

I Corinthians 10:23-33

Have you been at a situation where either way is fine in your perspective, but your friends hold two extreme point of views on the matter? It happens often among friends regardless they are Christians or not. Some people called it the “gray area” where there is no absolute right or wrong. How do you deal with it? What is your decision process to act in that situation? A passage in I Corinthians covers this topic.

Book of I Corinthians is the first letter written by Paul and his collaborator Sosthenes to the church in Corinth. Corinth is a wealthy city. Many people there had problems like worship false gods and self-indulgence. Churches in Corinth had both Jew and gentile members. Many members failed to recognize Jesus as Lord. The letter covers many topics mainly on Christian conducts such as church life and communion, love, believers’ freedom, spiritual gifts, orderly worship, etc. Today we focus on the topic of freedom, and how that relates to making decision in the “gray area”.

1) Understand Freedom

- a) True freedom is from God. John 8:36 states “So if the Son set you free, you will be free indeed.”
- b) God’s definition of freedom is free from sin. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life (Romans 6:22).
- c) Once we are free from sin and death, we shall live our lives by the Spirit. Romans 8:1-4 state “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

2) Exercise Freedom

Now we believers have freedom. How do we exercise that freedom? The two passages in I Corinthians have the answers. “I have the right to do anything,”

you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others (I Cor. 10:23-24). Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. (I Cor. 8:9)

There are many situations in our lives that are in the “gray area” where someone feels fine with an action but someone else feels offended or with disapproval. I have an example that can illustrate the point of how to exercise freedom in that case. I was travelling with a group of Christians from US to join with some Christians in China. After we have completed the main purpose of the trip, the local Chinese Christians decided to bring us to a large park for sightseeing. There were many walking paths inside the park. One of the paths routes by a large Buddha statue, and another path has a different scenic route, but both eventually meet at the end of the park.

The local Christians did not like to walk by the statue for reasons such as not wanting to walk close to human idol, and didn’t want their non-Christian Chinese friends be able to see them and think they are worshipping the Buddha. The US born Christians want to walk by the statue to take photos of it to show how people in Asia worship idols, and to encourage more Christians having the hearts to evangelize to those Asians. I was thinking it was really a “black” to one group but it’s a “white” to another group. You can call it the “gray area” but I understood the thinking on both sides. I explained the views on both sides to each other. However, I have decided to walk with the local Chinese Christian group, and agree to meet the other group at the end of the park.

3) Ultimate purpose of actions in freedom

I Cor. 10:31 states “so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” We Christians have been blessed with freedom from God through the precious blood of Jesus on the cross. We are free from the condemnation of sin. We are free to do all things as long as it is not sinful. Further, all our acts in our freedom should consider the purpose and consequence. We don’t want our actions be a stumbling block to others. We want all glories go to God including our actions.

In summary, we are glad and grateful that we have received freedom from God. In our freedom, be mindful of others in our actions: all actions are permissible but not all are constructive.