

Three Rules for Testing an Act to see if it is Sinful¹

When you wish to know “Is it wrong for me to _____ under the present circumstances?” you should ask:

1. Does the Bible forbid my doing this?

Any claim that the Bible declares a particular thing to be sinful must be substantiated by sound Biblical interpretation. The burden of proof rests on the one making the claim. A matter must be regarded as indifferent until it is proven to be sinful, not vice versa. When there is any doubt that the matter is sinful in itself, it must be left to the individual conscience.

2. Although it is not a sin in itself, would my doing this lead me into temptation and cause me to sin?

Matthew 5:29-30 says: “*If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*”

Christ’s command is conditional. What is an overwhelming temptation for one person may be no temptation at all to another person. Each individual must judge for himself what is a temptation to him/her and needs to be avoided.

3. Would my doing this cause me to offend a weak brother so as to make him stumble?

Romans 14:21: “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.”

If you can truthfully answer all three of these questions NO, then it is not wrong for you, although it may be wrong for someone else.

What if my answer to any of these questions is MAYBE?

When in doubt, don’t do it! Romans 14:22-23 says: “Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

Each believer must determine how and when to use the liberty given to them. But he or she must make those judgments realizing that they will have to give an account for their decisions to God, who knows the secrets of the heart.

¹ See David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *ROMANS An Interpretive Outline* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia, Pa., 1963).