

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. **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.
3. Expressions like "If the Lord will" acknowledge that God puts limits or boundaries on men's plans. **ISA 10:11-12 c/w PRO 21:1; JOB 38:11.**
- a. Paul frequently made plans with an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty.
1CO 4:19; 16:7; HEB 6:3.
 - b. "It is interesting to note that most of Paul's plans did come to pass (Acts 18:21; 1 Timothy 1:3), just as most of our well-laid plans are accomplished. Each time a carefully devised plan is successful, two truths are reinforced: the importance of wise, orderly planning (Proverbs 24:6); and the effectiveness of God's sovereign will in accomplishing the plans of men and God (Romans 1:10; 15:32)."
(Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, p. 212)
 - c. When well-laid plans within the revealed will of God are frustrated, it may simply be a matter of the timing not being right (**ACT 16:6 c/w 19:26**) so we do well to not fret but thank God for His sovereignty.

- IX. As touching our need and desire to make decisions that accord with God's will, the *Traditional* approach stands in contrast to the *Wisdom* approach.
- A. *Traditional* says that for each of our decisions, God has a perfect plan or will. *Wisdom* says that in non-moral decisions, we have liberty and responsibility to choose between various options that are not sinful, some of which may be more profitable than others.
 - B. *Traditional* says that the goal of the believer is to discover God's individual will (find the "dot") and make decisions in accordance with it. *Wisdom* says that God's moral will for all believers is established and uniform but other decisions are made by wisely applying Biblical principles to acceptable options and opportunities.
 - C. *Traditional* says that the believer interprets inner impressions and outward signs through which the Holy Spirit communicates His leading. *Wisdom* says that the Holy Spirit leads through believers applying the commands and principles which He has already communicated in Scripture.
 - D. *Traditional* says that the believer receives confirmation of a decision being in God's will by a sense of inner peace or by outwardly positive results. *Wisdom* says that confirmation of a decision being in God's will is by its conformity to commandments and the guidelines in Scripture for Christian conduct in areas of liberty.
 - E. *Traditional* promotes immaturity, inconsistency, anxiety and disillusionment.
 - 1. It permits believers to justify unwise decisions on the basis of "God told me to do it." It absolves one of personal responsibility and accountability.
 - 2. It promotes costly delays because of uncertainty about God's perfect individual will.
 - 3. It influences people to reject personal preferences when faced with multiple

- acceptable options.
4. It encourages the practice of “putting out a fleece” and letting circumstances make the decision.
 5. It is inconsistently applied since it is abandoned in minor decisions.
 6. It generates anxiety out of concern of “missing the dot” of the one correct choice that was God's will rather than being thankful for multiple choices. **ROM 14:6.**
 7. It facilitates disillusionment when a decision assumed to be God's will is made on the basis of nebulous, subjective factors and it produces negative results.
- F. The *Traditional* view does generally place strong emphasis on understanding the Bible because it assumes that a great deal of God's will for the individual is spelled out there. The *Wisdom* view says that ALL of God's will for the individual is spelled out in the Bible.
- G. The goal of the *Traditional* view (certain knowledge of God's individual will) is unreachable but the goal of the *Wisdom* view (adequate knowledge of God's moral will plus wisdom) is attainable.
- X. The examples of the wisdom of creatures (**PRO 6:6-8; 30:24-28**) and the unjust steward (**LUK 16:8-9**) show us that common sense is important.
- A. We are not relieved of personal responsibility to pursue wisdom and apply it because we have God to mysteriously guide us, back us up or save us from the consequences of foolish decisions. **GAL 6:4-5.**
 - B. Following Christ by faith is sufficient to make us look like fools and lunatics in the eyes of an unbelieving world. Why give them more rocks to throw by going through life with obvious disregard to plain facts available to all men? Christians, of all people, should be exercising good judgment. **1CO 6:1-6.**
 - C. Common sense, though, must take a backseat to revelation.
 1. The wise creatures from whom we may learn may also be savage, ruthless and merciless towards even their own species: enslaving, cannibalizing or eliminating them if they are not beneficial to society.
 2. Common sense might look at the creation and conclude that sexual activity is to be regulated only by brute instinct or that androgynous anomalies in nature justify gender-swapping in humans.
 3. Common sense might reason that as one would not commit to a major purchase like a car without testing it out, so one should not commit to marriage without finding out if there is sexual compatibility, thereby justifying pre-marital fornication.
- XI. One's character is itself a guiding principle to help make good decisions which please God. **PRO 11:3, 5.**
- A. integrity: In moral sense. †a. Unimpaired moral state; freedom from moral corruption; innocence, sinlessness. b. Soundness of moral principle; the character of uncorrupted virtue, esp. in relation to truth and fair dealing; uprightness, honesty, sincerity.
 - B. righteousness: Justice, uprightness, rectitude; conformity of life to the requirements of the divine or moral law; virtue, integrity.
 1. All God's commandments are righteousness. **PSA 119:172.**
 2. The righteousness of the perfect is his conformity to those commandments both by the imputed righteousness of Christ and the practice of that righteousness in personal obedience. **1JO 3:7.**
 - C. virtue: (ad. L. *virtūt-*, *virtus* manliness, valour, worth, etc., f. *vir* man) Conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality; voluntary observance of the recognized moral

laws or standards of right conduct; abstention on moral grounds from any form of wrongdoing or vice.

