

Thoughts on Making Decisions

- I. We know we are to walk by faith, not sight. **2CO 5:7**.
- A. We are to trust God rather than our own understanding. **PRO 3:5-6**.
 - B. We read in Scripture of God's providential direction of men's lives and may even have experienced the same in our own lives.
 - C. We may be persuaded that because God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives, we are relieved of the responsibility of personal decisions, and, after all, *God makes all things work together for our good*.
 - D. This study is a reminder that Jesus Christ died to take away our sins, not our minds or personal responsibility to make decisions.
 - 1. Common sense need not be contrary to faith.
 - 2. Faith obliges us to have common sense, regulate it by God's word, and put it to work.
- II. Decisions are basically choices: choices between permissible options or choices concerning impermissible options (things contrary to God's law, **1JO 3:4**).
- A. Believers have only one acceptable choice concerning an impermissible thing: NO.
 - 1. Black and white decisions about known wrong require little critical thought: they are easy decisions.
 - 2. We simply choose to do or not do what we know is wrong.
 - B. But we are faced with myriad decisions where our critical faculties are tested.
 - 1. We may need to first decide whether a thing is permissible or not. For this we are constrained to know God's laws from His word. **PSA 119:104, 128; 2TI 3:16-17**.
 - 2. There are many revealed "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" laws in Scripture where God's will is crystal clear but what about those "gray" areas?
 - 3. There are many areas of liberty in which there are multiple choices, none of which are necessarily wrong but they can have undesirable consequences: food, hobbies, companions, living accommodations, careers, marriage, single life, pleasures, etc.
 - a. It is these decisions that are the most problematic to us.
 - b. If we want to please God, we don't want to make decisions that displease Him.
 - c. Neither do we want to make decisions which trouble us or those we love.
 - d. But the fact is, we have to make decisions, and this involves effort in thought and the unpleasantness of risk.
 - C. It is our nature to avoid pain and decision-making in the absence of a clear-cut commandment can be painful. This can become a snare.
 - 1. One may make no decision out of concern of what others think.
 - 2. One may make no decision out of concern of it not working out for the best.
 - 3. One may resort to "rolling dice," letting random chance make the decision.
 - 4. One may resort to looking for mystical signs to guide him, "putting out the fleece" as Gideon did. **JDG 6:36-40**.
 - 5. One may resort to feelings to direct him.
 - a. We know that feelings are not a basis for interpreting Scripture where God's will for us is revealed. **PRO 28:26; JER 17:9**.
 - b. If feelings have no authority in interpreting the will of God revealed in Scripture, why should they have authority in deciding the will of God not revealed in Scripture?

6. One may let another make the decisions in order to avoid personal responsibility.
 - a. For this reason, many desire a higher power to direct their lives.
 - b. That higher power may take the form of voices in the head which are assumed to be revelation from God. Once one is convinced that the Almighty has thus spoken, how can it be questioned?
 - c. The appeal of the occult is that it offers us a way to escape the responsibility of personal decisions.
 - (1) Man wants his own personal spirit guide, fortune-teller, or guru to decide everything for him.
 - (2) Cult researchers have observed how readily people submit to bondage which relieves them of the heavy freedom they have to carry with all the decisions and efforts that freedom implies.
 - d. For some, religion is a way of coping with difficulty. For others, religion is a way of escaping difficulty.
7. Many of the above are some form of fear: of man, failure, loss, unpopularity, embarrassment, the unknown, etc.
 - a. These are not the means of overcoming this world (**1JO 5:4**); they are the means of torment. **1JO 4:18**.
 - b. The fear of God is healthy but these other fears are not.

III. We are taught by example and precept to seek divine direction for our lives and we are promised it shall be given. **PSA 25:4-5, 8-9; 31:3; 32:8-9; PRO 3:5-7; EPH 5:15-17.**

