

Applying Scripture to Life

Commands, Freedoms, Conscience, and Decision Making

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Introduction

As we read the Bible and grow in our knowledge and understanding of who God is and what He desires for us, we immediately see that God has given us specific commands in the Word. These are “dos” and “don’ts” that are for His glory and our sanctifying good. But are all precepts the same? How do we make decisions in the free areas? How do our convictions and conscience play into doing life?

If we misunderstand what the Scriptures teach in these areas, we may experience much personal emotional turmoil as well as judgment and unacceptance of the brethren. We may go through life filled with “buyer’s remorse” due to decisions that, from our perspective, do not turn out well. Our walk could become laborious and stressful. So, let’s dig in.

God’s Various Wills

God’s Sovereign Will

God’s sovereign will is His predetermined, perfect plan in which He is directing all events according to the counsel of His will for His glory (Eph 1).

- God’s sovereign will is certain – nothing nor no one can thwart or resist it. It will come to pass.

¹Then Job answered the LORD and said, ²“I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. (Job 42:1-2)

⁹“Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’; ¹¹Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it. (Isa 46:9-11)

❖ **What does surrender to God’s sovereignty look like?**

- God’s sovereign will is detailed – from the smallest events to whom will be saved.

⁴“I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! ⁶“Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷“Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Luke 12:4-7)

¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, (Eph 1:11)

❖ **Does God’s comprehensive and detailed sovereignty give you peace?**

All Scripture are from the NASB ‘95 Update unless noted.

Most word studies are from preceptaustin.org, blueletterbible.org, and biblehub.com

- God's sovereign will is known only to the Godhead except when revealed by prophecy or statements concerning the future in the Scriptures.

²⁹"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. (Deut 29:29)

❖ **Is God's sovereign will comforting to you?**

God's Moral Will

God's moral will is found for us in the Bible. It is the precepts (commands) given to us by God in the Scriptures. This is what God decrees for His Children.

- God's moral will is fully revealed in the Bible.

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

- The proper response to God's moral will is to purpose to know and do what it says.

²¹Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²²**But prove yourselves doers of the word**, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. (James 1:21-22)

❖ **Have you set your heart to know and do God's moral will?**

God's Individual Will

God's sovereign and moral wills are clearly taught in Scripture. Many people also believe that God has a perfect individual will for their lives. God's individual will would be defined as God's detailed plan for each specific person which they are responsible to find and live "in the center of". According to this belief, God's perfect individual will is discerned through internal and external signs which may include: the Bible, an inner witness, personal desires, circumstances, mature counsel, common sense, "fleeing" (Judges 6:26-40), etc.

Also, according to this belief, a person can make choices that miss God's perfect individual will. For example, if a woman makes a permanent decision, like marriage, but missed the "road signs" for marrying the one man that God had chosen for her, then she is out of God's perfect will. A person who subscribes to this thinking would then say that God has a backup plan for this woman, but that plan B is not as perfect as plan A.

A Christian who believes that God has an individual will might think or say something like: "I need to find (or discern) God's will for me in this situation."

❖ **Do you live as if you were trying to find God's perfect individual will for your life?**

However, God’s “individual” will does not appear to be taught in the Scriptures. There are several passages that seem to indicate an individual will, but under closer examination refer to God’s sovereign or moral will. See for example: Psa 32:8; Prov 3:5-6; 16:9; Isa 30:20-21; John 5:19; 10:3-4, 16, 27; Rom 12:1-2; Eph 2:10; 5:15-17; Col 1:9; 4:12. We do not have time today to look at each of these passages, but for a good treatment of this topic you might like to read *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* by Garry Friesen.

“The traditional view holds that the Bible (God’s moral will) gives most of the guidance needed to make a decision; but additionally, knowing God’s individual will is essential for complete leading to the correct choice.” (*Decision Making and the Will of God*, Gary Friesen, p. 82)

There are several instances in Scripture where God does appear to have a specific plan for an individual (e.g., the prophets and the apostles). However, in each of these cases God spoke to these individuals directly through angels, visions, or an audible voice. There was no need to try to discover what God’s will was or any way to misunderstand what God wanted (e.g., Dan 2:19; 10; Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19; 22; Acts 16:9-12; 22:10; Rev 1:1-2).