1. **valour**: The quality of mind which enables a person to face danger with boldness or firmness; courage or bravery, esp. as shown in warfare or conflict; valiancy, prowess.
2. **JOS 1:7** and **1KI 2:2-3** call for virtue as the dictionary defines it.
- D. Wanting to do right because it is right and having courage to do right (virtue) will bar the way to many morally corrupt or compromised paths.
 1. Much personal grief or even sin is introduced in life for lack of a strong will to stand on principle or a lack of courage to deal with everyday things of life because of personal insecurities, etc. Oftentimes, the biggest monster we face is the warped perception we have of ourselves which is not shaped by what God tells us about our identity and power in Christ nor by the obvious realities of the world and human nature.
 2. There is much less chance of yielding to peer pressure when integrity and virtue are guiding our decisions.
- E. Righteousness is set forth as a thing to follow, a guiding principle. **1TI 6:11; 2TI 2:22.**
- F. God's wrath is revealed against ALL unrighteousness. **ROM 1:18, 29-32; 1CO 6:9-10.**
 1. Hence, the demand for righteousness is not to be held in contempt. **PRO 14:9.**
 2. Unrighteousness sets one up to be misled. **ROM 7:11; HEB 3:12-13; 2TH 2:8-12.**
 3. Therefore, sin must not be spared, sampled, regarded or excused, but mortified. **ROM 8:13.**
- G. Righteousness lies at the heart of the following instructions to be applied in making decisions.
 1. **(1CO 16:14)** Let all your things be done with charity.
 - a. This is to be above all else. **COL 3:14; 1PE 4:8.**
 - b. Charity (love) fulfills the law. **MAT 22:37-40; ROM 13:10.**
 - c. Run your choices and decisions through **1CO 13:4-7** and eliminate any that conflict with that grid.
 2. **(MAT 7:12)** Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.
 3. **(ROM 14:16-19)** Let not then your good be evil spoken of: (17) For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (18) For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. (19) Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.
 - a. If you are acceptable to God (**v. 18**), you ARE in the center of His will.
 - b. If a choice does not pass the test of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, eliminate it.
 - c. We ought to consider the effect of our choices not only upon ourselves but upon others also.
 4. **(ROM 13:14)** But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.
 5. **(ROM 12:17-18)** Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. (18) If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.
 6. **(1TH 5:22)** Abstain from all appearance of evil.
 7. **(ROM 14:22-23)** Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that

condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. (23) And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

- H. The thought life shapes character. **PRO 4:23; 23:7.**
 - 1. Our minds will think with the information they are fed and that will influence decision-making. Garbage in, garbage out.
 - 2. We should definitely think on the things listed in **PHIL 4:8.**
 - a. These things make for good character.
 - b. This is a grid through which we may filter sources of information and entertainment.
- I. There is no unrighteousness in those who seek God's honour rather than their own honour. **JOH 7:18.**
 - 1. When making decisions, we should carefully weigh whose honour we seek.
 - 2. The righteousness of seeking God's honour will help filter out God-dishonouring and self-serving decisions.
- J. Having a prepared resolve to do right can make even difficult matters easy to decide.
 - 1. Daniel's purpose of heart laid the groundwork for deciding a difficult matter. **DAN 1:8.**
 - 2. Consider the following resolutions. **PSA 26:4-5, 11; 56:3; 101:2-3; 119:115.**
 - 3. Having godly core principles which are not up for debate will prevent many bad decisions even when something difficult is suddenly sprung on you.
- K. Since character is influenced by associations, we do well to choose companions wisely. **PRO 13:20; 1CO 15:33.**
 - 1. How many terrible decisions have been made because of peer pressure!
 - 2. Rehoboam's companions inspired his fateful decision which split a country. **1KI 12:1-20.**
 - 3. **(PRO 9:6)** Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.
 - 4. **(PSA 119:63)** I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.
- XII. Parents should impart godly direction to their children to form their character. **PRO 22:6; 29:15.**
 - A. "...the WAY he should go..." implies direction.
 - B. Godly training of children is one of God's means for directing our lives.
 - C. Values such as reverence for God, respect for authority, truthfulness, fairness, diligence, responsibility, cleanliness, temperance and modesty which are instilled in children from the time they are babes will prepare a child for good decisions throughout life.
 - D. Foolishness is hereditary (**PRO 22:15**) but virtue must be *trained* into a child.
 - 1. train: To treat or manipulate so as to bring to the proper or desired form. To subject to discipline and instruction for the purpose of forming the character and developing the powers of, or of making proficient in some occupation. (Also with *up*.) a. To instruct and discipline generally; to educate, rear, bring up.
 - 2. Manipulation is the parent's domain, not the child's.
 - E. Nowhere does Scripture teach that parents should train up their children in the art of deciphering circumstances, inner voices, impressions or feelings in order to make decisions in accord with God's will.
 - F. God gave parents, not signposts, feelings or villages for children's direction and the parents had better take their responsibility seriously. This is an area where decisions will have life-long consequences for parent and child.

- XIII. Decision-making should begin with major foundational decisions which direct the course of later decisions. Joshua's decision stands out here. **JOS 24:15.**
- A. Christ is the best foundation. **1CO 3:11; MAT 7:24-25.**
1. The decision to follow Christ is the most important decision. **ACT 17:30-31.**
 2. *How* one builds on Christ (future decisions) will be tested. **1CO 3:12-15.**
 3. If we have committed to wholly follow Christ, we will decide *for* things that enhance that and *against* things which would interfere with that.
 - a. Since following Christ requires identifying with a local church (**ACT 2:38-41**) and regular assembly (**HEB 10:25**), we should make decisions that agree with those objectives. **MAT 6:33.**
 - b. Since God wills that we be able to give, we should make financial decisions that enable us to do that according to our own purpose. **EPH 4:28 c/w 2CO 9:6-7.**
 - c. Since quietness and meditation are vital to our spiritual health, we should make decisions to accommodate them. **ECC 4:6; PSA 1:1-3.**
 - d. Since too much care will choke God's word, we should limit cares. **LUK 8:14 c/w 1CO 7:32.**
- B. Life relationships like marriage and family are foundational decisions.
1. Paul makes clear in **1CO 7** that marriage or celibacy are choices in accord with the will of God.
 2. Whether one marries or not depends on one's ability to contain oneself sexually. **1CO 7:1-2, 8-9.**
 - a. Celibacy is a gift only to some (**MAT 19:11-12**), and we are warned against *boasting of a false gift* (**PRO 25:14**).
 - b. "For the man lacking self-control, the choice is between potential distraction (marriage) or potential destruction (celibacy)." (Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, p. 291)
 3. If one chooses to marry, Paul gives regulation for the married state.
 4. The freedom of personal choice in the marriage issue is affirmed in **vs. 25-28, 36-40.**
 5. Though not the only factor in decision-making, one's personal happiness is a factor to be considered. **1CO 7:40.**
 6. Deciding to marry or remain celibate are both acceptable choices to God as long as one obeys God's moral law relative to either state.
 - a. Marriage requires sexual fidelity (**JOB 31:1**) and godly relating. **EPH 5:22-33.**
 - b. Celibacy is not to be equated with self-mutilation or perverse sexual activities or relationships.
 7. One's decision to marry should flow out of one's commitment to Christ.
 - a. A Christian should desire a spouse who will work with them to build a marriage in keeping with biblical instructions. One should be realistic about a potential mate's attitudes towards this goal.
 - b. If a couple has children, the biblical training of those children will be handicapped in a divided household.
 - c. How one chooses to educate children should flow out of commitment to Christ.
 - (1) There are pro's and con's to public school, private school and home

school.

