



Lesson 10: Proper Behavior

How should Christians decide what kinds of activities are proper for them? That is, how can one know if something is right or wrong? We could come up with a long list of rules to follow. But instead of just listing a bunch of do's and don'ts, we'll look at some important Biblical principles to apply.

Direct Commands and General Principles

The first thing to do is see what the Bible teaches about the subject. Direct biblical principles cover many of life's most important issues—they tell us specifically what to do and what not to do. What are some direct commands that we must follow?

The Bible doesn't address many issues that modern believers have to deal with. Usually, if the Bible doesn't speak to the topic directly, we can find a general principle that does apply. What issues do general biblical principles cover?

General Biblical Principles that Guide Behavior

There is usually not much question or confusion regarding how to apply direct biblical commands – just obey them. However, because the Bible doesn't address every single issue, we must apply general principles. Below is a list of texts that we should use when the Bible doesn't directly talk about an issue.

1. 1 Corinthians 10:31 *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

“To glorify” means to honor or reverence, to treat with respect. To do something for the “glory of God” means that we do it in a way that God would be pleased with.

What are some things that it is impossible to do “to the glory of God”?

Ask yourself the question, “Is God pleased with or honored by this activity?” or “Can I do this activity in a way that God would be pleased with?”

1. Philippians 4:8-9 *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.*

∞ Think about the right kinds of things.

What kinds of things would this passage rule out?

Where are the good things from this passage found?

∞ Follow the right kind of teachers. “*learned, received, heard*” When the blind follow the blind, they both fall into a pit. Make sure you are following someone who is leading you in an orthodox, proper path.

∞ Follow the right kind of examples. “*seen in me*”

Who is speaking here?

What did Paul expect his readers to do with the information he had taught them?

Paul was a good example for the Philippians and for us. Who are other examples we could follow?

Ask yourself, “Does this help me think the right thoughts?” and “Is this teacher helping or hurting me?” and “Am I following a good or a bad example here?”

2. 2 Corinthians 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

All Christians will one day stand before the Lord to be judged for our works. Thus, we should ask ourselves, “Is this activity worthy of reward, or will I be sorry I did it?”

Note: This judgment is for rewards, not for salvation. Nobody is saved based on his or her works.

1. 1 Corinthians 6:12 *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

The people at Corinth were boasting that they were totally free in Christ and could do whatever they wanted to. This is a very common sentiment today. Paul gives them two limitations:

☐ Your actions should be beneficial, i.e., helpful, advantageous, or profitable. What are some activities that we can do that are not sinful, but that are unprofitable? *Much TV, video games, movies, entertainment, some books, etc.*

☐ Your actions should not lead to enslavement. What are some activities that tend to lead to enslavement? *Smoking, drinking, drugs, porn.*

Ask yourself, “Is this kind of activity beneficial?” and “Will this activity bring me under its power?”

2. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *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.*

This passage teaches several important truths that impact our behavior. First, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer’s body. That means that wherever the believer goes and whatever he does, God is present. Second, the believer’s body is not his own because God has purchased it. No one has the right to do whatever he pleases with his body. Third, the believer’s duty is to honor God with his body. Some have taught that it doesn’t matter what one does with his body because the physical nature is not as important as the spiritual. This is not true. One should seek to honor God with both his body and his spirit, because both belong to God.

How should this text influence your behavior?

6. 1 Peter 1: 15-16 *but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”*

Clearly, this text teaches that the believer is to live a holy life. But note that one should be holy because God is holy. Christians should judge an activity by comparing it to the character of God. In other words, if the activity runs contrary to what we know God is like, the activity is likely out of bounds.

List some of the attributes of God's goodness that can help us evaluate an activity or behavior.

What about letting your conscience be your guide?

What is a conscience? It's an internal sense of right and wrong, a witness within man's heart that tells him he ought to do what he believes is right and not to do what he believes is wrong. Conscience does not teach us what is right or wrong, but prods us to do what we have been taught is right.

The conscience may or may not be a good guide, depending on how it has been molded. One's conscience may become overly-sensitive if he has been taught that certain permissible behaviors are sinful. On the other hand, one can so abuse his conscience that it becomes unable to sense good and evil (1 Tim 4:2). If your conscience is telling you that a behavior is wrong, you should not practice it. If you are unsure about a behavior, you should withhold from participating until you examine the matter biblically. Once you are convinced that an activity is acceptable for Christians, it should not bother your conscience when you engage in it. In any case, don't ignore your conscience.

Note: Determining what behaviors are personally acceptable for you depends greatly on your spiritual and physical maturity. Young people still living at home obviously have to abide by the rules their parents teach. Newly saved people probably won't have the same standards and convictions as mature Christians do.

Conclusion: How do you know if an activity is proper or not? Find out what the Bible teaches, either directly or in principle. Can you practice the behavior in a way that honors God? Does the practice help you think the right kinds of thoughts, or does it tempt you toward evil thinking? Are you following a good example or a bad one? If God were to judge you for this activity, would you be rewarded or punished? Is the behavior beneficial for yourself and others or does it lead to enslavement? Answering such questions usually helps in choosing proper activities.

Discussion:

1. Why is it sometimes hard to discern what behavior is acceptable?
2. How can you know if some activity brings glory to God or not?
3. How should the reality of the Judgment Seat of Christ influence your behavior?