

Study Guide #21: Christian Standards of Conduct

Introduction

This Study Guide focuses on several Christian standards of conduct outside the area of food and drink.

Question #1: Is the area of dress and outward adornment a spiritual issue?

Answer: Before sin entered earth, Genesis 2:25 says that Adam and Eve “**were both naked...and were not ashamed**” (NKJV). After they sinned, their eyes were opened, and “**they knew they were naked**” (Genesis 3:7, NKJV). Obviously, they knew they were *unclothed* before they sinned, so the issue must be of *spiritual* nakedness. Then when they sewed fig leaves together to clothe themselves (Genesis 3:7), the Lord considered it so unacceptable that “**He made tunics of skin, and clothed them**” (Genesis 3:21, NKJV). Clothing them in animal skins meant that an animal was sacrificed. Because this was a spiritual issue, that animal must have represented Jesus as the Lamb of God who would one day become the substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29, 36; I Peter 1:19). Therefore, the dress of fig leaves Adam and Eve made must represent righteousness by works, and the animal skins God made must represent righteousness by grace through faith. Note that the animal skin clothing was a gift from God, which is the meaning of the word “grace.” This is the reason that Scripture speaks of clothing as a metaphor for one of 2 different spiritual conditions, as reflected in texts such as Job 29:14, Isaiah 61:10, and Revelation 3:5, 7:14, and 22:14.

Question #2: Is jewelry a symbol of a particular spiritual problem?

Answer: There’s an amazing contrast in Scripture between God’s *people* adorning themselves with *literal* jewelry and God *figuratively* adorning them with jewelry. In Ezekiel, God’s people putting on jewelry is identified as representing spiritual *adultery* or *harlotry* (Ezekiel 23:40-45). But in Ezekiel 16:9-14, God’s adorning His people figuratively with jewelry represents adorning them in His own “**splendor**” (NKJV). From these 2 passages, we conclude that the wearing of jewelry represents self-glorification, while God’s *figuratively* adorning us with jewelry represents His righteousness and glory. This strongly suggests that God loves jewelry, but apparently, we can’t spiritually handle literal jewelry in our sinful natures.



Question #3: Does the New Testament teach anything about jewelry?

Answer: Yes. I Timothy 2:9-10 and I Peter 3:3-4 are the key passages here. I Timothy 2:9 says that Christian women should “**adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not**

with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing” (NKJV). I Peter 3:3 says women should avoid **“arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel”** (NKJV). Three key words in I Timothy 2:9 point to 3 basic principles of adornment:

- **Modest**—The Greek word means “to be properly arranged in an orderly manner.” Implicit in this concept is the principle of attractiveness or good taste.
- **Propriety**—The Greek word denotes the idea of “humility,” or not calling attention to oneself. Implicit in this concept is the principle of simplicity or modesty.
- **Moderation**—The Greek word means “self-control” or of “sound mind” or “sound judgment.”

The prohibition against **“braided hair”** refers to the ancient practice of *extravagant* hairstyles that called unusual attention to the person. It’s evident that gold or pearls includes all items that have no functional purpose except to *adorn* the person and would therefore include objects made of silver, diamonds, or other things as well as gold and pearls. **“Costly clothing”** speaks for itself. [NOTES: (1) Because hair is a *natural* part of the body, the prohibition against fancy hair treatments would include piercings or *coloring* of other natural body parts, including nails, lips, and eyes—which would then make them *living ornaments*. Of course, sexually suggestive clothing should also be avoided because it *unnecessarily* attracts the opposite sex to a person; and (2) Some Bible versions add the word “merely” in I Peter 3:3, implying that the outward adornment items mentioned in the text are not prohibited. But there is no Greek word for “merely,” so Peter is in perfect harmony with Paul in *prohibiting* the kinds of outward adornment items given in the text.]

Question #4: Is the wedding ring considered ornamental in nature?

Answer: That depends on the culture, including the workplace culture. In some cultures, a married person who doesn’t wear a wedding ring is not considered married. And in some workplaces, a person (a woman especially) might be harassed without a wedding ring. In these circumstances, a *simple* wedding ring may be considered a cultural imperative because others might otherwise refuse to listen to the gospel message from you. Therefore, in such places, a wedding ring would not be considered an ornament *as long as* it isn’t jeweled or otherwise fancy. However, the wearing of a wedding ring must never be allowed to become an excuse for wearing ornamental jewelry. [NOTE: Some may attempt to justify the wearing of class rings and fancy pins, but if wearing anything calls attention to you without having any *functional* value, then the principle of ornamentation applies, and the item should be avoided. Slippery slopes are always dangerous.]



Question #5: Is it wrong for a believer to have a tattoo or have body-piercing?

Answer: Some believe that Leviticus 19:28 prohibits tattoos, but the context there clearly speaks of pagan religious practices. However, there are 3 good reasons that a Christian should avoid tattoos. *First*, we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), so marking it defaces that image. *Second*, since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19), marking it with a tattoo is like putting graffiti on a temple wall; it’s clearly an act of disrespect. *Finally*, tattoo inks contain chemicals and heavy metals that

can cause cancer. Body-piercing should be avoided for the same reasons, except that it makes one more susceptible to infections rather than to cancer.