- (2) School choice should take into consideration the potentials for enhancing or frustrating the need to *bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*. **EPH 6:4.**
- (3) Remember what you were taught in the series, *Downside and Dangers of the Digital Age*. Even Silicon Valley executives recognize the inherent problems of electronic media relative to child development.

- C. A career or job should have an eye to God's law.
1. Employees have a moral duty to obey their employer. **EPH 6:5-8.**
 2. Will a job reasonably provide for one's own plus biblical needs of others? **1TI 5:8; EPH 4:28.**
 3. Would better education or training be in order? **ECC 10:15.**
 4. Will a job frustrate obligations to God and family?

XIV. Spiritual expediency is a factor in decision-making. **1CO 6:12.**

- A. expedient: Conducive to advantage in general, or to a definite purpose; fit, proper, or suitable to the circumstances of the case.
- B. Christians have a definite purpose: pleasing God (**HEB 13:21; 11:5**). Therefore, our pleasure in decisions we make in an area of liberty may have to take a backseat to what pleases God. **1CO 10:31-33.**
- C. Spiritual expediency prompted Paul to make certain decisions based on high priorities. **1TH 3:1-8; PHIL 2:25-30.**
1. Mind that these were decisions which Paul *thought good* and *supposed necessary*.
 2. Paul had no specific commandment: these were judgment calls HE made.
 3. He did not have absolute knowledge of all factors and possibilities but based his decision upon prudent evaluation of available information and upon biblical priorities.
- D. Spiritual expediency should establish priorities when making decisions.
1. Prioritizing means saying “no” to people, activities and opportunities that would encroach upon those priorities.
 2. You will not always be available for everybody and everything that would demand your time.
 - a. Time is a precious commodity that is to be redeemed if we would be in the will of God. **EPH 5:15-17; COL 4:5.**
 - b. Spending great amounts of time agonizing over a decision about a relatively insignificant thing out of concern of finding the “dot” of God's perfect will may actually put you *out* of the will of God.
 - c. “The perfect is the enemy of the good.” (Voltaire)
 - d. Don't sweat the small stuff and much of it is small stuff.
 3. Christ did not let men keep Him from fulfilling His priorities. **LUK 4:42-43.**
 4. Paul's good priorities played a strong role in his decisions. **ACT 18:20-21; 20:16; ROM 15:20-28.**

XV. Do appropriate research, when necessary, to make wise decisions.

- A. Nehemiah discreetly researched a major building project. **NEH 2:12-16.**
- B. This principle is at the basis of Christian discipleship. **LUK 14:28-33.**
- C. This principle is critical in the big decisions of everyday living, business, military strategy,

etc.

- D. This is the *work* of decision-making that people would like to escape by having a little inner voice or a sign tell them what to do because of invalid fears.

1. Fear can be a mask for *sloth*. **PRO 22:13.**
2. Let us not grow a wishbone where we should have a backbone.

XVI. Scripture teaches us to seek the counsel of wise persons in making decisions.

PRO 12:15; 13:1, 20; 20:18.

- A. wise: Having or exercising sound judgement or discernment; capable of judging truly concerning what is right or fitting, and disposed to act accordingly; having the ability to perceive and adopt the best means for accomplishing an end; characterized by good sense and prudence. Opp. to *foolish*.
- B. There are wise people who can give good counsel. **2SAM 16:23; 20:16-18; ECC 9:13-18.**
1. This should certainly be the case in the church. **ROM 15:14; 1CO 6:5.**
 2. “God has not promised to whisper 'perfect plans' or omniscience into the mind of any believer who asks. Accordingly, the apostles counseled that when a decision is required, those who are 'full of...wisdom' (Acts 6:3) and 'prudent' (1 Timothy 3:2) will do the best job. The church has not been told to identify those who are best at picking up and decoding inner impressions, but those who are mature and wise (1 Corinthians 6:5).” (Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, p. 261)
- C. We are told that there is safety in seeking out many counselors. **PRO 11:14; 15:22; 24:6.**
1. Be wary of twisting this principle as Rehoboam did (**1KI 12**), shopping for the counsel that agrees with your lusts. c/w **2CH 18:7.**
 2. Seek out spiritually mature counselors for Biblical principles that apply to a decision that you are facing.
 3. Seek the counsel of those who have experience in the area you are considering.
 4. Scorners will not seek counsel from the wise. **PRO 15:12.**
 - a. Those who avoid seeking counsel commonly do so because they know their plans would not meet with a good counselor's approval.
 - b. “Matrimonial cases have been numerous, and sometimes intricate and perplexed; made so not by the law of God, but by the lusts and follies of men; and often in these cases people resolve, before they ask, what they will do.” (Matthew Henry Commentary, Mat. 19:3-12)
 5. The best counsellors are God's testimonies (**PSA 119:24**), the keeping of which can make one wiser than the ancients. **PSA 119:100; 1TI 4:12.**
 6. Seeking counsel should not be viewed as a shifting of responsibility, a convenient way of blaming someone else if things don't work out well. The decision and responsibility still remain with the inquirer.

XVII. Effective leaders know that indecision or making no decision because of the possibility of an error, or falling apart because of a decision that was wrong are fatal traits in leadership.

- A. “Decisiveness is the willingness to make decisions, even in the face of complexity or uncertainty. When we are decisive, we weigh the information that is available to us and we use our judgement to choose among the possibilities. It is easier to be decisive when we are clear about our values and goals. Decisiveness means taking the risk that we may be wrong, but knowing that perfect clarity is rarely available and indecision can be costly. It also means taking responsibility for the outcome of the decision. Together, research, analysis and decisiveness get great things done.” (Anon.)

