

• When It's Time to Make a Judgment Call * We know what it is to make "judgment calls" in various circumstances of everyday life. In general terms, a judgment call is a decision based on personal opinion or preference. In our last session, we noted the difference between specific and generic instructions from an authority figure: ☞ Specific instructions specify. By their very nature, they exclude and rule out every other option. Specific instructions don't generally leave room for judgment calls on the part of the recipient. ☞ On the other hand, general instructions generalize. By their very nature, they include any number of options within a specific group, category, or class. General instructions typically leave room for judgment calls on the part of the recipient. One word that naturally arises in discussions of judgment calls is expedient. An expedient is an appropriate, profitable, advantageous way of accomplishing something. Expedients are helpful means to necessary ends. The word expedient is used seven times in the King James Version of the Bible. ☞ "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) If in all circumstances he allowed us to determine for ourselves what is right and wrong based purely on our own judgments 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 general commands will be carried out and general examples will be modeled in our own modern context. Some aspects of discipleship can be accurately described and faithfully fulfilled within the realm of human judgment. In such cases, we have liberty to determine 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 regard 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) "Is it lawful?" Why must we always be willing to start with and return to that question?