



What Do You Do When There Isn't a Chapter or Verse? Discerning Right from Wrong: Ethical Principles for Christians

The following notes are from Dr. Mike Bere's Social Ethics class at Pensacola Christian College. They were compiled by Evangelist Rich Tozour who also added the Distinction Principle 10/93.

Introduction: Does the Bible relate to everyday living in modern culture? Yes. Does the Word of God spell out every sin in contemporary society? No. So, how does one determine right from wrong when there is no particular chapter and verse in the Bible concerning the issue in question? Answer: Use **biblical principles**.

Proverbs 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.;

Psalms 119:97-104 O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

Satan can be transformed into "an angel of light".

2 Corinthians 11:9-14 And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth. But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

He can easily trap Christians into "gray areas" of morality, unless we follow the admonition of **Hebrews 5:14** to have our "senses exercised to discern both good and evil." The basis principles of Scripture help us to develop such discernment.

Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.



Paul used principles: 1 Corinthians 9:4-11 (especially v. 9) from Deuteronomy 25:4 (cited also in 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

1 Corinthians 9:4-11 Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? **For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?** Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

Deuteronomy 25:4 Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

Jesus used principles: Mark 2:23-28; cf. 1 Samuel 21:1-6 and Exodus 23:12.

Mark 2:23-28 And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.



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1 Samuel 21:1-6 Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee? And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place. Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.

Exodus 23:12 Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.

It is wise for us, therefore, to be well acquainted with basic biblical principles in order that we may make right decisions when faced with questions of ethics and conduct.

I. ASSOCIATION PRINCIPLE.

A. Summary: Who or what is **associated** with this item, activity or individual?

1. What is the **present dominant** association?
2. Is there guilt by association?

B. Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Ephesians 5:11; Romans 14:16;
1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.



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Ephesians 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

Romans 14:16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

II. OFFENSE PRINCIPLE.

A. Summary: To **abstain** from something, perhaps even from something good, for the sake of another Christian.

B. Scripture: Romans 14:12-15:6 (especially 14:21); 1 Corinthians 8:9, 13; 10:23-33; cf. Philippians 2:1-5

1. **Offend** = to **cause** to sin (emboldens; convinces to do wrong)
2. **Weaker brother** = a **new** or **immature** Christian

Romans 14:12-15:6 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. **It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.** Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.



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1 Corinthians 8:9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

1 Corinthians 8:13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

1 Corinthians 10:23-33 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Philippians 2:1-5 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

III. WEDGE PRINCIPLE.

- A. Summary: Once a particular action is initiated, the tendency is to **become more involved** in that activity.
- B. Scripture: Deuteronomy 12:30-32; Romans 16:19; 1 Corinthians 6:12
(Beware of habit-forming practices!)

Deuteronomy 12:30-32 Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

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Romans 16:19 For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

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

IV. DOUBT PRINCIPLE.

A. Summary: If there is a **doubt**, give God the benefit of the doubt and do not do it. ("If in **doubt**, **DON'T!**")

B. Scripture: Romans 14:5, 23; 1 Corinthians 10:27-29

Romans 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Romans 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

1 Corinthians 10:27-29 If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?

V. EDIFICATION PRINCIPLE.

A. Summary: Will this action **build up**? Does it give the **right opinion** of Jesus Christ?

B. Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 (especially vv. 23, 31, 33); Romans 14: 19; 1 Corinthians 8:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:11

** **glory** = (*doxa*) opinion, estimate; hence, the honor resulting from a good opinion (cf. Romans 3:23; John 12:28)

1 Corinthians 10:23-33 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and



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for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? **Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.** Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: **Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.**

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

1 Corinthians 8:1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

John 12:28 Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.

VI. EXPEDIENCY PRINCIPLE.

A. Summary Is this the **BEST** of all my choices? The "**good**" things in life are enemies to the "**best**" things in life because of time.

** **expedient** = profitable, advantageous

B. Scripture: 1Corinthians 6:12; 10:23 (e.g. Luke 10:38-42, Mary & Martha)

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

1Corinthians 10:23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.



Luke 10:38-42 Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain vil-
lage: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a
sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was
cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care
that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Je-
sus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about
many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which
shall not be taken away from her.

VII. DISTINCTION PRINCIPLE.

A. Summary: God created everything with **distinction**, and clear **separation** by kind
and category.

B. Scripture (note the contrasts):

Genesis 1:1 **heaven & earth**

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Genesis 1:4 **light & darkness**

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1:5, 14, 18 **day & night**

⁵ And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and
the morning were the first day.

¹⁴ And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day
from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

¹⁸ And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness:
and God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:7 **upper & lower waters**

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament
from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.



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Genesis 1:9-10

land & sea

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:20-21; 24-25

“kinds” of creatures

²⁰⁻²¹ And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

²⁴⁻²⁵ And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2

male & female

^{1:26-27} And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

^{5:1-2} This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.

Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:8-11

Sabbath & work days

^{Gen. 2:3} And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

^{Ex. 20:8-11} Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.



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Exodus 11:5-7

Jew & Gentile

And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.

Deuteronomy 22:5

male clothing & female clothing

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

Ezekiel 22:26; 44:23

holy & profane; clean & unclean

22:26 Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

44:23 And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

John 3:16; Romans 6:23 Revelation 20:6, 15

eternal life & second death

Jn. 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Rom. 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Rev. 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. ¹⁵ And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.



1 Corinthians 10:21

Lord's Table & table of devils

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

believers & unbelievers

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.