

Pattern & Purpose

Discussion Guide

Although some things are not specifically mentioned in Scripture, God does provide us with all the help we need to make decisions that glorify God. We start by looking to the patterns God has given us in the Bible and in our lives.

Opening Thoughts

- **Take a few minutes to discuss some of the “black and white” teachings of the Bible, noting their location in Scripture.**

There are numerous teachings of Scripture that are revealed with perfect clarity. However, what about issues such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, eating certain foods, or worshipping on certain days of the week? These topics appear to be distant and blurry.

Many brothers and sisters among the various Christian denominations maintain strong feelings and sharp disagreements regarding these topics. We often refer to these as “grey” areas of the Bible. They are normally taught in Scripture either through principles or types.

While one believer is persuaded that a woman should not wear makeup, jeans, or cut her hair, another believer is persuaded to allow it. Likewise, you might know someone who refuses to watch movies at the theater while another openly loves to do so. Or maybe you’re convinced that watching television is wrong, but know your friends say otherwise.

- **Discuss some of the “grey” areas where the Bible is seemingly quiet on an issue. If time permits, thoroughly describe the aspects of each issue, such as when and why, and to whom it applies.**

Patterns

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul ends his teaching on grey areas with this short line, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

As founder of the Corinthian church, it was Paul’s duty to be the shining example before the church. Along with the other Apostles and their closest disciples, Paul was the standard for godliness and spirituality, integrity and character. At this time, the church didn’t have mass-produced, leather-bound Bibles with footnotes. They relied on the Apostles and prophets of the Old Testament to teach them how to live their lives for God.

Paul commanded the church to follow his example as he follows the example of Christ. He was Jesus’ apostle, appointed to train others, not only in word, but also in action. This is why church leaders are called to such a high standard (1 Tim. 3).

Today, we turn to the pages of Scripture and read the words of Paul and other apostles and we learn to pattern our lives after their words and deeds as they follow Christ. We look to the principles of God’s Word to direct us in decision making. It is the tool by which we see clearly the right decisions.

- **Read 2 Peter 1:3 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. How do these verses help you establish a pattern of behavior? Are Paul’s words trustworthy? Why or why not?**

- **Is there a particular scripture you have leaned on to help you establish a new pattern of behavior?**
- **Read Hebrews 4:12-13 and explain what is meant by “piercing to the division of soul and of spirit” and “discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” How does this help us in making clear the grey areas?**
- **What does this verse say about your decision making?**

Purpose

Now that we understand how we should pattern our behavior, let us look to the subject of purpose, or why we should learn to make righteous decisions.

First, let's refer back to our original text where Paul writes, “Do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). The purpose is simple, but the implications are complex. It is evident by Paul's writings to the church of Corinth that they were seeking to be glorified rather than seeking to glorify God. Paul reveals their arrogance by sarcastically comparing the church to the Apostles, “We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.” (1 Cor. 4:10). Paul also mentions their being “puffed up” or self-centered in numerous texts (1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4). In regards to spiritual gifts, he writes, “The one who speaks in a tongue [in your church] builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.” (1 Cor. 14:4). They were so prideful and self-seeking that Paul stopped to dedicate an entire chapter to define love. He points out that love is not self-seeking (1 Cor. 13:5), but is God-seeking (1 Cor. 13:6-8). If there was something wicked going on, the Corinthian church was in it.

John, better known as the “Apostle of Love,” understood this concept. In his first epistle, he wrote about the ultimate example of love. In chapter 3 verse 16 he writes, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” He continues to say that “by this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him” (1 Jn. 3:19).

- **In your own words, define the “glory of God” as communicated in the text.**
- **How can one “do all to the glory of God”?**
- **Obedience to God is how we actively do (or not do) things to His glory. How does obedience impact the idea of making grey areas clear?**
- **Earlier in this epistle to the Corinthians, Paul commands them “not to go beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). How does this teaching fit with grey areas?**

Closing

God would never expect us to obey Him by making right decisions if He did not first tell us how. As we have learned, God speaks through the principles, purposes and patterns revealed in His Word. He makes clear what we call blurry.