

**Wise Decision–Making in a Wicked World
(God’s Guidelines for the “Gray Areas” of Life)
Part 3**

Ethical and moral decision-making presents a great challenge for devoted followers of Jesus in the 21st 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.

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

Therefore, if food causes my brother to fall, I will never again eat meat, so that I won't cause my brother to fall. – 1 Cor. 8:13

No one should seek his own good, but the good of the other person. – 1 Cor. 10:24

Give no offense to the Jews or the Greeks or the church of God... - 1 Cor. 10:32

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, “consider others as more important than yourselves.” Paul drives ethics to the gospel and to the cross. The gospel demands that the needs of others outweigh selfish desires. When it comes to wise decision making, a believer in Christ should always have an eye toward a potential weaker brother. John McArthur says, “Right or wrong is not the issue, but offending someone is.” (*Giving Up to Gain*, 5). This principle was an important guide for me as a father. Being blessed by God with four sons, I did not want to do anything that could hurt them, harm them, mislead them or lead them astray. I wanted to live

before them, as best I could, in a way that would encourage them to take the high road ethically and morally, and to avoid the “danger zones” that could lead to sorrow and even destruction.

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

If others share this authority over you, don't we even more? However, we have not used this authority; instead we endure everything so that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ. – 1 Cor. 9:12

For although I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win more people. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law--though I myself am not under the law--to win those under the law. To those who are outside the law, like one outside the law--not being outside God's law, but under the law of Christ--to win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, that I may become a partner in its benefits. – 1 Cor. 9:19-23

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

This principle is so crucial Paul repeats it at least three different times. He makes it very clear that his ethics are missiologically and evangelistically motivated. He did not allow anything to hinder the gospel from going forth and being heard in the most effective way possible.

Some misunderstand Paul to mean that he is infinitely flexible. However, antinomianism has no place in Paul’s theology, missional strategy, ethics 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 misinterpretation 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. The insights of D.

A. 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! (*The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 120-21).

The bottom-line: nothing must hinder or obscure the gospel! Nothing! Absolutely nothing!