

DISCERNMENT

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”
Phi.1:9-11

Knowing what God would have us do does not come naturally at birth nor automatically at rebirth (conversion). Deciding what is right and what is wrong for Christians can be determined by answering a few questions with what is found in the Holy Scriptures.

Question #1: Is it Clearly Condemned in The Bible?

Many things are specifically mentioned as being wrong.

There are, among others, two lists of specific things.

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Gal.5:19-21

“But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.” Eph.5:3-7

What is precisely forbidden settles the matter. There is no room for debate.

But not all sins are specifically mentioned: the Bible would be endless if that were true! Other questions need to be asked.

Question #2: Is it Similar to Those Things Condemned in The Bible?

Note the phrase *“things like these”* in Gal.5:21

Is it similar to any sins specifically mentioned?

Question #3: Does it Hurt My Conscience?

“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” 1Ti.1:5

“. . . holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” 1Ti. 3:9

An act may be good in and of itself, but if I think it is wrong (because of incorrect knowledge) or have doubts about, to me it is wrong. Rom.14:23

Violating my conscience to the degree it no longer bothers me can be fatal.

1Ti.4:1-2

Question #4: Does it Hinder My Influence?

Does the practice under question *help* or *hinder* my influence as a Christian?

By both example and word, Paul was concerned about our influence on others.

“ . . . whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved.”

1Co.10:31-33

The good example of a wife can greatly influence her husband. 1Pe.3:1-2

Question #5: Is it Poor Stewardship?

We are all stewards (responsible caretakers) of our time, money, and bodies.

Note the parable of the talents. Mat.25:14-30

Instructions concerning our bodies. 1Co.6:19-20

Directions for those of us who are rich in this world. 1Ti.6:17-19

Some activities may be harmless in themselves, but require so much time and energy that there is none left for the Lord. Time is limited and priorities are a must.

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil”. Eph.5:15-16

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.” Mat.6:33

Question #6: What Do Mature Christians Say About It?

This is not the ultimate determining factor, for mature Christians can be wrong.

Note Heb.5:14 *“ . . . the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”*

The advice of mature Christians can be helpful. Phi.3:17

Paul instructed Titus that the younger should look to those older. Tit.2:3-5

Was it not the older men who first felt shame and left after their attempt to trap Jesus went awry? Joh.8:9ff

The example of Rehoboam's failure to listen to the advice of older, mature men is a prime example. 1Ki.12:6-20

Question #7: Would Jesus Do It?

The goal of discipleship is to be like Jesus.

“A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.” Luk.6:40

The study of Jesus is of prime importance: His life, His examples and His Word.

We need to have the *“mind of Christ.”* Phi.2:5