

On the Making of Expedient Judgments

An “expedient” is an appropriate, profitable, advantageous way to accomplish something. Expedients are helpful means to necessary ends. The word *expedient* is used seven times in the King James Version of the Scriptures.

“Nor consider that it is **expedient** for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” (John 11.50)

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is **expedient** for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” (John 16.7)

Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was **expedient** that one man should die for the people. (John 18.14)

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not **expedient**: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1 Cor 6.12)

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not **expedient**: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. (1 Cor 10.23)

And herein I give my advice: for this is **expedient** for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. (2 Cor 8.10)

It is not **expedient** for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. (2 Cor 12.1)

The English Standard Version translates *sumphero* (Greek) in the passages listed above as “**better**” (John 11.50), “**to your advantage**” (John 16.7), “**expedient**” (John 18.14), “**helpful**” (1 Cor 6.12; 10.23), “**benefits**” (2 Cor 8.10), and “**to be gained**” (2 Cor 12.1). As a noun, *sumpheros* (Greek) is also used by Paul in 1 Corinthians, and noting the context deepens our understanding of the principle behind the word.

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own **benefit**, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. (1 Cor 7.32-35)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own **advantage**, but that of many, that they may be saved (1 Cor 10.31-33).

Based on our study up to this point, we know that God hasn't given mankind a blank check labeled "EXPEDIENT." If in all circumstances he allowed us to determine for ourselves what is right and wrong within the boundaries of our own view of what is "better," "beneficial" or "advantageous," we would basically become a law unto ourselves and do whatever was right in our own eyes.

And yet, God *has* allowed us to choose for ourselves how a number of generic commands will be carried out and general examples will be modeled in our own modern context. Some aspects of discipleship can be accurately and faithfully described and fulfilled as matters of human judgment. In such cases, we have liberty to judge what would be most appropriate, profitable and advantageous in a given situation. We have freedom to ask, "What would be the most helpful and beneficial means of reaching this necessary end?"

Constructive Questions to Ask in the Making of Expedient Judgments

- ▶ **Is it lawful?** "All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful" (1 Cor 10.23). Some of the early Christians in Corinth were arguing that all things were lawful for the Christian. There was great confusion and argument over how to view meat that had been sacrificed to a pagan idol. Paul provides practical instruction in the larger context of 1 Corinthians 10, but establishes that things must first and foremost be "lawful." Before we consider whether a thing is expedient, we must honestly ask, "Is it lawful?" If it's not lawful, it can't be expedient.
- ▶ **Has God been specific?** If something has been specified, there is no room for expedients.
- ▶ **Is it helpful?** In 1 Corinthians 10, the Spirit encourages us to recognize that even lawful things may not be helpful in a specific situation. Some press their opinion or insist on their "pet project" in the name of expediency even if it causes division among God's people. Such attitudes and actions destroy rather than edify and build up (1 Cor 14.26).
- ▶ **Will this cause my brother or sister to stumble?** In 1 Corinthians 10.32, Paul qualifies his instructions about expediencies by saying, "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God." In 1 Corinthians 8.7-13 he encourages careful recognition that "not all possess" mature knowledge and that the mature must act accordingly.

And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Cor 8.11-13)

These General COMMANDS or EXAMPLES	Logically Encourage the Question of EXPEDIENCY
Noah (Genesis 6.14) "Make" yourself an ark	The tools Noah was to use were not specified; Noah could use whatever was available as long as it did not violate another command
The Great Commission (Matthew 28.19-20) "Go" "Baptizing" "Teaching"	
Assembling with the Saints Not neglecting to meet (Hebrews 10.25)	
The Lord's Supper On the first day of the week (Acts 20.7)	
Addressing one another in song (Ephesians 5.19; Colossians 3.16)	