- B. When Joshua was distressed over a humiliation because of a decision he had made, God reproved him. **JOS 7:7-10.**
- C. Sometimes our indecision is simply owing to the fact that we can't bear the thought of making a potential mistake because our image would be tarnished by that.
 - 1. This is essentially a pride issue. We are plainly told to eschew pride and to not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. **ROM 12:3.**
 - 2. Life is full of decisions that have to be made. Let not the fear of an imperfect decision prevent the making of a decision. Waverers are not in control. **JAM 1:6.**
- D. "In any moment of decision the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing." (Theodore Roosevelt)

XVIII. There *is* a voice within us that should be heeded for direction in making decisions: conscience. **ACT 24:16; 1TI 1:19.**

- A. conscience: Consciousness of right and wrong; moral sense. The internal acknowledgement or recognition of the moral quality of one's motives and actions; the sense of right and wrong as regards things for which one is responsible; the faculty or principle which pronounces upon the moral quality of one's actions or motives, approving the right and condemning the wrong.
- B. The conscience is our inward awareness of right and wrong. It is not infallible but when it is instructed by God's law (preeminently the two great commandments), it is an effective guide in decision-making.
- C. It IS God's will that we heed the voice of conscience.
- D. To violate conscience even with regard to something that is not sinful is to defile it and incur judgment. **ROM 14:14, 20-23.**

XIX. Scripture warns against the power of contrary influences affecting judgment.

- A. We are responsible to lay claim to *soundness of mind*. **2TI 1:7.**
- B. Even the spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets, that is, under the rational control of the individual to speak or not to speak. **1CO 14:29-32.**
 - 1. The idea of involuntary utterance where the speaker is under the control of the spirit is not biblical.
 - 2. Jonah received revelation and consciously decided NOT to speak. **JON 1:1-3.**
 - 3. The apostles "...preached everywhere, the Lord working WITH them..." (**MAR 16:20**). It was not a matter of "the Lord worked them." c/w **EXO 4:11-12.**
 - 4. Balaam's ass (**2PE 2:16**) had involuntary utterance, not Christ's apostles. They were *taught* by the Spirit that they might *speak* by the Spirit. **JOH 14:26 c/w 1CO 2:13.**
- C. We should therefore be wary of whatever impairs our rational faculties since this reduces our ability to make good decisions.
 - 1. Intoxicants obviously impair judgment and therefore we should not be under their influence when making important decisions. **PRO 31:4-5.**
 - 2. Someone led by lusts is not in his right mind. **LUK 15:13-17.**
 - 3. Sexual desire and even love have the power to *ravish*. **PRO 5:19-20; SON 4:9.**
 - a. ravish: To seize and carry off (a person)...carry away...carry away from a belief or state.
 - b. There are three kinds of normally rational people with whom it is difficult to reason: the drunk (incl. drugs), the sexually aroused, and someone in love.
 - 4. Take stock of dietary elements which may negatively impact your ability to make

- good decisions. If you have noticed such associations because of things, for example, like sugar or stimulants, do not let them take control of you.
5. Be wary of sleep deprivation. It is much more difficult to think clearly when we don't get enough recuperative sleep.
- D. As noted earlier, the influence of unwholesome associations and communications are powerful forces which affect the mind (**1CO 15:33; PRO 13:20**). Peer pressure and emotionally dependent relationships are real and powerful forces that can impair sound judgment.
- XX. Intense pressure makes decisions difficult and the tendency is to make an impulsive choice rather than a faith-based rational choice. **MAT 26:51-53.**
- A. Obedience to God does not exempt us from times of *amazement* and *perplexity*. **MAR 14:33; 2CO 4:8.**
 - B. Remember the earlier observations about good resolve. If you are thinking biblically, even under pressure you will decide for the betterment of God, His kingdom and your soul. Remember the difference between the blessed Christian life (Abraham) and the blasted Christian life (Lot). **MAT 6:31-34.**
 - C. When in such situations, remember David. **1SAM 30:6.**
 1. When overwhelmed, David remembered God's previous help. **PSA 61:1-3 c/w 2CO 1:9-10.**
 2. Though pressured, David knew what NOT to do. **PSA 61:4.**
 3. Faith is sometimes a matter of not knowing all, or knowing the best, but knowing what not to do. **HEB 11:8, 15.**
 4. Eliminating known wrong choices at least reduces the chance of making a very poor decision. There is more mercy to the man who ignorantly makes a decision contrary to God's will than to the man who does know God's will and makes a decision contrary to it. **LUK 12:47-48.**
 - D. Consider the pressures that Rahab and Esther faced.
 1. Esther faced the pressures of potential Jewish genocide, God's law, conscience, honoring Mordecai and the threat of death. Her decision was based upon godly principle, eliminating the threat of death as a determinant. **EST 4:10-17.**
 2. Rahab faced the pressures of civil power and patriotic duty but chose rather a faith-based decision. **JOS 2 c/w HEB 11:31.**
 3. These were both high pressure decisions based not upon signposts, impressions, feelings or coincidences but rather upon known facts and godly principles.
 - E. Sometimes we may be pressured to make decisions where there are no "good" choices nor specific commandments to direct us. In such cases, remember the lepers of Samaria and choose the lesser of the evils. **2KI 7:3-5.**
 - F. Sometimes with the best of intentions of pleasing God, situations may become suddenly out of control, in which case we do well to appeal to God's mercies. **2CH 30:18-20.**
 - G. If we have to decide something based upon limited knowledge and/or without a clear commandment or principle to regulate that decision and we are not motivated by pride, lust, greed, envy (or other sinful initiators), we should make the best decision we can under the circumstances, commit the matter to God and see how things shake out. **PRO 16:3; PHIL 4:6-7.**
 1. There may be negative consequences that will be later regretted. **1SAM 22:22.**
 2. When a decision does not pan out, we do well to sweep up the pieces, add it to our "School of Hard Knocks" lesson book, not repeat it, share our lesson with others as

