

# SHADES OF GRAY



**BIG IDEA:** Have you ever faced a tough decision in which there were few or no criteria for deciding the right course of action? Have you ever discussed a life situation or topic with a Christian friend and come to two totally different conclusions?

The Bible directly addresses many areas of life, but on others it appears to be silent. Our thoughts and conduct regarding these gray areas should be guided by biblical principles. This lesson will help group members identify gray areas in their lives and discover the biblical principles to help them make wise choices about these difficult issues.



**DESIRED LIFE CHANGE:** As a result of this study, your group will: 1) uncover personal areas in their lives to which the Bible does not directly speak, 2) develop biblical convictions for choosing the best course of action in difficult or compromising situations, 3) immediately apply these guiding principles to a common gray area situation the group itself determines.



**AUDIENCE:** This lesson is designed for students who are grappling with issues the Bible does not specifically address. It can be used with students of all levels of Christian maturity and ministry involvement.



**LEADER'S PREPARATION:** The student lesson is designed to be worked through in a group setting. Work through the entire study with the leader's guide, taking extra time to examine the biblical passages. This passage in 1 Corinthians is used because it contains easily discovered-principles for effective decision making, even for young believers who have limited experience in Bible study. As the leader of the group, become familiar with the background and situation sections of 1 Corinthians (page 2 of the student piece). Be prepared to share your story related to this topic. Let your group know the difference these truths have made in your life.



## AT A GLANCE

As your group interacts in this study, they will think . . .

This is my **WORLD:** My criteria for determining what is right and wrong should be different than the criteria of the world in which I live.

This is my **NEED:** In light of the complexities of life I face, I need to develop biblically based convictions to help me decide how I should live my life.

This is my **ANSWER:** The Bible can help me develop biblically based criteria that will help me know what to think and what to do in areas I am unsure about and to which the Bible does not speak directly.

This is the **DIFFERENCE:** My life will honor God and be more beneficial to myself, other people, and Jesus Christ if my thoughts and actions are based on principles given in God's Word.

This is what I'll **DO:** I'll seek to determine the gray areas in my life and apply biblically based principles to those situations so I can develop biblical convictions.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION - WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?



As Christians in the '90s learn to deal with questionable issues, there are two important considerations that will affect their decisions. The first is maturity. As we mature and as our mind is renewed (Romans 12:2), we have better judgment in dealing with gray areas. The second consideration is the motivation for choosing wisely. The real issue at stake is not only making wise choices, but more importantly, learning to live in a manner which pleases the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:1,2).

It is also important to note that not every issue raised in this study—such as premarital sex—is necessarily a gray area (right or wrong, depending on the circumstances).

These additional passages relating to gray areas are included in the student piece.

Romans 14:22, 23

1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 8:1-13

Galatians 5:16-24; 6:1-4, 7, 8

Ephesians 5:1-13

**INTRO:** Group leader can bring a beer can (filled with water) or an empty pack of cigarettes to the group meeting to arouse interest in the topic of gray areas.

Hold up the beer can or the pack of cigarettes

**1 ASK:** Should I or shouldn't I? (Let group respond.)  
Why?

**2 BRAINSTORM:** Write responses on a poster board.

**POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTION:** What did you think or feel in that situation?

**Additional areas:**

- partying/drinking
- having opposite sex roommate
- civil disobedience, non-violent demonstrations
- dressing provocatively
- dieting (using drugs to lose weight)

**OPTIONAL MOCK DEBATE:**


Pick one area from brainstorm and assign two or three group members to defend opposing viewpoints.

**3 READ**

**READ & DISCUSS BRIEFLY**

**5 ANSWER & DISCUSS:** Have group fill out individually (1-2 minutes). Then share answers with no justifying comments.

**6 SUMMARIZE:** The Bible deals directly with many areas; however, it doesn't give a specific yes or no to every issue or situation we face today. Our world isn't always black or white, right or wrong, but sometimes appears to be shades of gray.



VERSION 2.1

# SHADES OF GRAY

**TOOLBOX**

- THINK
- OBSERVE
- CLOSE-UP
- WRITE
- DISCUSS
- FEELINGS
- BRAINSTORM
- REFERENCE
- PASSAGE
- ARTICLE
- BIG IDEA
- CROSSROAD

**BRAINSTORM**

What are some things you have observed other people do that you've questioned whether it's OK to participate in?

**DEBBIE**

Debbie, a Christian sophomore, is invited to a Greek formal by a good-looking guy in her psychology class. He is the president of his fraternity and a big man on campus. Dating him would make her the envy of all the women in her sorority. She's heard that he may be a Christian, but doesn't know for sure. He seems very nice.

**IMAGINE**

Imagine you are Kevin or Jason (men), or Debbie or Karen (women). How would you feel, and how would you decide what to do in these situations?

**LIFE STORIES**

**KEVIN**

Kevin, a young Christian, is a freshman. During freshman orientation week, a friend invited him to a party. He really wanted to meet other people and make new friends, so he decided to go. At the party, the friend who invited him gave him a glass of beer and encouraged him to drink.