Commands

In Scripture there are precepts (commands), principles, and promises.

Precepts are the God’s clear commands. This is the moral will of God.

Principles are general guidelines that require discernment and wisdom to apply. (e.g., Prov 22:7 – it is wise to not go into debt because the borrower becomes the lender’s slave; Gal 6:7-8 – whatever a person sows, this he will also reap; etc.).

Promises are those things that God says will come to pass because He is faithful to do what He says (e.g., Phil 1:6 – God promises to finish the work He started in my sanctification; Rom 8:28-29 – God works all things together for my sanctifying good; etc.).

The believer strives to obey God’s commands, apply His principles, and believe His promises out of gratitude because we love Him and desire to be pleasing to him.

²⁸Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:28-29)

¹⁵“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (John 14:15; see also 1 John 5:3)

⁹Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (2 Cor 5:9)

❖ Are you striving to obey God’s commands, apply His principles, and believe His promises?

We believe that Christians are free from the Mosaic Law and understand the hermeneutical principle of “all Scripture is for us, but not all Scripture is to us”. So, as we read the Scriptures and see God’s commands, we understand that some commands are not applicable to us at all while other are.

Among the commands that are applicable to New Testament believers, we begin to see differences in the commands. Commands can be grouped differently, but there seems to be three categories.

1. There are specific (or absolute) commands. These commands specify the manner of implementation or application (most often one clear option). There is no freedom with these commands; it is simply “do” or “don’t do”. Examples of these commands are do not commit adultery (Matt 19:9), do not murder (1 John 3:15), do not steal (Eph 4:28), do not deceive (Eph 5:6), abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thess 4:2), etc.
2. There are specific commands with exceptions. These commands specify the manner of implementation, but there are also biblically permitted exceptions to the command. Examples of these commands are do not divorce (Luke 16:18) except for the case of adultery (Matt 5:32; 19:9) or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:15), be subject to authorities like citizens to government (Rom 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-17), wife to husband (Eph 5:22-25; Col 3:18), child to parent (Eph 6:1), slaves to master (or employee to employer) (Eph 6:5; Col 3:22; Tit 2:9-10), and congregation to elders (Heb 13:17) unless they direct you to sin (Acts 4:18-20; 5:28-29), etc.
3. There are generic commands where the implementation or application of the command is an area of freedom for the believer according to their understanding of Biblical principles, spiritual maturity, spiritual giftedness, wisdom and judgment, personality, talents, etc. Examples of these commands are make disciples (Matt 28:19-20), the one-another’s (i.e., love one another, serve one another, etc.), love your neighbor (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14), modesty (1 Tim 2:9), shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet 5:2), etc.

Only about 20% of commands are specific leaving the vast majority as generic commands.

❖ **What happens if you view your application of a generic command as the only way or the best way to apply the command?**

Freedom

Life is full of decisions that do not specifically have prescribed Biblical “dos” and “don’ts”. These are the gray areas of life. Biblical freedom falls into two primary categories.

1. First are areas on which the Bible does not speak. These are non-moral areas, those not prescribed in Scripture. These are the freedoms we have in Christ (e.g., what to eat or drink, what to wear, how to spend free time, what to buy, what job/career to pursue, whom to marry, etc.).

In these areas we have the freedom to make our own choice and the responsibility to use God provided resources to make the decision. The choice is based on our understanding of Biblical principles, spiritual maturity, spiritual giftedness, wisdom and judgment, personality, talents, etc. Additionally, in some decisions, part of the decision is a moral decision and part is non-moral (i.e., marriage).

In the gray areas of decision making, some decisions have multiple choices, any of which are acceptable to God. Yet, some decisions are wiser than others.

We see many examples in Scripture where decisions were based on wisdom and what seemed best to the person/people making the decision.