- needed and thank God for His mercy and promises to never forsake us. **HEB 13:5.**
3. **(PSA 125:4)** Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.
 4. **(PSA 7:10)** My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart.
 5. Failure can be the mother of success. Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."
- H. Differentiate between genuine and artificial pressure. The former may not be avoidable but the latter often is avoidable.
1. Artificial pressures may be a result of a series of choices which produce a sudden reality check. Example: You thought you could play fast and loose with credit and suddenly you are out of a job. Now what?
 2. We've probably all felt the artificial pressure of a clever salesman who knew all the right emotional buttons to push to convince us that the only sensible option was "Buy Now!" Remember **PRO 20:17**. Impulsive decisions, especially in big matters, can be very "instructive."
 3. Another form of artificial pressure is when we try to please everyone when making decisions. This is usually not the formula for success but rather for failure.
- XXI. Avoid decisions based on reactionary anger (**JAM 1:19; 1CO 13:5**). Even Christ's overturning of the tables was a meditated response. **JOH 2:14-15**.
- A. Ancillary to this would be decisions made for vengeance sake. **ROM 12:19**.
 - B. How many fateful decisions have sprung from a spirit of vengeance! **GEN 34:30**.
- XXII. Here are a couple of principles to observe in order to do God's will and have further direction.
- A. Bloom where you are planted.
 1. Be the best you can be where you are for the present.
 2. This principle may be seen in **LUK 16:10; 1CO 7:17-24; COL 3:23**.
 3. Such a person is one whom God advances when God is ready. **MAT 25:20-23; LUK 19:17; PRO 17:2; 22:29; 27:18; PSA 75:6-7**.
 4. Remember Joseph. In whatever capacity he was found, he was faithful.
 - B. God guides a moving ship.
 1. Do what you know to do now and God will direct you from there.
 2. We should follow the light we have in order to see light shining further. **PRO 4:18**.
 3. Paul had to follow instruction to go to Damascus before he would learn of the other things appointed for him to do. **ACT 22:10 c/w PSA 25:8-9, 12**.
 4. Disobedience will have a blinding effect that will hinder your forward vision.
- XXIII. Goals, attitudes and means need to be considered in decisions and courses of action.
- A. Goals. Consider what you want to achieve in making a decision. Does your objective square with Scripture or conflict with it?
 1. For example, an objective of becoming rich will expose you to many dangers. **1TI 6:9-10; PRO 28:20**.
 2. Seeking men's praise violates God's will. **MAT 6:1, 5, 16**.
 3. God's glory should be our top goal in all things. **1CO 10:31**.
 4. Scripture teaches us to seek the edification of others. **ROM 14:19; 1CO 14:26**.
 - B. Attitudes. Doing the right thing with the wrong attitude will not please God.
 1. As noted earlier, all things should be done with charity. **1CO 16:14; 13:1-3**.
 2. Give with cheerfulness rather than *grudgingly or of necessity*. **2CO 9:7**.

3. Some godly attitudes are humility, meekness, longsuffering (**EPH 4:2**), willingness (**2CO 8:12**), diligence (**ROM 12:11**) and contentment. **HEB 13:5**.
- C. Means. The right thing must be done the right way.
 1. God must be served in the manner which He has ordained. **DEU 12:32; JOH 4:24**.
 2. Scripture must be used according to its own rules of interpretation.
 3. Personal disputes must be handled according to **MAT 18:15-17**.
 4. Positive results don't justify disobedience. **NUM 20:7-12**.

XXIV. Do extra-scriptural prompts play any role in godly decision-making?

- A. Impressions.
 1. These are inward impulses, urges or other subjective sensations which, if given too much significance, become our "scripture." Recall the previous warnings against assuming ongoing revelation from God.
 2. Impressions are essentially emotional experiences: "I just *felt* God was leading me."
 3. Emotions can be influenced by many things: God, Satan, health, medication, diet, hormones, fatigue, lust, news, music, others' feelings, anticipation, dread, upbringing, loneliness, etc.
 - a. How does one determine the actual cause of the feeling, and why should it be assumed that the feeling must be from God?
 - b. Since impressions are emotion-based and emotions are variously influenced, impressions are not a reliable guide in godly decision-making.
 4. If an impression does not violate Scripture, then it is not sinful and that impression may (not *must*) be followed.
 - a. Mind that this is a case of revealed truth judging the impression, not an impression judging the truth.
 - b. It may even be wise to follow that impression since you are apt to do your best when you are inclined to do something, and doing one's best in a good thing is a Biblical principle. **ECC 9:10; ROM 12:11; COL 3:23**.
 - c. "Did God give me this impression?"
 - (1) That God gave the impression directly cannot be known for sure nor does it need to be known.
 - (2) God could directly impart it or it could come about from upbringing, instruction, personal ambition, etc.
 - (3) If the impression is a good thing, then it ultimately comes from God whether directly or indirectly through means of abilities He has imparted and circumstances He has permitted. **JAM 1:17**.
- B. Circumstances.
 1. Circumstances are the pros and cons of a given decision, things like means available, time available, people available, cost, opportunities, etc.
 2. Be wary of inquiring what God is trying to tell you by the circumstances. Remember that God is not *trying* to tell you anything.
 - a. He has already told you in His word what He wants to say.
 - b. God may providentially direct circumstances in your life that, when processed through the grid of Scripture, will be conducive to a good decision. But the determinant here is not circumstances, it is knowledge and wisdom.
 3. For circumstances to provide direction, they must be interpreted. This is where the

subjective element enters since multiple interpretations can be made of the circumstance. For example, what about where you are hindered from doing something?

