastered by anything but Christ.
- 5) The body is not to be used for any immorality.
- 6) The body is to be used for the glory of God.

What is the result? “Use your body in ways that will show that God is more satisfying, more precious, more to be desired, more glorious than anything the body craves” (“You were bought with a price,” 11-22-92).

#### **10) Will this action glorify God?**

**1 Cor. 10:31**

This climatic and over-arching principle has been called “the joyful duty of man.” It is right in its God-focus for He is the most beautiful and valuable person in all the universe. It is right in its human perspective for it makes clear why we are here: to live for God’s glory. John Piper gets it right: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him!”

- No part of life is exempt from this principle. It is comprehensive and it is satisfying!

#### **Conclusion**

- Convergent Christians will not wed their cultural and personal preferences to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They will vigorously keep them separate and distinct. They will not insist on their rights or their special interest that could cloud the beauty and purity of the gospel.

- Indeed, how can a devoted Christ follower stand beneath the cross of their Savior and insist on their rights? No, to give up our rights for the spiritual and eternal blessing of others will be a joy and not a burden.
- How will this influence the way we do church? Let me provide a matrix derived from the Corinthian correspondence to give us some guidelines to consider, followed by 6 summary observations.

### A Theological Paradigm for Doing Church

– Bad Church + Good Way	+ Good Church + Good Way
– Bad Church – Bad Way	+ Good Church – Bad Way

### Six Guiding Principles for Finding the “Good Way”

- 1) Love will **regulate** liberty.
- 2) Love will **rein in** legalism.
- 3) That which **detracts** from the gospel will be avoided.
- 4) That which **distracts** from the gospel will be avoided.
- 5) Follow the **witness** principle.
- 6) Follow the **wisdom** principle.