Question #6: Would you please summarize the Biblical principles of outward adornment?

Answer: There are at least 7 principles of outward adornment in Scripture, as follows:

- One should wear clothing (at least in public).
- It should reasonably reflect one's gender (Deuteronomy 22:5).
- It should be appropriate for the occasion.
- It should be clean and orderly.
- It should be simple or modest.
- It should be attractive without also being outlandish.
- It should be functional or culturally required or promotional of something appropriate without also (at the same time) attracting undue attention to the wearer.

Question #7: Is divorce ever permissible? May a Christian remarry after a divorce?

Answer: Jesus taught that divorce was permitted in the Old Testament for almost any reason because of the hardness of people's hearts, but it was never God's ideal (Matthew 19:7-8; Mark 10:2-6). Jesus gave 1 exception to allow divorce—in a case when 1 partner commits adultery (Matthew 19:9; 5:32; cf. Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). He also declared that a divorced person is not free to remarry unless the former spouse has sexual relations with someone else (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). Apparently, Jesus still considers a couple married unless and until 1 party has sexual relations with someone else. The apostle Paul gave a 2nd exception for divorce—if an *unbelieving* spouse leaves the marriage, then the believing spouse is free to remarry (I Corinthians 7:15). All other reasons for divorce aren't Biblical grounds for divorce.



Question #8: What is a sexual perversion?

Answer: Any sexual activity outside of a marriage between one man and one woman is a perversion because it violates the major purpose for both marriage and sexual relations, which is to symbolically allow people to experience a type of the spiritual union that God wants with us (Genesis 2:24). Prohibitions include fornication (casual sex outside of marriage), adultery, polygamy (more than 1 marriage partner), prostitution, incest, rape, bestiality, homosexuality, and masturbation.

Question #9: Is homosexual sex a sin?

Answer: Yes. See Question #8 for the definition of sexual perversion. Homosexual sin is also specified as a sin in Scripture. See Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, and Romans 1:26-27. Some argue that the Levitical prohibition isn't valid because that was part of the old covenant law. However, that law is obviously not ceremonial or typical, but is based on the natural order of God's Creation and thus is part of God's eternal Moral Law. In Romans 1, the apostle Paul wrote about those who worship the creature rather than the Creator. In this context, he declares, **"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due"** (1:26-27, NKJV). Defenders of the gay lifestyle say that this passage refers to idolatrous practices common in Paul's day. But a careful reading reveals that Paul said 3 times that their idolatrous practices involving the worship of the creature rather than the Creator was the *reason* God gave them over to this sexual perversion (vv. 24, 26, 28). This cause-and-effect relationship proves that the sexual perversion was separate from the idolatrous practices. Therefore, Paul is indeed condemning homosexual behavior. [NOTES: (1) Many gays and lesbians insist that God made them that way; thus, He must be fine with their lifestyle. But we are all born with a sinful nature, with different people having different sinful tendencies. Because of the plan of salvation, God doesn't condemn us for our sinful *inclinations*, but only if we *yield* to those inclinations. So there's no excuse for sinning just because you have sinful desires; and (2) Christians should never engage in gay-bashing because while God hates sin, He loves the sinner. At the same time, neither should we refuse to call sin a sin.]

Question #10: What are profanity and vulgarity, and why are they sinful?

Answer: The word "profanity" is derived from the word "profane," which means to treat something sacred with irreverence or contempt. It also refers to that which is secular, meaning that which is not consecrated for religious use. The use of profanity refers to language that treats God or things associated with God with irreverence or contempt. This is a violation of the 3rd Commandment, which says that we should **"not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"** (Exodus 20:7, NKJV). Profanity would include terms such as "God d-a-m-n it" and other terms for God, including abbreviations or slang references to God such as "golly" (a form of "God"), "gee" or "geeze" (both short for "Jesus"), and "gosh" (slang for "God"). Words like "damn" and "hell," when used to convey contempt or in a frivolous way, also represent profanity.



A vulgar man

In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus forbade oaths to the Lord. His focus was on truth-telling and doesn't mean that taking an oath to tell the truth in a courtroom is wrong. It also refers to the common Jewish practice then of making oaths affirming some truth or of a promise to do something by saying "I swear" and then invoking God's name. So here Jesus wasn't speaking of profanity, but of a careless or frivolous use of language. Vulgar words are those which the culture considers inappropriate language. Vulgar words in modern English would include, but not be limited to, words like "c-r-a-p," "s-h-i-t," "f-u-c-k," and in some contexts the word "bloody."

Question #11: What is gambling, and why is it considered a sin?

