

## Discerning Good and Evil

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The question of what is right and what is wrong is always before the Christian. Some are forever asking: "Is there any harm in dancing, in going to the picture shows, smoking cigarettes, and the like?" Certain works of the flesh are enumerated by Paul in Gal. 5: 19, 21, and the apostle emphatically declares that "they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The Scriptures also condemn lying, deception, hypocrisy, covetousness, stealing, and suchlike. Furthermore, things indecent and immoral are condemned. But some seem to find it hard to decide what is indecent and immoral, and also there are practices among men now that were not in existence in the days of the apostles. How, then, shall one discern what is good and what is bad? The following suggestions should help the honest heart in making decisions regarding these things:

1. *Anything that destroys the identity of the Christian is sinful.* The Christian has been called out of the world, and this separation should be maintained always. Jesus said: "By their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. 7: 16.) It should never be necessary for a Christian to tell another man that he is a Christian; he should know it by his fruits.

2. *Questionable places should be avoided.* There is no excuse for a Christian to be found habitually hanging around a liquor store, public poolroom, race tracks, and suchlike places. To be found at questionable places naturally causes others to question us. People generally associate us with the places and people we are found with.

3. *The Christian should never participate in anything that destroys or weakens his influence.* The Christian's influence is one of the most potent means for good. He can often lead men to serve God by his good example when he fails to convince him by the word. Peter said: "Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their wives; beholding your chaste behavior coupled with fear." (1 Pet. 3: 1, 2.) And Jesus said: "Let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5: 16.) God will hold us responsible for our influence upon other people, whether it be good or bad.

4. *Anything that the Christian allows to hinder him in performing his Christian duty is wrong.* Jesus said: "Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness." (Matt. 6: 33.) "God first" should be the motto of every child of God. "No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier." (2 Tim. 2: 4.) Sunday trips, and visits, Sunday jobs and business interests become sinful when they are allowed to hinder the Christian in his worship and service to God on the Lord's day. Our duty to God should always come first. The Lord teaches us that we must love him more than we love anything or anyone in this

life. Anything that will draw our affection from the Lord is sinful.

5. *Whatever places an unequal yoke upon the Christian is wrong.* Paul said: "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers." (2 Cor. 6: 14.) He also declared that there can be no fellowship between righteousness and iniquity, or communion of light with darkness, or concord between Christ and the devil. How, then, can a Christian have fellowship with these things? "Who-soever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God." (James 4: 4.) While this Scripture does not name the matter of Christians marrying those who are not Christians, nevertheless the principle that should govern marriage is stated here. It seems so strange that any Christian would even entertain the idea of selecting a wife or husband who is not a Christian. If the paramount thing in life is to serve and honor God, how incongruous to say the least it appears for a Christian to marry one who does not love God and whose life is devoted to the devil? Furthermore, working under undesirable influences places an unequal yoke upon the Christian. Certainly evil companionship should be guarded against. Paul said: "Be not deceived; Evil companionships corrupt good morals." (1 Cor. 15: 33.)

6. *That which is harmful to the body is sinful.* We are commanded to glorify God in our bodies. (1 Cor. 6: 20.) "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10: 31.) "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's dainties, nor with the wine which he drank." (Dan. 1: 8.) Partaking of any kind of dope, liquor, or even tobacco, which harms and defiles the body is wrong. Our outward man decays fast enough without adding these things which poison and destroy it.

7. *Anything that corrupts the heart is sinful.* "For as he thinketh within himself, so is he." (Prov. 23: 7.) A man's thoughts are very largely governed by the books and papers he reads. To read good books for instruction and entertainment is not wrong, but many an honest heart has been poisoned by rotten and vile literature. Parents should guard the hearts of their children from vile literature as they guard them from eating poison food. This is also what is wrong with the picture shows. It seems that those who produce the shows think it is necessary that most of them should show immoral scenes and evil suggestions. Young people should be warned of these things and encouraged to keep their hearts pure.

8. *Finally, if there be anything else, anything whereof a Christian is doubtful, it should be avoided.* Paul said: "He that doubteth is condemned if he eat." (Rom. 14: 23.) He did not teach that it was sinful for the Christian to eat meat; but should one be in doubt about the matter and go ahead and eat meat, he sinned. The Christian should hold "faith and a good conscience." Until he is sure a thing is right he had better let it alone. It does not help the matter to simply say: "I cannot see any harm in this or that." The harm may still be there even if we are not able to see it. God's word should be the standard by which all things are to be measured; and when we earnestly study his word, we will be able "to discern good and evil." (Heb. 5: 14.)