

**Wise Decision–Making in a Wicked World  
(God’s Guidelines for the “Gray Areas” of Life)  
Part 2**

Ethical and moral decision-making presents a great challenge for devoted followers of Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context. In 1 Corinthians Paul provides helpful guidelines for navigating what could be called “the gray areas” of the Christian life.

These biblical principles are true anywhere, anytime and under any circumstances. They are extremely helpful in leading us to be wise decision-makers as we live out a gospel-centered ethic.

**#1) Will this action be helpful to me?**

*“Everything is permissible for me,” but not everything is helpful. “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will not be brought under the control of anything. – 1 Cor. 6:12*

*“Everything is permissible,” but not everything is helpful. “Everything is permissible,” but not everything builds up. – 1 Cor. 10:23*

Certain actions are not helpful for believers. They don’t build you up or make you better for Jesus. They accomplish little or nothing. To understand this principle, examine the following four statements. ““Everything is permissible for me”” (6:12; 10:23). ““Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods,’ but God will do away with both of them”” (6:13). ““Every sin a person can commit is outside the body”” (6:18). ““It is good for a man not to have relations with a woman”” (7:1). I believe these were all “Corinth slogans.” In other words, these statements were not things Paul was affirming. On the contrary, these were popular sayings that Paul was correcting because they were rooted in a misunderstanding of the implications of the gospel. The first three erred on the side of antinomianism; the last one erred on the side of legalism and asceticism. All were infected with a view of reality that was grounded in a Platonic-type of

philosophy that saw matter as evil or, at best, inferior. Thus, some went to one extreme and said, “The body does not matter, so indulge.” Others said, “The body is bad, so I will punish it.”

Paul said there is a third and better way. There is a gospel way! The Lord is for the body (6:13) and He is going to raise it (6:14). In other words, the body is a wonderful gift from God, God has redeemed it in Christ, He is going to resurrect and glorify it and it is a great thing when handled properly. So ask: is a particular activity helpful, profitable, beneficial? Will a particular activity make me better in Christ and raise me to a higher spiritual level? In other words, the question should not be, “Am I free to do it?” The question is, “Is it good for me to do this as a man or woman in Christ?”

## #2) **Will this action potentially enslave me?**

*“Everything is permissible for me,” but not everything is helpful. “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will not be brought under the control of anything. – 1 Cor. 6:12*

Paul is confident that he is a slave to only one master. His name is Jesus. No one or no thing is to “be master” (NIV) over us other than Him. I will choose to live a radically Christ-centered life because I belong to Him. You see, there is a danger in living “too close to the edge.” It can be the edge of antinomianism and libertarianism or legalism and asceticism. Either extreme is going to draw you away from Christ, and you will run the risk of being enslaved. Later, in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, Paul will point out that living near the edge of sin can even make one vulnerable to demonic attack and influence. There is little, if any, wisdom in hanging around out here.

The boasts: “I have liberty in Christ” and “I am free under grace” can become something of a moral rationalization that is more likely a personal idol erected for satisfying sensual pleasure. 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.” (*First Corinthians*, 253). Christians must consistently guard themselves against any action that will potentially enslave them. I believe this is a tremendous word of wisdom as it relates to issues like drugs, alcohol, tobacco and pornography just to note a few of the more common destroyers of lives and families in our day.