Answer: Gambling always involves a game of chance in which the player pays for the long shot of winning at the expense of others. This includes, but is not limited to, poker, betting on sporting events (including office pools), casino games, and buying lottery tickets. Gambling is wrong for at least 4 reasons. *First*, it tends to undermine the work ethic in an attempt to “get rich quick” (Proverbs 12:11; 13:11; 28:20; II Thessalonians 3:10). *Second*, it violates the spirit of loving your neighbor as yourself because gambling involves winning at the expense of someone else (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:25-28). *Third*, it’s a disregard of the Biblical teaching on stewardship, the concept that God owns everything and loans some of it to us and gives us the power to get wealth (Psalm 24:1; 50:10; Deuteronomy 8:17-18; Matthew 25:14-30). *Finally*, it’s wrong because it tends to be addictive (I Corinthians 6:12). [NOTE: The use of playing cards should also be avoided because of their origin and association with gambling. As such, it may well cause someone to stumble back into a former gambling habit if they see you using them.]

Question #12: What kinds of music should Christians avoid?

Answer: See Explorer II, Study Guide #12, Questions #8-10 for a discussion of the principles of good music. Secular music is not necessarily bad music during regular (non-holy) days as long as it meets the criteria for good music and any lyrics are not contrary to Christian values. This includes most patriotic music, folk music, classical music, Christmas music, and even *some* popular music. Good music meets these requirements:

- Its beat (or rhythm) is subordinate to the melody and harmony.
- It avoids frequent repetitive syncopation.
- It has no dissonance (clashing sounds).
- It has no mantras (the frequent repetition of the same sounds or lyrics).
- Its lyrics, if it has any, are consistent with Christian values.

Question #13: May a good Christian dance?

Answer: Many times people will justify dancing because the Old Testament features some of God’s people dancing. However, dancing in the Scriptures is never portrayed as something men and women do together. Common sense tells us the reason is that most forms of dancing are sexually suggestive and arouse feelings that are sinful unless your partner is your spouse. Like music itself, dancing is a powerful medium. We don’t know the precise nature of acceptable dancing in the Bible, but we can be certain that it was not sensual in nature.



Question #14: Is it wrong to watch movies or television?

Answer: Theatrical and film performances that portray gratuitous violence, sexual immorality, and that use vulgar and/or profane language should be avoided because Philippians 4:8 says we should meditate on “whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are

pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (NKJV). For this reason, Scripture tells us to make a covenant with our eyes not to look upon evil things (Job 31:1; Psalm 101:3; 119:37) or to approve of others doing evil things (Romans 1:32). Television, videos, radio, audio recordings, in addition to books and other written materials, aren’t inherently evil, of course. But care should be taken regarding their content.

Question #15: Is it acceptable to consult astrological charts, palm readers, psychics, or to play the Ouija board game?

Answer: These things, and many more, are associated with the occult and condemned in the Bible in the strongest terms. The word “occult” comes from the Latin word for “hidden, secret, or clandestine” and refers to a hidden knowledge, that is, a knowledge of the paranormal. It’s a group of supernatural practices called the magical arts, which has existed from the beginning of history. It’s based on the unbiblical idea that one can communicate with the dead, who are the *alleged* source of the hidden knowledge. The Bible condemns this entire area according to Exodus 7:11, 22:18, Leviticus 20:27, Deuteronomy 18:10-12, I Samuel 28:7, Jeremiah 27:9, Daniel 5:11, Malachi 3:5, Revelation 9:21, 18:3, and 22:15. Christians are in a spiritual war against evil angelic powers and **“the rulers of the darkness of this age”** (Ephesians 6:12, NKJV), who are led by Satan himself (Revelation 12:9). Such demonic forces aren’t metaphors, but *real* beings who rebelled against God in heaven and were then cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:9). Their purpose is to deceive the whole world (Revelation 16:14), and they can work supernatural signs and alter their appearance (II Corinthians 11:14). Therefore, Christians should not make light of any of the occult associations or view them as harmless entertainment. See Explorer II, Study Guide #2 for a discussion of Satan and his evil angelic allies.



Question #16: What one word should describe the Christian’s relationship with other people?

Answer: *Integrity*--a life of honesty and respect for God and other people—is the key word here. The moral basis for integrity is the 5th through the 10th Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20:12-17. They are summarized in the principle of **“love your neighbor as yourself”** (Leviticus 19:18, NKJV; Matthew 22:39). We should refrain from cheating anyone for *any* reason. A Christian student won’t cheat on an exam or other assignment, and a Christian employee or employer won’t cheat his employees, fellow employees, or employer in any way. That includes giving an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay and not so much as stealing a pencil or paper clip from the workplace. Cheating hurts someone else *and* the person who cheats. Obviously, he won’t murder anyone, nor will he mistreat animals, for even animals were created by God, who also cares for them (Matthew 10:29; Luke 12:6). He also won’t murder someone’s character by slandering or libeling anyone. He also won’t rob someone of his reputation, for that also violates the commandment against stealing. A Christian will operate above-board at all times. Moreover, he will respect the free will of everyone else, which means he won’t discriminate against anyone on the basis of gender, race, color, ethnicity, sexual orientation (even though he disagrees with the gay lifestyle), or religion—because *all* people were made equally in the image of God.