

SHADES OF GRAY

TOOLBOX

- THINK
- OBSERVE
- CLOSE-UP
- WRITE
- DISCUSS
- FEELINGS
- BRAIN-STORM
- REFERENCE
- PASSAGE
- ARTICLE
- BIG IDEA



BRAINSTORM

What are some things you have observed other people do that you've questioned whether it's OK to participate in?

DEBBIE

Debbie, a Christian sophomore, is invited to a Greek formal by a good-looking guy in her psychology class. He is the president of his fraternity and a big man on campus. Dating him would make her the envy of all the women in her sorority. She's heard that he may be a Christian, but doesn't know for sure. He seems very nice.

LIFE STORIES

KEVIN

Kevin, a young Christian, is a freshman. During freshman orientation week, a friend invited him to a party. He really wanted to meet other people and make new friends, so he decided to go. At the party, the friend who invited him gave him a glass of beer and encouraged him to drink.

KAREN & JASON

Karen and Jason recently became engaged to be married. Last night as they sat close to one another on Jason's couch, they were both thinking to themselves, *How far can we go sexually before it's sin?*



IMAGINE

Imagine you are Kevin or Jason (men), or Debbie or Karen (women). How would you feel, and how would you decide what to do in these situations?



GRAY AREAS

Situations to which the Bible does not directly refer

IS IT RIGHT?

AREAS	NEVER	DEPENDS	ALWAYS
Drinking alcohol			
Pre-marital sex			
Dating a non-Christian			
Unhealthy dieting			
Watching soap operas			
Gambling			
Physical intimacy (without sex)			
Going to clubs or bars			
Using a fake I.D.			
Living with a member of the opposite sex			
Cheating (using a book on a take home test)			
Dressing provocatively			
Swearing			
Drinking a non-alcoholic beer			
Magazines— <i>Cosmopolitan</i> , <i>Sports Illustrated</i> (swimsuit issue)			

BACKGROUND

The apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to the church in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17), a major cosmopolitan city in Greece, while he was in Ephesus (Acts 19). Many of the Christians in the church at Corinth came from immoral, pagan backgrounds, and at the time of Paul's letter (54-55 A.D.), these Christians struggled in many areas—drunkenness, sexual immorality, idolatry, etc. Most of these areas of struggle were definitely wrong, but not all. Some were what we call “gray.”

CONTROVERSY

The following situation took place almost 2,000 years ago in the ancient city of Corinth. In this culture the main religion was the worship of many gods (idols) who were believed to control human and earthly events. The worship of these gods included immoral sexual practices and the offering and eating of animal sacrifices given to appease the gods and to receive from them blessing.

Imagine that you, coming from this cultural and religious background, just became a Christian after hearing the gospel from the apostle Paul. A pagan friend invites you to attend a celebration which includes eating the meat of animals that has been sacrificed to idols.

What would you do? Would you attend the celebration? What criteria would you use to decide?

OBSERVE/IDENTIFY

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

- 23 “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is **beneficial**. “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is **constructive**.
- 24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the **good of others**.
- 25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of **conscience**,
- 26 for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”
- 27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.
- 28 But if anyone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience’ sake—
- 29 the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my **freedom** be judged by another’s conscience?
- 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?
- 31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do it all for the glory of God**.
- 32 **Do not cause anyone to stumble**, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God--
- 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but **the good of many**, so that they may be saved.
- 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

OBSERVED PRINCIPLE

DEFINITION

CONSCIENCE: The faculty of recognizing the distinction between right and wrong in regard to one’s own conduct. (*New American Heritage Dic.*)

FREEDOM: Liberty from the arbitrary views and restraints of another. (*Vine’s*)

STUMBLE: To fall into evil ways (*New American Heritage Dic.*);

CAUSE TO STUMBLE: To give offense (*NASB*).

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE: a governing law of conduct that is timeless, not bound by culture, non-negotiable, to be obeyed.

SUMMARY

The principle we have observed can be helpful in applying the Bible to difficult situations and choices we face today. Remember the conclusions you come to may not be the same conclusions another Christian embraces. Many issues are open to personal choice or conviction, and matters of individual conscience.



Four H's of 1 Corinthians 6, 8 and 10

Questions to ask when faced with a gray area:

1. Is it **helpful**, beneficial or constructive for me? Does it cause me to grow spiritually or help others grow? (6:12a; 10:23)
2. Is it a **habit**? Is it an addictive behavior? Does it hold me in its power? Do I feel I need this to be happy and fulfilled? Does it control my thoughts or actions? (6:12b)
3. Is it **hurtful** for another? A weaker Christian? In doing it, would I hurt someone else or cause them to be tempted to go against their conscience (what they think is right)? Is it hurtful for a non-Christian? Could my behavior cause a non-Christian to ignore the gospel or disregard Christ? (8:13; 10:24-11:1)
4. Is it **Honoring** to God? Glorifying God means to exalt God, to please Him by seeking His interests above our own interests. In doing it, would I bring glory to God, or dishonor Him? (10:31)



TRY IT OUT

GRAY AREA

Helpful?

Habit?

Hurtful?

Honoring?

BENEFITS OF APPLYING PRINCIPLES



POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT APPLYING PRINCIPLES





REFLECTION

What are the top two or three gray areas you are dealing with in your life right now?

How will you apply biblical principles in dealing with these gray areas?



“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.”

Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 13:5



“An unexamined life is not worth living.”

Socrates

For individual study and application:



PRINCIPAL PASSAGES

Romans 14:22,23
1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 8:1-13
Galatians 5:16-24
Galatians 6:1-4,7,8
Ephesians 5:1-13

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version*, ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.