

Things Indifferent:

In the Christian Life there are many gray areas. There are many things that we encounter in our American life and culture that the Bible does not specifically address. This calls for some discernment. I hope that this tool gives all of us some guidelines for discerning “things indifferent,” the gray areas of life. (Examples of gray areas would be things like movies, books, games, music, alcohol, etc...) How should we decide what is edifying and what is not? What should I participate in and what should I not?

First of all, “God gave humanity the cultural mandate to develop the potentials of creation and dedicate them to the glory of God. Christians must learn to discern God’s will in every area of human life in regard to what is good and evil, avoid the worldliness of loving temporal or sinful things instead of God, and call society to obedience to Christ. Christians must be spiritually separate from the world even while enjoying those things that the Bible neither commands nor forbids. In those matters neither commanded nor forbidden Christians must exercise Christian liberty guided by enlightened conscience and submit prayerfully to God’s Word and Spirit.” (www.crcna.org) Here are some overarching guidelines and questions to ponder when faced with a discernment issue.

Overarching Guidelines:

- 1. **The Honor of God:** Does participation or practice bring Glory and Honor to God?*
- 2. **The Welfare of Humanity:** Does participation or practice buildup others?*
- 3. **Spiritual Separation from the World:** Affecting your walk with God? (+ or -)*
- 4. **Exercise of Christian Liberty:** Things indifferent: see below.*

Romans 12:1-2 speaks about “...offering our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to him. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” To conform to the world is a pathway of ease and indulgence through pleasure/entertainment purely for selfish and exploitative reasons. To transform is to follow a pathway of personal and mutual edification, self-denial and self-sacrifice for reasons of love for God and neighbor – conforming to Christ and to Scripture.

1 Corinthians 8:9-13 speaks about the freedom we have in Christ. Yet it gives a strong warning about causing a weaker brother to stumble. The context is food sacrificed to idols but it isn’t a far stretch to expand that context to include other areas where there are differing opinions but no clear guidance from scripture. A similar text is 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, “Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything...” The context of this verse is sexual immorality. But again, this context can be expanded to include other things of a similar nature. We have Christian freedom, but even freedom has its limitations.

*We live in a time of Christian liberty! Now our liberty is guided by Scripture and the Holy Spirit. John Calvin puts it this way in the **Institutes**, “We regard things that are of themselves ‘indifferent’ we are not bound before God by any religious obligation preventing us from sometimes using them and other times not using them, indifferently...All outward things are to our freedom provided our minds are assured that the basis for such freedom stands before God.”*

Here are some guidelines and questions for your discernment of things indifferent:

- 1. Addiction/Overindulgence: Are you addicted to it? (Idolatry)*
- 2. Self-awareness: Do you know yourself and your weaknesses?*
- 3. Stumbling Block: Do others around you take offense?*
- 4. Time: Is the time spent on it equal it's true worth?*
- 5. The Flow: Is the majority of culture pre-occupied with it?*
- 6. Escapism: Is your indulgence avoiding reality and its problems?*
- 7. Redemptive: Is it a redeemable or redemptive activity?*
- 8. Priorities: Is time and energy spent in line with priorities?*
- 9. Proactive: What about God's priorities?*
- 10. Sacred/Secular Split: Is God in it?*
- 11. Conscience: Does your participation in it bother you?*
- 12. Authority Principle: What do those in authority say about it?*

So there it is, some help and guidance. Happy discerning! The best place to hash these things out is with one another before the witness of the Holy Spirit and the testimony of Scripture.

Pastor Mark