- a. You might think God is trying to tell you that He doesn't approve of it.
 - b. You might think God is testing you to see if you will persevere.
 - c. You might think God doesn't want you to do it now but later.
 - d. You might even think that Satan is hindering you and, since you are to resist the devil (**JAM 4:7**), you **MUST** push ahead at all cost.
4. Relying on circumstances alone to determine good or evil is not only unreliable, it is downright pagan. **ACT 28:3-6**.
5. Among circumstances are open doors (opportunities).
- a. Do open doors specify what God wants done, or are they opportunities God permits wherein we must decide to avail ourselves of them or not?
 - b. Open doors are not always pathways to good. Recall Jonah. **JON 1:1-3**.
 - c. Scripture speaks of open doors which were opportunities for gospel ministry. **ACT 14:27; 1CO 16:5-9; 2CO 2:12-13; COL 4:3**.
 - (1) At Ephesus, Paul took advantage of an open door and *decided* that it was expedient to stay there a while. **1CO 16:5-9**.
 - (2) At Troas, Paul left that open door to search for Titus. **2CO 2:12-13**.
 - aa. He was awaiting word from Titus as to how the Corinthians had responded to his first epistle in which he had sternly upbraided them.
 - bb. In Macedonia, Paul met up with Titus who brought him the good news about Corinth's positive response. **2CO 7:5-7**.
 - cc. Paul here judged it spiritually expedient to make sure of the work at Corinth before starting a new work.
 - dd. If an open door is God signalling a "MUST DO" then to leave such an opportunity would be sin.
 - (3) Paul didn't need a sign to tell him to preach the gospel since God had already clearly commanded him to do so (**ACT 26:16-18**). All he needed was an opportunity *wherever* that might happen to be.
 - d. Paul purposed to come to Rome but was not permitted to do so. That door was closed. **ROM 1:9-15**.
 - (1) He didn't assume that was a sign from God that his plan was bad.
 - (2) He accepted that he was hindered for the present and would try again later.
 - e. A prayer for an open door should be viewed as a prayer for *opportunity* rather than a prayer for *guidance and compulsion*. It is up to the individual to judge the spiritual expediency of the opportunity.
6. Circumstances are not messengers telling us God's will; they are rather factors to be weighed in making decisions.
- a. Scripture determines right or wrong, not circumstances.
 - b. Scripture's wisdom applied to circumstances is what tends to a favorable outcome for which God may be thanked.

C. Personal peace.

1. There are various causes of a lack of peace.
 - a. One may be violating Scripture or conscience. If so, it is not the lack of peace determining the wrong, but rather the Scripture.

- b. It may be because of health conditions, medications, exhaustion, concerns, deadlines, uncertainties, fears, new experiences, major decisions, etc.
 - (1) In such cases, the lack of peace does not determine what one should do or not do.
 - (2) Should a minister fail to call for needed church discipline because of potential repercussions which make for a sleepless night before doing it?
 - (3) Should someone not get baptized because he fears to speak before the church or doesn't have every single question answered? Is this lack of peace a message from God to not obey His gospel?
 - (4) Often it is *after* we do the right thing that we find the peace which was lacking beforehand. **ISA 32:17; MAT 11:28-30.**
 - 2. Does **COL 3:15** teach that we should let peace in our hearts decide issues?
 - a. It must be noted that there is a counterfeit peace which can rule one's heart. **JOH 14:27 c/w LUK 11:21.**
 - (1) The men of Laish were at peace with their shameful living. **JDG 18:7.**
 - (2) Ignorance of truth or a seared conscience can produce an internal peace. **EPH 4:18-19.**
 - b. The context of **COL 3:15** is peace among brethren in the church. We are not to harbor hostility against one another in our hearts. Rather, the peace of God is to rule in our hearts because we have been called to peace in one body.
 - c. Peace is something to be acquired through obedience to God's revealed will rather than being something that determines God's will! **PHIL 4:6-9.**
 - (1) As that peace is attained through obedience, it can then rule in our hearts.
 - (2) That peace will control how we respond to situations and to our brethren and promote harmony in the church. **PSA 119:165.**
 - d. A lack of peace may prompt you to examine yourself whether you are in the will of God but lack of peace does not determine that: God's word does.
 - e. Whereas one's emotional condition does not determine right, it is a factor to be considered in decision-making.
 - (1) If one is not emotionally stable enough to handle certain tasks and situations, he should avoid them.
 - (2) Obviously, the person who falls apart under pressure would not be a good leader.
 - (3) Remember that faith builds confidence and strength (**HEB 11:34**) and prayers in this regard are very appropriate. **EPH 3:15-21.**

XXV. What about the examples in Scripture of people being given special guidance?

- A. Examples:
 - 1. God gave Israel a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to guide them in the wilderness (**EXO 13:21**). This ceased upon their entrance to Canaan.
 - 2. God told David to go up to Judah. **2SAM 2:1.**
 - 3. God instructed David about proceeding against the Philistines. **2SAM 5:18-25.**
 - 4. The Spirit told Philip to join himself to the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot. **ACT 8:29.**
 - 5. The Spirit told Peter to go to Cornelius' household. **ACT 10:19-20.**

- B. These examples do not prove that such special guidance is the norm for believers.
1. What about all the other examples where believers made very serious decisions *without* such special guidance?
 2. The number of these examples of special guidance is not sufficient to establish a norm for all believers.
 3. If such special guidance is the norm for all believers, then why is so much attention given in Scripture to the exercising of wisdom, prudence, discretion, etc.?
- C. These examples apply to people and events that occupied a special place in God's revelation.
1. Israel served as a type of the N.T. church. **1CO 10:1-11.**
 2. David was told to go up to Judah because that is where he would be made king, establishing the Davidic monarchy.
 3. The Philistines were threatening the fledgling Davidic monarchy so God gave special guidance in overcoming this resistance and further establishing David's kingdom. There were other times of conflict and danger in David's life when he did not receive such special guidance.
 4. The Spirit instructing Philip to minister to the Ethiopian eunuch set a precedent for the change in the law which now admitted eunuchs to the house of God.
 5. The Spirit directing Peter to go to Cornelius was a great turning point in the history of divine revelation in that uncircumcised Gentiles were admitted into the same church fellowship as the Jews.
- D. All these examples occurred before the completion of the canon of Scripture when such *partial* revelations ceased! The Book of Acts shows the early church gradually coming to terms with the full program of God for His church with God providing helpful prompts for the sake of His own timetable while their understanding was in its formative stage.
- E. These Bible characters needed these special revelations and so do we. We have them: they are recorded in the Scriptures for our learning to guide us and we need no more!
- ROM 15:4; 2TI 3:16-17.**
1. God's guidance of Israel with cloud and fire provides us with a beautiful type of God's guidance of His people by His Spirit through His word as we pass through the wilderness of this world to THE promised land. **PSA 119:105; 2PE 1:19.**
 2. Through the special revelations made to David we have record of the establishing of God's Judaic kingdom on this earth and the pedigree of King Jesus.
 3. Through the special revelations of battle plans we have a great manual on military strategy that has both natural and spiritual applications.
 4. Through God's guidance of Philip, we now have clear direction to admit eunuchs to the house of God based upon their spiritual fruit of faith.
 5. Through God's special guidance of Peter we now have clear direction for fellowship of Jews and Gentiles in the same body and also for the irrelevance of circumcision.
 - a. The apostles and elders had both special guidance and wisdom guidance to establish rules for Gentile believers.
 - b. **(ACT 15:28)** For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;
 - c. The Holy Ghost by special guidance and manifestation directed the baptism of Cornelius and his household. **ACT 15:7-8.**
 - d. The Holy Ghost's prophecies of old concerning Gentile inclusion were presented as further guidance. **ACT 15:13-21.**
 - e. The final determination for the Gentiles was according to wisdom guidance!