**KAREN & JASON**

Karen and Jason recently became engaged to be married. Last night as they sat close to one another on Jason's couch, they were both thinking to themselves, *How far can we go sexually before it's sin?*

**GRAY AREAS**

Situations to which the Bible does not directly refer

**4 READ**

AREAS	NEVER	DEPENDS	ALWAYS
Drinking alcohol			
Pre-marital sex			
Dating a non-Christian			
Unhealthy dieting			
Watching soap operas			
Gambling			
Physical intimacy (without sex)			
Going to clubs or bars			
Using a fake I.D.			
Living with a member of the opposite sex			
Cheating (using a book on a take home test)			
Dressing provocatively			
Swearing			
Drinking a non-alcoholic beer			
Magazines— <i>Cosmopolitan</i> , <i>Sports Illustrated</i> (swimsuit issue)			

**1 TRANSITION STATEMENT:**

Does this mean we can never know what to think or do in areas not addressed in the Bible? What do you think?

**2 STATE:**

The book of 1 Corinthians contains some helpful passages for dealing with the gray areas of life.

**3 READ & DISCUSS:**

Questions in “Controversy” box  
 In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul gives the Corinthian Christians some godly advice. Let’s read what Paul has to say.

**5 READ & DISCUSS:**

Have the group read the passage and discuss the principles they see. Write the principles in the right column then draw an arrow to the verse where it is taken from.

**POSSIBLE PRINCIPLES:**  
 Do what is always helpful, beneficial, constructive (10:23).  
 Do what is good for myself and others (10:24).

**Note:** Reflect upon 1 Corinthians 13.  
 Do not do anything that would cause a weaker Christian or non-Christian seeking Christ to stumble (10:27-29, 32).

Do what would glorify God (10:31).

**OPTIONAL:** Read “Definition” box.

**POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:** Is the principle still relevant today? Why is this principle important? How can these biblical principles we have discovered help us develop criteria to decide the best course of action? Why would we want to apply these biblical principles?

**6 GROUP LEADER:** You may want to write your group’s answers on a poster board.

**7 READ**

<b>BACKGROUND</b>	
<p>The apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to the church in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17), a major cosmopolitan city in Greece, while he was in Ephesus (Acts 19). Many of the Christians in the church at Corinth came from immoral, pagan backgrounds, and at the time of Paul’s letter (54-55 A.D.), these Christians struggled in many areas—drunkenness, sexual immorality, idolatry, etc. Most of these areas of struggle were definitely wrong, but not all. Some were what we call “gray.”</p>	
<b>OBSERVE/IDENTIFY</b>	
<p><b>1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1</b></p> <p>23 “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is <b>beneficial</b>. “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is <b>constructive</b>.</p> <p>24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the <b>good of others</b>.</p> <p>25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of <b>conscience</b>,</p> <p>26 for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”</p> <p>27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.</p> <p>28 But if anyone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for ‘conscience’ sake—</p> <p>29 the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my <b>freedom</b> be judged by another’s conscience?</p> <p>30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?</p> <p>31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, <b>do it all for the glory of God</b>.</p> <p>32 <b>Do not cause anyone to stumble</b>, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—</p> <p>33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but <b>the good of many</b>, so that they may be saved.</p> <p>11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.</p>	<p><b>OBSERVED PRINCIPLE</b></p>
<b>CONTROVERSY</b>	
<p>The following situation took place almost 2,000 years ago in the ancient city of Corinth. In this culture the main religion was the worship of many gods (idols) who were believed to control human and earthly events. The worship of these gods included immoral sexual practices and the offering and eating of animal sacrifices given to appease the gods and to receive from them blessing.</p> <p>Imagine that you, coming from this cultural and religious background, just became a Christian after hearing the gospel from the apostle Paul. A pagan friend invites you to attend a celebration which includes eating the meat of animals that has been sacrificed to idols.</p> <p><b>What would you do? Would you attend the celebration? What criteria would you use to decide?</b></p>	
<b>DEFINITION</b>	
<p><b>CONSCIENCE:</b> The faculty of recognizing the distinction between right and wrong in regard to one’s own conduct. (<i>New American Heritage Dic.</i>)</p> <p><b>FREEDOM:</b> Liberty from the arbitrary views and restraints of another. (<i>Vine’s</i>)</p> <p><b>STUMBLE:</b> To fall into evil ways (<i>New American Heritage Dic.</i>); <b>CAUSE TO STUMBLE:</b> To give offense (<i>NASB</i>).</p> <p><b>BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE:</b> a governing law of conduct that is timeless, not bound by culture, non-negotiable, to be obeyed.</p>	
<b>SUMMARY</b>	
<p>The principle we have observed can be helpful in applying the Bible to difficult situations and choices we face today. Remember the conclusions you come to may not be the same conclusions another Christian embraces. Many issues are open to personal choice or conviction, and matters of individual conscience.</p>	

**1 LEADER:** Use the Four H's box as a summary of the principles previously discovered by the group.

**2 ASK & DISCUSS:** What other questions would be helpful to ask when faced with a gray area or situation?

**3 STATE:** Let's apply these principles to one of the gray areas we have determined. **Pick a gray area from their page 1 list and discuss it in light of the Four H's.**

**5 ASK:** Can you think of any other biblical principles that apply to this gray area? (see page four of student piece)

**6 LIST & FILL IN:** From discussion

**4 LEADER:** You will need to have a gray area in mind if the group cannot agree upon one from the list on page one (e.g., drinking, gambling, physical intimacy).

