

Three Principles

In relationship both to God and man there are three principles that determine if a practice is a matter of faith or of opinion. Each principle may be posed as a question.

First, is it authorized? Jesus Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18). In every relationship both our words and our acts are governed by Jesus (Colossians 3:17). We must have permission from Him to speak or act. To act without His authority is to cut ourselves off from Him and the Father (2 John 9).

Permission to act may be given either specifically or in a general way. We are specifically authorized to sing in worship to God (Ephesians 5:18-19). Since the Lord commands us to take the gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20), and He did not specify how we are to go, we have general permission to buy a passport and to fly on an airplane.

Is it my duty? (James 4:17) For example, it is our duty to assemble faithfully with other Christians to worship (Hebrews 10:24-25). Children are obligated to obey and honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Duties also may be specifically or generally imposed. Wives are specifically commanded to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24). But the application of this duty is general. If he says, "We must move to Texas so I can find work," her obligation is to go because of the general duty to submit. Husbands are specifically told to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25-31), but cleaning the house for her when she is sick is a duty generally imposed by the command to love her.

Is it forbidden? Binding the observance of the Sabbath as a duty is condemned (Colossians 2:13-17). Sexual relations outside a marriage which God approves is likewise condemned (Hebrews 13:4).

The Scriptures may also forbid acts or words either specifically or generally. Social drinking is specifically forbidden (1 Peter 4:1-3). But dancing as is commonly practiced in Western society (Europe and the Americas) today, since it involves "lewdness" (Ibid), i.e., "indecent bodily movements, unchaste (impure - KS) handling of males and females" (Thayer. 79-80), is condemned in a general way.

Three Categories

All speech and action falls into one of three categories. It is either **required by the Lord** (Matthew 28:20), **sinful** (1 John 3:4), or a matter of **opinion**. The baptism of alien sinners for the remission of sins is required (Acts 2:38). Keeping holy days religiously, such as remembering Christmas as the birthday of Christ, is sinful (Galatians

4:10-11). But what about keeping days as a matter of social custom? That's a matter of opinion or liberty, something the Lord allows but does not require (Romans 14:5).

If the Scriptures provide authority for an act but do not command it as a duty, then it is a matter of opinion. Nothing is helpful that is not authorized by the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). Nothing that God forbids is spiritually profitable (1 John 5:3).

Opinion

Four New Testament passages instruct us how to determine what is spiritually most profitable in matters of opinion: Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 8:1-13; and 10:23-33. These passages teach us seven guidelines to determine what is the most profitable thing to do or say in matters of opinion.

- ❶ **Do not lead one who is weak to violate his conscience** (Romans 14:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:25-33).
- ❷ **Do things that lead to peace and edification** (Romans 14:19).
- ❸ **Do not violate your own conscience** (Romans 14:23).
- ❹ **Try to please others rather than yourself** (Romans 15:1-3).
- ❺ **Do not be enslaved to anything** (1 Corinthians 6:12).
- ❻ **Do all to the glory of God** (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- ❼ **Seek the salvation of others** (1 Corinthians 10:33).

Conclusion

We have the solemn duty to avoid sin (1 Corinthians 15:34). If we will learn, understand, and apply the principles of this lesson we will know both how to distinguish between right and wrong and how to tell what is most helpful in the realm of opinion. We will be maturing as Christians. We will glorify God in our own lives and help lead others to salvation.

Work Cited

Thayer, J.H. **A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament.**

Questions for Review

I. True/False

1. _____ The first and great commandment is to love yourself.
2. _____ The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

3. ____ Faith comes by a feeling better felt than told.
4. ____ We have the right to pass judgment on each other in matters of opinion.
5. ____ In the realm of opinion, God has given us principles to help us decide what course of action is most profitable spiritually.
6. ____ We must have authority from Christ for what we do and say.
7. ____ All speech and action falls into one of three categories: required by the Lord, sinful, or a matter of opinion.
8. ____ Nothing is helpful that is not authorized by the Lord.
9. ____ I do not have to be concerned about causing someone else to violate his conscience.
10. ____ We should do things that lead to peace and edification.
11. ____ You should not violate your own conscience.
12. ____ You can't please everyone, so you should please yourself.
13. ____ You should not be enslaved to anything.
14. ____ Do everything that brings glory to yourself.
15. ____ We should seek the salvation of others.
16. ____ We have the solemn duty to avoid sin.

II. Matching

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|-----------------|---|
| 1. ____ Discern | A. those matters about which God has expressed His will |
| 2. ____ Faith | B. things about which God has not given law |
| 3. ____ Opinion | C. freedom to decide for ourselves what is best |
| 4. ____ Liberty | D. distinguish between |

Bible Correspondence Course Lesson Seventeen Discerning Good and Evil

If you were the witness to a crime and were called upon to identify the criminal from among suspects in a line-up, how would you pick out the real culprit? Wouldn't you look for identifying features, such as sex, height, weight, skin color, and hair color? By doing this you hopefully could identify the criminal.

An important part of our maturing as Christians is learning to distinguish between right and wrong (Hebrews 5:12-14). Sin has characteristics by which we can identify it. How can we "discern (distinguish between - KS) both good and evil"?

Love God and Love Your Neighbor

The greatest commandment of the law is:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is the first and great commandment. (Matthew 22:34-38)

Our first and most importance obligation is to God. The Lord then added:

And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (verses 39-40)

We also have the responsibility to treat other people as we want to be treated.

Faith and Opinion

In both these relationships, there are two realms. There is the realm of faith, those matters about which God has expressed His will. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).

Then there are activities that are liberties, matters of opinion, things about which God has not given law and thus has given us the freedom to decide for ourselves what is best. For example, we each have the liberty to decide what foods we eat (1 Corinthians 8:8-9). In the realm of opinion, God has given us principles to help us decide what course of action is most profitable spiritually. But because God has not demanded a certain action in these matters, none of us should judge each other about such things (Romans 14:3).