

CHAPTER EIGHT

QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES

OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- Write the Key Verse from memory.
- Explain what is meant by the term "questionable practices."
- Give Scriptural guidelines for decision making on questionable practices.
- Distinguish between a "weaker brother" and a "stronger brother."
- Give Scriptural guidelines for dealing with a "weaker brother."
- Give Scriptural guidelines for handling disagreements between believers.
- Give Scriptural guidelines for resolving offenses between believers.

KEY VERSE:

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (I Corinthians 10:31)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter concerns decision making about questionable practices. The term is defined and discussion includes guidelines for dealing with questionable practices, dealing with weaker brethren, handling disagreements between believers, and resolving offenses.

QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES

In every culture there are certain practices which are questionable. These are practices which are not specifically mentioned in Scripture as being either wrong or right for a follower of Jesus.

You can easily think of such practices in your own culture. They might include activities of leisure or entertainment. They may be clubs or organizations to which you could choose to belong. These practices include certain habits and choices of what you eat or drink. They may be questions on which days to worship or holy days.

How do you determine the will of God regarding questionable practices when specific guidance on such matters is not given in the Bible? Ask yourself these questions:

DOES IT GLORIFY GOD?

Perhaps the most important principle by which to judge a questionable practice is to ask the question, "Does it glorify God?"

The Bible indicates all you do should glorify the Lord:

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (I Corinthians 10:31)

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him. (Colossians 3:17)

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24)

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION?

Why do you want to engage in this practice? What is your reason or motive for doing it? Even a good activity can be done with a wrong motive. For example, James gives an illustration of a wrong motive for prayer:

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:3)

Praying is certainly not wrong but the motives for some requests are improper. The motivation described in this verse is the wish to fulfill lustful desires.

IS IT NECESSARY?

Paul states that while some things may be considered lawful (not in violation of God's written Word), you should consider whether they are really necessary. He states:

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient. . . (I Corinthians 6:12)

WILL IT PROMOTE SPIRITUAL GROWTH?

Many activities can hinder spiritual growth. Other activities can become so time consuming that they choke out spiritual growth:

And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word.

**And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.
(Mark 4:18-19)**

And that which fell among thorns are they, which when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. (Luke 8:14)

Ask yourself: "Will this activity hinder or promote my spiritual development?"

Activities that hinder spiritual development become weights which interfere with the spiritual race God has set before you:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1)

IS IT AN ENSLAVING HABIT?

When considering a questionable practice, ask yourself "Will this practice enslave me to a habit?" An enslaving habit is one which controls you. You feel you cannot get along without it and you have difficulty giving it up.

Paul comments regarding enslaving habits:

. . .All things are lawful unto me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (I Corinthians 6:12)

Any activity which is enslaving physically, mentally, spiritually, or habitually demands valuable time should be avoided.

IS IT A COMPROMISE?

Paul asks in II Corinthians 6:14, ". . . what communion hath light with darkness?"

Will the questionable practice you are considering be a spiritual compromise? Will you be engaging in activities of the world or accepting its standards by doing this thing? The Bible commands:

**Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.
(II Corinthians 6:17)**

WILL IT LEAD TO TEMPTATION?

Jesus taught us to pray "lead us not into temptation." It is useless to pray this prayer and then by means of a questionable activity deliberately place yourself in a place of temptation. The Bible warns:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man;

But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:13-15)

Temptation is different from a trial of faith. A trial of faith occurs when a believer faces a difficult situation through no fault of his own. The situation tries his faith in God. God permits trials to strengthen your faith and bring spiritual maturity.

But God does not tempt man. Temptation is the desire to do wrong. Temptation comes when you do not control your thoughts and actions properly or when Satan entices you to do evil. Some questionable practices may put you in situations of temptation. If you yield to the temptation, lust results in sin, and sin results in spiritual death.

DOES IT GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF EVIL?

Does the practice you are considering give an appearance of evil to others? The Bible commands:

Abstain from all appearance of evil. (I Thessalonians 5:22)

DOES IT VIOLATE YOUR CONSCIENCE?

When making a decision regarding questionable practices, you should be fully persuaded the choice you make is right. In New Testament times believers disagreed over whether or not it was right to eat meat since meat had been used for sacrifices under the Old Testament law. These sacrifices were used as atonement for man's sin before Jesus gave His life as the final and complete sacrifice for sin. Because meat was used for sacrifices there were laws against eating certain meats. Paul wrote regarding this question:

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

The principle is that you must be fully persuaded in questionable matters that what you are doing is right. If you have doubts, then it becomes sin for you to engage in such practices.

HOW WILL IT AFFECT OTHERS?

This leads to the final guideline in regards to questionable practices. How will engaging in this activity affect others? Will it edify others? To edify means to instruct, build up, or improve spiritually. The Bible states:

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

Does this activity contribute in a positive way to the spiritual development of others? Paul writes:

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

Some practices in which you might engage may cause other believers to be hindered in their spiritual walk. Again, speaking on the question of eating meat, Paul wrote:

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

Paul did not consider it wrong to eat meat. But he would not eat it if it hindered a weaker brother in the Lord. A weaker brother is a believer who, because of weakness of faith, knowledge, or conscience can be affected by the example of a stronger brother. He can be influenced to sin against his conscience and his spiritual progress can be hindered.