**Four H's of 1 Corinthians 6, 8 and 10**  
 Questions to ask when faced with a gray area:

1. Is it **helpful**, beneficial or constructive for me? Does it cause me to grow spiritually or help others grow? (6:12a; 10:23)
2. Is it a **habit**? Is it an addictive behavior? Does it hold me in its power? Do I feel I need this to be happy and fulfilled? Does it control my thoughts or actions? (6:12b)
3. Is it **hurtful** for another? A weaker Christian? In doing it, would I hurt someone else or cause them to be tempted to go against their conscience (what they think is right)? Is it hurtful for a non-Christian? Could my behavior cause a non-Christian to ignore the gospel or disregard Christ? (8:13; 10:24-11:1)
4. Is it **Honoring** to God? Glorifying God means to exalt God, to please Him by seeking His interests above our own interests. In doing it, would I bring glory to God, or dishonor Him? (10:31)

**TRY IT OUT**

GRAY AREA

Helpful?  
 Habit?  
 Hurtful?  
 Honoring?

**BENEFITS OF APPLYING PRINCIPLES**

Honor God  
 Obedience  
 Confidence  
 Joy

**POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT APPLYING PRINCIPLES**

Guilt  
 Doubt/uncertainty  
 Fear  
 Anxiety  
 Unhappiness

 REFLECTION

What are the top two or three gray areas you are dealing with in your life right now?

How will you apply biblical principles in dealing with these gray areas?



"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."

*Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 13:5*



"An unexamined life is not worth living."

*Socrates*

For individual study and application:



## PRINCIPAL PASSAGES

Romans 14:22,23  
1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 8:1-13  
Galatians 5:16-24  
Galatians 6:1-4,7,8  
Ephesians 5:1-13

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**1 LEADER:** In this section it may be best **not** to have group members share their top gray areas with the group.

**2 STATE:** On your own, write down your answers to the reflection questions. (Give group members 2-3 minutes to answer questions individually.)

**3 ASK:** Would anyone like to share with the group one of the gray areas you are dealing with?

**4 ASK:** Is there anyone who can help you talk through the gray areas?

You may want to offer help to the group members individually, and follow-up on this question with each person the week after this lesson is completed.

**5 STATE:** On your own this next week you may want to read through the additional principal passages and apply the principles you discover to some of the personal gray areas you are dealing with.

**6 OPTIONAL:** Read "Socrates" and "Apostle Paul" quotes to summarize and motivate group members to apply biblical principles to their personal gray areas.

L E A D E R ' S R E S O U R C E



**BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

*The Pursuit of Holiness* – Jerry Bridges (NavPress)

*The Practice of Godliness* – Jerry Bridges (NavPress)



**TOPIC CONNECTIONS**

Related *InterACTA* small group studies: *Father Knows Best; Distilled Logic; Pardon Me?*

**ADDITIONAL PREPARATION**

Students in your group are often looking for black and white answers when sometimes there are none. They also cross paths with people who look to them for answers. But even when there are no clear-cut answers, we can look to the Bible and biblical principles.

Consider these scenarios:

“I just pledged a sorority and we go to these mixers with different fraternities and well . . . well . . . do you think it’s all right to drink? I won’t get drunk or anything.”

What would you say? What are the biblical principles involved?

“I’m going to a formal this weekend—it’s out of town and my date and I will be sharing a hotel room with another couple. Nothing will happen. What do you think?”

What do you say? What are the biblical principles involved?

“A Christian friend of mine says Christians should never listen to secular music or go to R-rated movies. What do you think?”

What do you say? What are the biblical principles involved?

As Christians we have a tendency to give our opinions on these issues rather than pointing people to the principles that aided us in developing our convictions and perspective. Rather than spitting out an answer, ask them the questions on pages 2 and 3 of this lesson. We are not the Holy Spirit and as hard as it may be, at times we have to be willing to give people time to develop their own biblically based convictions. All we can do is point them to God’s Word and Christ.

**O V E R V I E W O F M E E T I N G T I M E**



**Planning your group session**

	INTERACTION AS A GROUP	INTERACTION WITH THE STUDY & WORD	INTERACTION WITH GOD	UPCOMING INFORMATION	OTHER IDEAS
	Ice breaker? Refreshments?	Provided. Add personal story?	Worship / Praise / Prayer time?	Next meeting? Special event?	Music / Video?
<b>Allocating your time</b>	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.	_____ min.

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