²So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "**It is not desirable for us** to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. (Acts 6:2)

²**Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders**, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, (Acts 15:22)

²⁵**But I thought it necessary** to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; (Phil 2:25)

¹Therefore when we could endure it no longer, **we thought it best** to be left behind at Athens alone, (1 Thess 3:1)

¹²When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for **I have decided** to spend the winter there. (Titus 3:12)

– Wisdom is commanded

¹⁵Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of your time, because the days are evil. (Eph 5:15-16)

❖ **Do you seek to make wise decisions?**

– Wisdom is provided

○ By God

⁵But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)

○ Through research

²⁸"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

²⁹"Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹"Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

³²"Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. (Luke 14:28-32)

○ Through wise council

²²Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed. (Prov 15:22)

❖ **Where do you seek wisdom to make decisions?**

2. Second are the personal application of God's generic commands and principles. The generic commands are commands that are to be obeyed, but the working out of those commands allows much freedom (e.g., A husband is commanded to love his wife, but how one husband loves his wife will be different than how another loves his wife even though they are both obeying the command to love his wife.)

In the personal application of generic commands, many applications are glorifying to God. Yet the believer will be striving to maximize the glory given to God by their application of God's commands. Also, since we are all in the process of becoming more like Christ, how we live out the generic commands may change over time.

❖ In what ways are you striving to maximize glorifying God?

Conscience

The conscience is a gift that God gives to all people. It is the personal awareness of what you believe is right and wrong. The conscience defends your actions/thoughts when you do what you believe is right and accuses your actions/thoughts when you do what you believe is wrong. When you follow your conscience, you feel approved and at peace. When you violate your conscience, you feel condemnation, guilt, regret, etc.

¹⁴For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, **their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them**, (Rom 2:14-16)

❖ Are you sensitive to your conscience?

There are many Scriptures that teach about the conscience, most are Pauline. Here is some systematized truth regarding the conscience.

1. The conscience is affected by "total depravity". The result of the sin nature is "total depravity", where the corruption of sin extends to every aspect of one's being (Rom 1:18-3:20) including intellect (2 Cor 4:4), conscience (Titus 1:15-16), will (Rom 1:28), and heart (Eph 4:18). The idea of total depravity is not that people display as much evil as they possibly could, nor that they cannot do any good, or even feign a love for God, but that their entire nature, including the conscience, is negatively impacted by sin.

¹⁵To the pure, all things are pure; **but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.** ¹⁶They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. (Titus 1:15-16)

2. The conscience changes at the moment of salvation. Salvation from sin by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone frees people from slavery to sin (Rom 6). The true believer has been changed (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 2:20) and this change affects the conscience also freeing it from slavery to sin.

¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more **will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works** to serve the living God? (Heb 9:13-15)

²¹and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, **having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.** ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; (Heb 10:21-23)

²⁰who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. ²¹Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—**not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,** (1 Peter 3:20-22)

3. The conscience can be progressively sanctified. As God works progressive sanctification in you as you strive to grow in your relationship with Christ (Phil 1:6; 2:12-13; 3:12-14; 2 Pet 1:10-11; 1 Pet 2:2), the conscience also becomes conformed to the Word of God. Some call this “calibrating the conscience”.

¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice **have their senses trained** to discern good and evil. (Heb 5:14)

⁵But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1 Tim 1:5)

❖ **What are you doing to calibrate or conform your conscience to the Word?**

4. The conscience can restrain or approve sin. To the degree that your heart, thoughts, and will are aligned to the Word of God, the conscience acts like a restraining force on sin. To the degree that it is not aligned with the Word of God, it acts like an approver of sin. This is how the conscience works with respect to moral issues (the commands of God).