- A. Note how that divine direction did not exclude understanding. **PSA 32:8-9; EPH 5:17.**
 1. To have understanding implies knowledge and the wisdom to apply it.
 2. It is when we lean on our own understanding *without consideration of, or in opposition to* the understanding we obtain from God that we err. **PRO 1:24-32.**
 3. Remember the source of our understanding. **PSA 119:99-100, 104.**
- B. God's direction of our lives does not exempt us from having to make our own decisions.
 1. The same Solomon who wrote **PRO 3:5-7** wrote at length also about wisdom and discretion.
 2. God made us with the ability to think, to reflect, to analyze, to plan, to choose and to decide. He obviously gave us these abilities to use just as He gave us physical abilities to use.
- C. We are oft called upon to use our critical faculties. **DEU 30:19-20; JOS 24:14-15, 22; ISA 1:18-20; HAG 1:5-10; LUK 14:28-33; JOH 7:24; ACT 6:3-5; 1CO 6:3-4; 10:15; 11:13; TIT 1:5-9.**
- D. Discretion is commanded. **PSA 112:5; PRO 3:21-22.**
 1. discretion: The action of separating or distinguishing; The action of discerning or judging; judgement; decision, discrimination.
 2. We have to sort things out and decide upon a course of action.
- E. We are to *prove all things*. **1TH 5:21.**
 1. prove: To make trial of, try, test.
 2. The Bereans were commended for proving the apostles. **ACT 17:11.**
 3. Ephesus was likewise commended. **REV 2:2.**
 4. We are to try the spirits to distinguish between truth and error. **1JO 4:1-3.**
 5. Biblical faith obviously requires the use of reason and critical faculties to discern the truth one is to believe.
 6. Paul reasoned out of the Scriptures to persuade men of Christ. **ACT 17:2-4; 18:4.**

IV. Some questions to consider:

- A. Does God lead us? If so, how: declared laws and principles, vague promptings, impressions, circumstances, coincidences, feelings, internal voices, signs, fortune cookies, ouija boards, tea leaves, astrology, seances?
1. Is divine leading such as **EXO 13:21; 40:36-37** normative for believers?
 2. Is there prophecy like **LUK 21:20-21** for every area of life?
 3. Is a Macedonian call such as Paul received (**ACT 16:9-10**) normative and this is what Paul meant when he wrote of being "...led of the Spirit..." (**GAL 5:18**)?
 4. Should we keep an ass on hand as a safeguard against our poor decisions? **2PE 2:15-16.**
 5. Is what we plan for the future immutable because we assume to have received extra-scriptural revelation? Is there any point in even saying, "If the Lord will..." (**JAM 4:15**)?
- B. Is God's revelation closed or ongoing? Does He lead individual believers by speaking to them as He did to Christ, the prophets and apostles?
1. It is not uncommon to hear Christians say things like, "The Lord spoke to my heart..." and they don't simply mean that a portion of Scripture gave them direction or conviction. It may rather be a strong feeling which prompts them to make a particular decision.
 2. Mind that if what someone says the Lord spoke is what is plainly declared in the Bible, that is the same thing He has spoken to everyone else. It is scripture.
 3. But if what someone says the Lord spoke is not already in Scripture, then such a person is assuming to have the gift of prophetic inspiration. If that person writes down "what the Lord spoke" then he is writing Scripture since all scripture is given by inspiration (**2TI 3:16**) and this makes that information binding upon all believers.
- C. Do you desire God's leading in your life? If so, what kind of leading are you looking for: absolute, limited, specific, general, passive, responsive, mysterious, undefined, defined, responsibility-free, responsible?
- D. Do you desire to be in the will of God when you make a decision?
1. If so, is the will of God a dot or a circle?
 2. Is there an ordained individual will for each believer outside of which is fault?
 3. Is there an ordained will for every option in life outside of which is fault? Is compliance with the will of God at stake when deciding which sock to put on first?
- E. Which is more comfortable for you: having all decisions made for you or having freedom and responsibility to make decisions?
- F. Does sincerity or good intention equate with a good decision?
- G. Are the promises of God to guide and guard His people a convenient safety-net which makes prudence and discretion irrelevant?
- H. Are the laws of nature and probability irrelevant to our decisions because we read of God sometimes overruling them or stepping in to save His children from the tragic consequences of their foolish decisions, as with Lot? **2PE 2:7-8.**
- I. Have you ever used "waiting on the Lord" to cover indecisiveness?