A stronger believer is one who, because of his understanding of freedom in certain areas and the strength of his conviction, exercises liberty with good conscience. He is not influenced by the differing opinions of others.

Any action by a stronger brother which ordinarily would be permissible is wrong if it influences a weaker brother to sin against his conscience or hinders his spiritual progress. Paul wrote:

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. (Romans 14:21)

SUMMARY: DECISION MAKING ON QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES

The following chart summarizes Biblical guidelines for decision making on questionable practices:

Ask Yourself. . .	Biblical Reference
Does it glorify God?	I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17,23
What is your motivation?	James 4:3
Is it necessary?	I Corinthians 6:12
Will it promote spiritual growth?	Mark 4:18,19; Luke 8:14; Hebrews 12:1
Is it an enslaving habit?	I Corinthians 6:12
Is it a compromise?	II Corinthians 6:17
Will it lead to temptation?	James 1:13-15
Does it give the appearance of evil?	I Thessalonians 5:22
Does it violate your conscience?	Romans 14:23
How will it affect others?	Romans 14:19,21; I Corinthians 8:13; 10:23

WHEN BELIEVERS DIFFER

Study Romans 14:1 through 15:2. These verses reveal believers will sometimes have differences in opinion. Such differences often arise over questionable practices not specifically dealt with in God's Word as being either right or wrong.

This passage explains that such differences will not result in harm if we love one another and continue to search the Scriptures. Romans 14 gives the following guidelines for dealing with disagreements between believers in matters not specifically covered in the written Word of God:

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MATTERS OF COMMAND AND FREEDOM:

Romans 14:14 indicates that when believers differ it is important to distinguish between matters of command and freedom. Concerning matters of freedom not specifically dealt with in God's Word, Paul writes:

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. (Romans 14:14)

In matters of command recorded in the written Word of God, we should all conform to the same pattern. In other matters, freedom of choice may be exercised.

CULTIVATE YOUR OWN CONVICTIONS:

You must cultivate your own convictions regarding questionable practices. In regards to observing holy days Paul wrote:

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

Use the guidelines given in the previous section of this chapter to help you determine your own convictions on questionable matters.

ALLOW OTHERS FREEDOM TO DETERMINE THEIR CONVICTIONS:

Even if others differ from you, allow them freedom to determine their own convictions on questionable matters:

But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother. . . Let us not therefore judge one another any more. . . (Romans 14:10 and 13)

LIMIT LIBERTY BY LOVE:

The basic message of Romans 14:13-15:2 is that Christian liberty should be limited by love:

Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. (Romans 15:2)

You should care for other believers so much that you limit your own behavior by love for them. You should love them so much that you will not do anything that would cause them to stumble spiritually:

. . . but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. (Romans 14:13)

RESOLVE ALL OFFENSES:

When a brother has been offended by another believer, Matthew 18:15-17 provides the Biblical formula for resolving such offenses:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matthew 18:15-17)

The steps to follow when a brother has offended you are:

1. Go to him privately to resolve the matter. Do not talk about the offense to others. Go directly to the one who offended you and try to resolve the matter. Pray and search God's written Word together.
2. If he will not listen to you, take one or two witnesses and try again. The witnesses should be impartial believers. Elders or leaders in the church would be a good choice. Take the witnesses and go to your brother and again attempt to discuss, pray, and search the Scriptures together regarding the problem.
3. Take the matter before the entire church body. If, after going to your brother with a witness he still refuses to resolve the matter, take the issue before the entire church body. This should be done at the proper time. It should not be done during a regular worship service or when unbelievers are present. After hearing the matter, the decision of the church should be abided by and the problem should be resolved. If not, then the offending party is acting like the heathen and unbelievers.

SUMMARY: WHEN BELIEVERS DIFFER

The following chart summarizes Scriptural guidelines to follow when believers differ in regards to questionable practices:

When Believers Differ

Romans 14-15:2 and Matthew 18:15-17

Distinguish between matters of command and freedom.

Cultivate your own convictions.

Allow others freedom to determine their own convictions.

Limit liberty by love.

Resolve all offenses.

SELF-TEST

1. Write the Key Verse from memory.

2. What is meant by the term "questionable practices"?

3. List ten Biblical guidelines given in this chapter for dealing with questionable practices:

4. What is meant by the term a "weaker brother"?

5. What is meant by a "stronger brother"?

6. List five Biblical guidelines for handling disagreements between believers:

7. What are three steps to take when you have been offended by another believer?

(Answers to tests are provided at the conclusion of the final chapter in this manual.)

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Prayerfully examine your own life. Make a list of questionable practices in which you are currently engaging or considering.

Examine each of these in terms of the Biblical guidelines given in this chapter which are summarized on the following chart:

DECISION MAKING ON QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES	
Ask Yourself. . .	Biblical Reference
Does it glorify God?	I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17,23
What is your motivation?	James 4:3
Is it necessary?	I Corinthians 6:12
Will it promote spiritual growth?	Mark 4:18,19; Luke 8:14; Hebrews 12:1
Is it an enslaving habit?	I Corinthians 6:12
Is it a compromise?	II Corinthians 6:17
Will it lead to temptation?	James 1:13-15
Does it give the appearance of evil?	I Thessalonians 5:22
Does it violate your conscience?	Romans 14:23
How will it affect others?	Romans 14:19,21; I Corinthians 8:13; 10:23