¹I am telling the truth in Christ, **I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,** ²that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. (Rom 9:1-3)

⁴for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. ⁵Therefore **it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.** ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. (Rom 13:4-6)

¹²For our proud confidence is this: **the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.** ¹³For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end; (2 Cor 1:12-13)

¹⁸Pray for us, **for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.** ¹⁹And I urge *you* all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner. (Heb 13:18-19)

¹⁸Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. ¹⁹For this *finds* favor, **if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.** ²⁰For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. (1 Peter 2:18-20)

¹⁵but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ¹⁶**and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.** ¹⁷For it is better, if God should will it so, that you **suffer for doing what is right** rather than for doing what is wrong. (1 Peter 3:15-17)

³I thank God, **whom I serve with a clear conscience** the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, (2 Tim 1:3)

¹⁸This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my* son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them **you fight the good fight,** ¹⁹**keeping faith and a good conscience,** which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. ²⁰Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. (1 Tim 1:18-20)

5. Through proper theological calibration (training one's senses to discern good and evil) of the conscience and obedience to the Word of God you are able to maintain a "good" and "blameless" conscience before God and people.

¹Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, **I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God** up to this day." (Acts 23:1)

¹⁵having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶In view of this, I also **do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.** (Acts 24:15-16)

6. It is possible to have a weak conscience or a strong conscience. A weak conscience is not properly calibrated to the Word of God in non-moral (or freedom) areas which are those not clearly specified in Scripture. This includes the freedoms we have in Christ (e.g., eating meat sacrificed to idols, drinking alcohol, seeing movies, etc.) and in the ambiguous applications of general commands (e.g., love, serve, shepherd, etc.). A weak conscience holds an area of freedom as sin for oneself. Therefore, should the person violate their conscience in that area, it would be sin.

A strong conscience is closely or perfectly calibrated to the Word of God. In non-moral (freedom) areas the complete understanding of the moral will of God allows the person to live with a clear conscience in living out those freedoms in Christ.

⁶yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him. ⁷However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and **their conscience being weak is defiled**. ⁸But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. (1 Cor 8:6-8)

⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, **will not his conscience, if he is weak**, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? ¹¹For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. ¹²And so, by sinning against the brethren and **wounding their conscience when it is weak**, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (1 Cor 8:9-13)

7. Finally, it is also possible to violate one's conscience by disobeying the Word of God often, and to such an extent, that the conscience is seared and therefore no longer performs the function as a condemner of sin.

¹But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, **paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons**, ²**by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron**, ³*men* who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Tim 4:1-3)

Believer Interaction on Areas of Freedom

In the non-moral areas, areas in which the Scriptures do not give specific direction, we have freedom. Therefore Christians can disagree. Sometimes, Christians believe they would be sinning if they made a certain choice within an area of freedom. Other Christians believe they would not be sinning if they made the same choice. Paul describes how Christians are to treat each other in these situations in Romans 14-15.

The over-riding principle in Christian relationships with respect to non-moral issues (areas of freedom) is love and service. If we aren't careful, we will end up biting and devouring one another and be consumed by one another.

¹³For you were called to freedom, brethren; only **do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another**. ¹⁴For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. (Gal 5:13-15)

❖ **Do you take care that you are not biting and devouring your brothers/sisters?**

Romans 14-15 describes a person who is “weak in faith” (Rom 14:1). A “weak in faith” Christian is one who, because of the weakness of his faith and conscience and lack of theologically correct knowledge believes a non-moral area is a moral area for themselves. Therefore, the weak in faith has placed restrictions on himself beyond what God’s word says because he would violate his conscious partaking in an activity.

⁷However **not all men have this knowledge**; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ⁸But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. (1 Cor 8:7-8)

A “strong in faith” (Rom 15:1) Christian is one who because of the strength of faith and conscience and theologically correct knowledge exercises his liberty with full peace of conscience without being improperly influenced by the differing opinions of others.

Let’s work through Romans 14-15 and see what the Spirit says about being weak in faith.

1. The strong in faith are to “accept” (“welcome” – ESV) the weak in faith. “Accept” means to receive in one’s circle of fellowship with friendliness and kindness. But we don’t treat them nice so to judge their opinions (“quarrelling over his opinions” – ESV).

¹Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.* ²One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. (Rom 14:1-2)

One person may be strong in one area (e.g., seeing certain rated movies or freedom in serving the brethren) but then weak in another area (e.g., drinking alcohol or the way they love their spouse).