V. (**ECC 10:10**) If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.

- A. For various reasons and misconceptions about God's guidance and providence, Christians

- may go through life learning everything the hard way and end up being reproved by the plain examples of nature and godless men. **PRO 6:6-8; 30:24-28; LUK 16:8.**
- B. If we are seeking direction in decision-making so we can be in God's will, *wisdom profits*.
- C. If we are lacking wisdom, we should be praying for it (**JAM 1:5-6**), searching for it and engaging it. **PRO 18:1.**
- D. There is worldly wisdom and God's wisdom so make your first decision for direction a good decision. **1CO 2:4-5.**
1. God's wisdom will not contradict the laws, principles and probabilities of this world which are there by His order for all men to observe and gain some understanding.
 2. God's wisdom declares those natural laws, exposes their deficiencies and provides a superior guide to help the believer process life in expectation of the life to come.
- E. A diligent study of Scripture coupled with earnest prayer will result in our understanding *every good path*. **PRO 2:1-22.**
1. We will be able to distinguish between positive and misleading influences.
 2. This passage emphasizes wisdom, knowledge and understanding over emotional experiences.
 - a. Seek wisdom and understanding instead of pursuing feelings. **PRO 4:7.**
 - b. It is in wisdom and spiritual understanding that we know the will of God so as to make proper decisions, not in feelings.
COL 1:9-10 c/w DEU 4:5-6; PSA 119:104-105.
 3. The evil man and the strange woman lead souls into positive but perverse emotional experiences. Not even positive emotions are reliable to determine God's will.
 - a. The Galatians were *zealously affected* (Gr. *zeloo*, to have warmth of feeling for or against) against the truth. **GAL 4:16-18.**
 - b. Christ's disciples' joy countered their faith. **LUK 24:41.**
 4. An interesting example of emotional relationship to truth is **LUK 24:32.**
 - a. Their hearts burned as Jesus opened to them the Scriptures.
 - b. burn: *fig.* Of persons, of the heart, etc.: To be on fire (with desire, lust, passion, wrath); to glow, pant.
 - c. The burning of the heart did not open the Scriptures and so determine truth. It occurred *while* Jesus opened the truth of Scripture to them as a response to truth.
 - d. The burning of the heart did not convey knowledge of truth or decide the will of God. It was rather a reaction to knowledge being gained.
c/w NEH 8:12; PSA 119:162.
 - e. Remember, though, that the Galatians also experienced warm feelings (**GAL 4:16-18**) and that men are commonly roused by stirring oratory to support all kinds of causes, and some of them are terribly bad decisions.
 5. Emotions which spring from the heart cannot be trusted because the heart cannot be trusted (**PRO 28:26; JER 17:9**). The heart must be guided by knowledge of truth; it is not a guide to determine truth for making good decisions. **PRO 23:19.**
 - a. Decisions made primarily on the basis of emotions to the disregard of wisdom and discretion are virtually guaranteed to be wrong.
 - b. Right thinking produces both right decisions and right emotions.
 6. While not denying the reality and importance of emotion, the fact is that is very possible for a Christian, on the basis of emotional signals alone, to “feel out of fellowship” with God for no valid reason or alternately “feel good” about his relationship with God though making decisions contrary to God's word.

- F. Applying Scriptural principles in making decisions is not leaning to our own understanding. It is rather acknowledging God by consulting with His word and so finding His promised direction for our paths. **PRO 3:5-6.**
- VI. We should certainly desire God's leading and guidance in our lives and pray for it when we must make a decision which could have weighty implications for our souls, church, families and even our finances.
- A. Here are some good prayers with which to begin your quest for God's direction. **PSA 119:5; 25:5; 43:3.**
- B. God leads through His righteousness. **PSA 5:8; 23:3; PRO 8:20-21; 11:5.**
1. Thus it behooves us to continually improve our understanding of what God considers right. **PSA 119:128.**
 2. The better we are acquainted with and conformed to the way God thinks, the better we are fitted to make good decisions that accord with His will and make sense of life before heaven. **PSA 73:24.**
 3. It is for lack of knowledge that destruction comes. **HOS 4:6.**
- VII. A big part of decision-making is eliminating morally bad choices.
- A. After that, whatever choices we make will not involve us in moral evil.
- B. Rather than between good and bad, our choices will be between good and good or good and better. **1TI 4:4; EPH 4:28; 1CO 7:38.**
- C. What remains of the morally good choices is whether or not they have positive or negative outcomes. This is where wisdom and prudence come into play.
1. wisdom: Capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends; sometimes, less strictly, sound sense, esp. in practical affairs: opp. to *folly*.
 2. prudence: Ability to discern the most suitable, politic, or profitable course of action, esp. as regards conduct; practical wisdom, discretion.
 3. Prudence is the domestic partner of wisdom. **PRO 8:12.**
 4. Prudence wisely weighs information (**PRO 14:15**) and knows that its judgment can be no better than its source of information.
 5. Prudence has foresight enough to recognize evil and avoid it. **PRO 22:3.**
 6. Prudence knows that silence is the best defense in corrupt times. **AMO 5:12-13.**
 7. When Paul exhorts us to understand God's will, he commands *circumspection*. **EPH 5:15-17.**
 - a. circumspection: The scanning of surrounding objects or circumstances, careful or wary looking about one; the faculty of doing this. a. *literally*.
 - b. As a mental action: vigilant and cautious observation of circumstances or events.
 - b. Circumspection demands that we consider present factors and their implications. This would apply to spiritual and practical decisions.
- D. This emphasis on conscious responsibility rather than supernatural signs, events or extra-scriptural “prompts” accords with the matured status of the church under the N.T. **GAL 4:1-7.**
1. The church under the law had explicit directives for almost every aspect of life: empirical experiences as where to live and when to move, diet, the Urim and Thummim for tough decisions, etc. Such “hands on” direction is appropriate for a child.