There was not a sudden new revelation from the Holy Ghost that said, “Here are the rules for Gentile believers.”

- f. The Holy Ghost then made sure that this record became part of Scripture.

XXVI. Is it wrong to ask God for a sign or to “put out the fleece” in seeking direction in a decision?

- A. The examples of Abraham's servant (**GEN 24**) and Gideon (**JDG 6:36-40**) are sometimes used to justify signs and fleeces.
- B. The sign Abraham's servant gave to God was this: the woman who would not only give drink to the servant when he asked for it, but would also give drink unto the camels, would be the one God had appointed for Isaac. **vs. 13-14.**
1. This experience is not exactly the norm for believers throughout the rest of Scripture nor for us today. Do we send servants out on spouse-hunting missions?
 2. God made a covenant promise to Abraham to multiply his seed through Isaac. This promise demanded that Isaac have a wife!
 - a. Observe how the account refers back to God's covenant with Abraham, which formed the basis for the success of the mission. **vs. 7, 27, 60.**
 - b. God does not make such a promise to every believer.
 - (1) Remember that there may be advantages in celibacy for believers. **1CO 7.**
 - (2) When Paul gave instructions in **1CO 7** regarding marriage, he did not teach them to invoke such a sign as this in seeking an appointed mate.
 3. Even when the woman complied with the servant's sign, the matter was not concluded in his mind (**v. 21**). He still inquired further to determine if she met Abraham's requirements. **vs. 7, 23.**
 4. Even when it was determined that the woman's background was acceptable, the matter was not concluded until her father, brother and she agreed to the marriage. **vs. 49, 57-59.**
 5. Therefore, the servant obviously viewed the giving of the sign as a highly unusual thing, especially since that alone did not decide the matter.
 6. God fulfilling a covenant promise to Abraham regarding Isaac is not the same as a couple of believers now deciding to marry.
 - a. No modern believers are being used to produce the covenant seed line that culminated in the generation of Jesus Christ. **MAT 1:1.**
 - b. Things different are not the same.
- C. Gideon sought confirmation that God would use him to save Israel by putting a fleece upon the floor. If in the morning the dew were only on the fleece but not the ground, then Gideon would know that God would save Israel by him. It came to pass. But for Gideon, that wasn't enough, so he reversed the sign the next day and that also came to pass.
1. First, God had already declared that he would save Israel (**v. 14**). Was the subsequent asking for a sign an act of faith or doubt?
 2. Gideon's sign was not merely a circumstance; it was a miracle. Should we start asking God for miracles to determine His will? Remember that sign-seeking is not unique to the godly. **MAT 12:39.**
 3. Gideon did not put out a fleece to *determine God's guidance* (which had already been given). Gideon was seeking *confirmation*.
 4. Gideon had already asked for a confirming sign and God granted it. **vs. 17-22.**
 5. Gideon's putting out the fleece was really an expression of his reluctance to believe

the call of God.

6. That Gideon asked God to not be angry when he changed the sign (**v. 39**) indicates that he knew he was on thin ice.
 7. God accommodated Gideon but God later judged Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, who sought a sign in unbelief (**LUK 1:11-20**). Should this be the model for us? Why choose Gideon's model?
- D. The examples of Abraham's servant and Gideon do NOT establish a precedent for us to follow.
- E. We have nothing in Scripture that instructs us or encourages us to seek signs from God to determine His will in decision-making. Scripture's commands and its principles of wisdom are to direct our decisions.

XXVII. "What if I have to make a decision and I pray, do my research and seek counsel yet I am not absolutely sure of what course to take? What if I make a wrong decision?"

- A. But for the decision to repent, believe and obey Christ, there are few decisions in this life in which we can be absolutely sure of their correctness.
- B. God's promise of wisdom to those who ask is not a promise of omniscience. **JAM 1:5**.
- C. We will never know everything there is to know about others, about situations or even about ourselves. **1KI 8:39; PSA 139:1-6**.
- D. Therefore, at best our data will be limited. But we can have sufficient understanding to know that a decision is at least within God's *revealed* will in Scripture.
- E. A *wrong* decision is one that violates the revealed will of God. If a decision does not do that, then it is not a wrong decision that merits judgment even though it may be an "educational" decision that has painful consequences.
- F. We can only make the best decisions we can with available data. This may mean selecting one of several choices which all seem good. Beyond that we must leave it to God.
- G. God allows us to be confronted with situations in which there are huge unknown dimensions.
1. These are opportunities for the exercise of faith, not abandoning known duty or promises of God. **ISA 50:10**.
 2. We may be sure that as we are striving to walk obediently, God will be with us. **2CH 15:2**.
- H. We learn more wisdom in the process of applying wisdom in making decisions. **PRO 4:18**.
1. The preceding verses of **JAM 1:5** show that we learn and improve through the challenges (trials) of our faith.
 2. Making decisions is a growth process.

XXVIII. What role does prayer play in making decisions if we have to do the research, seek counsel, and then make our own decisions?