❖ **Are you accepting (welcoming) to all believers?**

2. The strong in faith are not to regard with contempt (“despise” – ESV) the weak in faith. “Regard with contempt” means to regard as nothing, to despise utterly, to look down upon and even to treat with scorn or ridicule. The “not-weak” bear a lot of responsibility in these body relationships.

The weak in faith are not to be legalistic, judging the strong in faith as being less spiritual or less holy or less mature because God has accepted (“welcome” – ESV) the strong.

³The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

⁴Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Rom 14:3-4)

❖ **Do you regard with contempt the “weak” or judge the “strong”?**

3. Both the strong in faith and the weak in faith must be fully convinced in their own mind. They must hold their own conviction.

⁵One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. (Rom 14:5)

❖ **Do develop your own convictions or do you live other's convictions?**

4. Both the strong in faith and the weak in faith must assume that each other are living to the glory of God. Love demands that we assume noble intent in each other.

⁶He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; ⁸for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (Rom 14:6-9)

⁴Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, ⁵does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, ⁶does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷bears all things, **believes all things**, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

❖ **Do you assume the best in your brothers and sisters?**

5. Both the strong in faith and weak in faith will each be judged by God; each one will give an account of themselves to God. Therefore, the weak in faith are not to judge and the strong in faith are not to regard with contempt.

¹⁰But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹²So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14:10-12)

❖ **Do you live in light of God's judgment?**

6. The strong in faith are to walk in love and be determined to not put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. A stumbling block would be to exercise freedom in disregard of the impact on the weak in faith and thereby move a weak in faith brother to do something that violates his conscience.

¹³Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. ¹⁴I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. (Rom 14:13-15)

7. The strong in faith's freedom is not to be exercised without regard for the weak in faith. Disputes on non-moral issues are not important, but what is important is building up one another. The strong in faith are to limit their freedom so as to not give offense to the weak in faith and potentially entice the weak in faith to violate their conscience.

¹⁶Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸For he who in this *way* serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. ²⁰Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. ²¹It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles. (Rom 14:16-21)

8. Whether you are strong in faith or weak in faith, have your own conviction before God. Violating your conscience in a non-moral area is sin.

²²The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating* is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

❖ **Have you thought through non-moral issues and developed convictions?**

9. The strong in faith should bear the burden of those who are weak in faith. It is the responsibility of the strong in faith to build-up the weak in faith.

^{15:1}Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. ²Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. ³For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." ⁴For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

10. Paul prays for the strong in faith and weak in faith to be of the same mind and together be glorifying God. Each are to accept (welcome – ESV) each other.

⁵Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, ⁶so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

❖ **Are you striving to glorify God together with your brothers and sisters?**

Here is the statement from the VBC website on one of our distinctives “Freedom given on non-moral issues”.

One distinctive of our church is what does not exist. We seek to strictly adhere to what the Bible specifically calls sin or that which necessarily violates biblical principles. This means there are no written or unwritten rules outside of the Bible that governs appropriate conduct.

Indeed, we consider such additions to the Scripture to lead toward legalism and become destructive to developing mature believers. Like the Pharisees in the New Testament, legalists develop a form of religion that emphasizes the external life. Jesus warned us to beware of this (Matthew 16:11-12).

It is important for the church to be healthy by giving freedom to people where the Scripture gives freedom. How each Christian chooses to live their lives in seeking to apply God's wisdom is important to the process of maturity.

What a great way to be spiritually healthy – individually and corporately.

The Process of Decision Making and Personal Applications General Commands

So, how do we make choices on how to obey in the general commands and make decisions in the non-moral areas of life (big or small)?

1. Obedience: In moral decisions you must obey the moral will of God. If it is prescribed in Scripture, the only decision to make is if you will obey or not.
2. Freedom: In non-moral decisions (those not prescribed in Scripture), you have the freedom to make your own choice and the responsibility to use wisdom in making the choice. The choice is based on your application of Biblical principles, spiritual maturity, spiritual giftedness, wisdom and judgment, personality, talents, etc.

Some decisions have multiple choices, any of which are acceptable to God. Yet, some decisions are wiser than others.

