

Wise Decision–Making in a Wicked World
(God’s Guidelines for the “Gray Areas” of Life)
Part 4

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.

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

Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: no sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, revilers, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom. Some of you were like this; but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. – 1 Cor. 6:9-11

Do you not know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own... – 1 Cor. 6:19

Followers of Jesus are brand new creatures. We are now temples of the Holy Spirit corporately (1 Cor. 3:16) and individually (1 Cor. 6:19). One aspect of this “newness” is that we honor God and bring Him glory in our bodies (1Cor. 6:20). This is a Pauline way of saying glorify God all the time in every way with all that you are. Body, mind, will, and emotions are all to be brought under His Lordship and control. Unfortunately, we sometimes forget this and tragic consequences follow. Christ is hidden rather than displayed in our lives. Let me illustrate. 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 we are reckless with what we do with our bodies and thereby cloud or even hide the glorious

gospel that transforms and changes life. 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. (Wolfhart Pannenberg, “How to Think About Secularism,” *First Things* 64 (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.” (Tim Keller, “Being the Church in Our Culture.”) When considering how to live for Christ in the 21st century, our new life demands that we proclaim and live the message with great boldness, holiness and humility. We are to live a life that is in harmony with who we are as new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

#6) Will this action violate my conscience?

Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake, for the earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it. If one of the unbelievers invites you over and you want to

go, eat everything that is set before you, without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This is food offered to an idol," do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who told you, and for conscience' sake. I do not mean your own conscience, but the other person's. For why is my freedom judged by another person's 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, Word and fellowship of the Christian community. 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* be 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 (Phil. 2:5). We must get used to living with this tension. While most would love for every decision to be crystal clear (I certainly would!), that is naïve and simplistic. It would also stunt spiritual growth and maturity as we grow in Christ. Thus, Christians must know what is going on in their own cultural context. The internal voice of a believer’s conscience can be a great aid when guided by Scripture and controlled by the ethic of love. It can give you peace in what you are doing and joy in the doing. Romans 14:23 reminds us, “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” Living with a clear conscience before Christ and others is a worthy goal for all of us to pursue.