

Tough Choices

**Is it OK for a believer to watch a “PG” or an “R” rated movie?
How about a glass of wine with dinner?
Can a Christian own a Ferrari?**

While the Bible does not directly answer these specific questions, it does provide principles and guidelines that allow Christians to determine how to proceed in these “grey areas” of Christian decision making. The following list of scriptural diagnostic questions, or a checklist if you will, will help believers discern God’s will for their lives and make God honoring decisions. These diagnostic questions are in no particular order of importance. If you can affirm each decision positively without violating Scripture, your conscience, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, then you may proceed.

1. Does my particular action violate the clear mandate of Scripture? This appears to be a straightforward and not worthy of mentioning. Yet, Christians need to be reminded that we are to walk in obedience with our Lord. The Scriptures teach that if we love Jesus, we will obey all of his commands.

“Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go” (Joshua 1:7). “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

2. Does it cause a weaker brother to stumble? As a believer, one must be sensitive to his/her brothers and sisters in Christ. Christians are commanded not to let our actions cause a weaker brother to stumble. We are to be concerned about each other. Therefore, anything Christians do that cause a brother or sister in Christ to stumble in their walk with the Lord is a sin.

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak (Romans 14:20-21).

3. Does it cause a non-believer to stumble? Is it a bad witness for Christ? We should not do anything that confuses the message of the Gospel. If any decision/activity we as believers participate in hinders an unbeliever’s decision to come to Christ, we must refrain.

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

4. Does it violate my body as a temple of the Holy Spirit? Our bodies are not our own, they were purchased by the blood of Christ and temporarily given to us. Christians share their body with the Holy Spirit, and are to maintain it in an honorable way. We must respect that which was made in the image of God. Treating the body with disrespect or polluting the body is not a Christian option. Additionally, other Christians and non-Christians can see when we are misusing our bodies. This poor treatment of our bodies is not only a sin, it is a bad testimony to others.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

5. Would you do it if the Lord was with you? This is a practical question that helps many Christians in their decision making process. To envision yourself partaking in *this decision* with the Lord present may change your decision to do it. Christians should honestly answer the question, “Would I be doing this if the Lord was with me?” Well He is!

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me (Psalm 139:7-12).

6. Does my decision and my action glorify God? The Apostle Paul addresses the issue of Christian decision making in I Corinthians. He speaks of the freedom that Christians have in Christ, and concludes that our decisions should consider whether or not we are going to glorify God.

Therefore . . . whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31-33).

7. Stewardship — Is my partaking fruitful or beneficial? The question of being good stewards — fruitful and productive with the time, talents, and treasures God has given must be considered as well. If your decision would cause you to waste your time, money, energy, or fruitfulness, it must be forsaken. As good Christian stewards, we must decide what is beneficial and what is not.

Everything is permissible for me -- but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me -- but I will not be mastered by anything (1 Cor. 6:12; NIV).

8. What is my motivation for wanting to do this? It may be a good time to search your heart by doing a personal inventory. God knows your heart and your motivations behind your actions. In the self-inventory process, try to pinpoint your motivation for considering this action. Remember that God is to be the sole focus of our affections, and that we should have nothing else above Him that captures our affections.

Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

9. Is there any doubt or sense of conviction? This question serves as a “catch all” for anything else left uncovered by the above questions. God has given us His Spirit. Christians are blessed to have the presence of the Holy Spirit living inside them and need to be sensitive to His leading. The Spirit convicts us when we are participating in something that we should not. Anytime there is doubt, conviction, or a lack of peace about a decision, we should not partake. If a Christian has any doubts or convictions about his choice, he must refrain.

But he who doubts is condemned if he ____, because he does not ____ from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:23). *Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart* (Psalm 37:4).