3. Trust: If you obey in moral decisions and make wise choices in non-moral decisions, you humbly submit (a heart attitude of “if the Lord sovereignly wills”) yourself to God’s sovereign will to work all things together for His glory and your sanctifying good.

²⁸And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* **conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:28-29)

¹³Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ¹⁴Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, "**If the Lord wills**, we will live and also do this or that." ¹⁶But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16)

²¹but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again **if God wills**," he set sail from Ephesus. (Acts 18:21)

¹⁹But I will come to you soon, **if the Lord wills**, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. (1 Cor 4:19)

⁵But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; ⁶and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. ⁷For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, **if the Lord permits**. (1 Cor 16:5-7)

❖ **Do you submit to God's sovereignty?**

Biblical Principles for Decision Making

The process for making decisions is: 1) obey in moral areas; 2) in non-moral areas exercise freedom with wisdom within the bounds of Scriptural principles; and 3) trust God's faithfulness and sovereignty to work all things for His glory and my sanctifying good. So, what are the Scriptural principles of decision making in areas of freedom?

It must be noted that it is up to each believer to apply these principles and cultivate their own convictions in areas of freedom. To force your own convictions on others is legalism.

1. Will the decision glorify God? OR What will best glorify God?

³¹Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31)

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6:19-20)

2. Will the decision cause a hindrance to the Gospel?

¹²If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. (1 Cor 9:12)

3. Does the desire for the thing overshadow your desire for God?

³³But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matt 6:33)

4. Is the decision spiritually profitable?

²³All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. ²⁴Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. (1 Cor 10:23-24)

5. Will the decision bring bondage?

¹²All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. (1 Cor 6:12)

6. Will the decision allow sin to be easily accomplished?

¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Rom 13:14)

7. Will the decision violate my conscience?

²²The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. (Rom 14:22-23)

8. Is the decision worth imitating?

¹Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. (1 Cor 11:1)

9. Does the decision fit the Philippians 4:8 pattern?

⁸Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Phil 4:8)

10. Will the decision cause my brother or sister to stumble?

²¹It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. (Rom 14:21)

¹³Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (1 Cor 8:13)

11. Will the decision build up or tear down?

¹Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. ²Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. (Rom 15:1-2)

¹⁹So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. (Rom 14:19)

❖ **Are you willing to apply God's principles in make decisions in non-moral areas?**

Conclusion

The process for making decisions is: 1) obedience to God's Word in moral areas; 2) in non-moral areas exercise freedom within the bounds of Scriptural principles; and 3) humble submission and trust in God's faithfulness and sovereignty to work all things for my good and His glory.

The over-riding principle in Christian relationships with respect to non-moral issues (areas of freedom) is love and service.

Real Life Scenarios

Yourself #1: Your vehicle has over 250,000 miles. It has served you well and you have lived the motto “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without”. However, there are some things going wrong with it and with an expanding family it seems like the right time for a different vehicle. Work through the process for decision making and ask yourself the principles.

Yourself #2: Your vehicle has 50,000 miles. You simply do not like it. It is uncomfortable and gutless, and you would like a different car. Work through the process for decision making and ask yourself the principles.

Yourself #3: You have a wonderful relationship with your spouse. You know exactly how to love your spouse. A friend is having some marriage difficulties and asks you for advice about loving their spouse. What will you say to him/her?

Yourself #4: You and some friends go out for a fancy dinner. One is newer to the group. Someone asks if anyone is having wine with their meal and this newer friend says, “I don’t drink.” What might you do?

Someone Else: A single friend, whom you know is a Christian, has told you that she has met a man and wonders if this is the man she should marry. She asks you how you would go about making this decision. Work through the process for decision making with her.

Additional Study

Make a list of what you believe are non-moral decisions that you (or someone else) might be faced with:

Re-read the verses in this study related to the process and principles of making decisions.

1. Ask God for wisdom in developing convictions in non-moral areas.
2. Think through the non-moral areas you listed above in light of the principles in the study. Also, look up other Bible passages that apply to that decision.
3. Develop your personal conviction based on Scripture for each of these decisions listed above.