2. By contrast, the N.T. church has not only the benefit of all the O.T. revelation which those empirical props confirmed to the church, we have the superior revelation of Jesus Christ (**HEB 1:1-2**) which only needed empirical props until the completion of the canon of Scripture. **1CO 13:8-10.**
3. Having come to maturity, God set the church free to decide and act responsibly based on the *treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ* (**COL 2:3**), the combined body of law and understanding which are the two testaments of our Bible which declare Him.

VIII. Here are some valuable facts about making decisions.

- A. There are many clear commands which show us God's will for our lives. **1TH 4:1-6; 5:18.**
 1. These are basically the “no-brainers.”
 2. We need not ponder, “Should I commit adultery, murder, steal, blaspheme, apostatize, embrace witchcraft, get drunk, etc.?”
 3. Neither should we ponder whether we offend God by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness or temperance, etc. nor whether we should magnify those things. **GAL 5:22-23.**
- B. But not every decision has such “black and white” clarity because God has not specified every detail by commandments. Direction in such areas is by applying Biblical principles.
 1. There are things in which it makes no difference to God what we do. **ROM 14:5-6; 1CO 8:8.**
 2. We have liberty in many areas to do what we want within the framework of Biblical principles. **ROM 14:14-15, 20-23; 1CO 10:23.**
 3. God tells the available woman that she is “...at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord” (**1CO 7:39**).
 - a. *Legally*, the decision to marry a qualified man is hers.
 - b. *Prudently*, her decision should be based upon more than the basic, “I'm lonely; I want a knight in shining armour; I want sex; I want children; this guy is available, etc.”
 - c. Such decisions are a true test of N.T. liberty and responsibility.
 4. Remember **ROM 4:15**. Beware of any teacher, impression or voice in your head which establishes “thou shalt nots” which God has not established. **COL 2:20-22; 1TI 4:1-5.**
 5. In the absence of a specific law, we are at liberty to make decisions following Biblical principles which will most likely yield favorable results.
 - a. However, do not be deceived into thinking that Christian liberty justifies making decisions that exploit the flesh before the spirit. **GAL 5:13.**
 - b. Make decisions which are best for your soul. Remember Lot.
- C. God's providence superintends our choices and actions and either permits or hinders them. **ROM 1:9-13; 15:23-32; 1CO 16:5-7; 1TH 2:17-18; 3:9-11.**
 1. **JAM 4:13-16** relates God's providence to our decision-making.
 - a. We do not know what a day may bring forth.
 - (1) Nothing here instructs us to try to find out what a day may bring forth.
 - (2) Therefore, our knowing what will happen in the future is NOT necessary to finding God's direction for our lives.
 - b. This passage allows us to make plans for the future within the limits of God's revealed will and subject to His providence.

- c. It is evil to plan for the future without recognition of God's sovereignty.
 - d. However, observe that *we* do what *we* decide to do, acting freely, within the limits imposed by the will of God.
 - e. If we had a special revelation from God for everything we would do, it would be incorrect to say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." Rather, we should say, "The Lord wills that I do this or that."
2. We do not have insight into all the workings of God's providence.
JOB 33:13; ECC 11:5-6; ROM 11:33.
- a. God's providence is not our directive rule for much of that is hidden from us.
 - b. Our rule of conduct is rather the things which God has told us in His law.
DEU 29:29.