- A. There is a cause and effect sequence with respect to prayer (**MAT 7:7-8; JAM 4:2**). Things happen because we pray.
1. Connect this with the fact that God governs all things, including our circumstances, choices and actions.
 - a. He directly causes some things. **EXO 14:21; PSA 135:7; 147:18**.
 - b. Other things He either permits or hinders. **PSA 76:10; ACT 13:18; 1CO 10:13; 16:7; JAM 4:13-15**.
 2. Therefore, there are things caused, permitted or hindered in response to our prayers.

- a. God withheld rain and also gave rain in response to Elijah's prayers. **JAM 5:17-18.**
 - b. Doors of opportunity for evangelism are opened in response to prayers. **COL 4:3.**
 - c. Our prayers to be delivered from temptation result in certain temptations not being permitted. **MAT 6:13; 26:41.**
- 3. But how God orders all those things is not for us to know. **ECC 11:5.**
- B. If you ask in faith for wisdom in making decisions it will be given but it will be withheld if you do not ask in faith. **JAM 1:5-7.**
- C. Consider what can happen to the person who does not pray for divine guidance.
 - 1. God can remove from him the sources of wise counsel to help him in making decisions. **ISA 3:1-4; 30:20.**
 - 2. God can take away his ability to understand the wisdom revealed in His word. **JOB 12:13-25; ISA 29:9-14.**
 - a. **EPH 1:15-18** shows that believers need *continual* spiritual enabling to understand the things of God.
 - b. In this case, the wisdom can be presented to the person yet he will reject it. **PRO 1:20-32.**
 - 3. God can unleash the devil on a person so that he will become so distracted and confused that he will be unable to think clearly. **DEU 28:28-29.**
 - 4. The person too proud to beg God for help will be denied needed grace in time of need (**JAM 4:6; HEB 4:16**) and don't we need help in making decisions?

XXIX. What about those times when you have followed every Biblical guideline in decision-making, you make a decision, and then it turns out badly?

- A. What makes a decision *bad* in your judgment? Is it because things didn't turn out as you planned?
 - 1. Oftentimes this is when doubts about one's spirituality, sincerity or wisdom set in. One may even start to question God: "Why did you let this happen?"
 - 2. Confidence is shaken, and insecurity about any big future decision takes over.
 - 3. Those who must make leadership decisions have the added burden on their hearts of how others are affected by a "bad" decision. Remember David. **1SAM 22:22.**
- B. Here are some examples of decisions that we might consider to have turned out badly:
 - 1. You decide to marry someone who seems to be a good person and then they turn out to be rotten or unfaithful.
 - 2. You make an investment that goes bust.
 - 3. You start a business and it fails.
 - 4. You decide on a course of treatment for a sickness and you don't get well.
 - 5. You decide to buy a house and then find out it that it has many defects which are very costly to remedy.
- C. Following Biblical guidelines will not make a paradise of this life.
 - 1. Because of the fall, we will always experience wants, inequities, and troubles in this world, even making the best of decisions. This even applies when we do those things specifically commanded in Scripture about which there is no doubt that we are doing the will of God. **2TI 3:12; 1PE 3:17; 4:16.**
 - 2. Because our path takes us through tribulation does NOT mean that God isn't leading us since tribulation is very much a part of the Christian path of life. **JOH 16:33; ACT 14:22; 1TH 3:3-4; 1PE 4:12.**

- D. That bad things happened after you made the decision does not mean that the decision itself was bad.
1. The minister who in obedience to the gospel baptizes someone who later turns out to be a hypocrite need not doubt that the decision to do what Christ commanded was a good decision.
 2. The believer who by wise and prudent evaluation of a potential spouse marries someone who only *later* shows their true colors may rest assured that their decision was not a bad one.
 3. The believer who decides on a course of treatment for a sickness but does not get better does not mean that the decision was bad.
 4. It is impossible for us to know future outcomes or perfectly know all present factors about things or people. Sometimes we have little choice but to make the best call that we can at the time and "...let her drive" (**ACT 27:13-15**).
- E. There are various reasons why God may permit us to make decisions that turn out badly.
1. First, we should remember that man's nature desires independence from God and free will to make his own choices. At least let us not fault God for giving us what we want.
 2. Perhaps God saw that your heart was too much set upon what you wanted, so He let you have it and let it turn out badly as a correction. **HOS 13:11; PRO 3:11-12.**
 3. Perhaps God is letting something fail or cause problems as a trial of your faith. **1PE 1:6-7.**
 - a. Trials are there because they *need* to be there.
 - b. Our trials will prove whether we are trusting God for Who He is or simply as someone to give us what we want.
 - c. Does your faith in the goodness of God remain unshaken when things don't turn out as planned? Or is God only good when He does what you want?
 - d. Perhaps you are limiting God's ability to care for you to what you decide is best for your life. God may well let your plans fail to prove to you that He can care for you regardless of your plans. **MAT 6:25-33.**
- F. Don't fail to notice the good things that sometimes come out of decisions which had negative outcomes.
1. Your marriage may fail but you are free to try again or remain single (providing the marriage covenant was dissolved for biblical reasons) and your experience has hopefully increased your insight and discretion.
 2. A convert turns out to be a hypocrite but the exposure of his hypocrisy is instructive to the rest of the congregation. **1TI 5:20, 24-25.**
 3. You may come out of a loss with a stronger faith in God and less love of the world.
 4. You may come out of tribulation with more patience and proof that you are a child of God. **ROM 5:3-5.**
 5. You may not recover from your sickness but you can be an example of unflinching faith (**JOB 13:15**) or you may die and be with Christ which is *far better*. **PHIL 1:23.**
 6. You may have just learned a valuable lesson about the ephemeral nature of this life or about personal ambition, pride, vanity and emotions.
- G. If you always judge afflictions as a bad thing for you, you have an opinion different from the Psalmist. **PSA 119:67, 71, 75.**
1. God is not necessarily mocking your prayer (**MAT 7:7-11**) because He permits adversity in your life. You ask for bread and the bread of adversity may be just the

- bread you need. **ISA 30:20-21.**
2. Instead of focusing on God to change our circumstances to make things easier for us, we should rather focus on asking God to help us to be the people we should be to honor Him no matter what the circumstances. **PHIL 1:19-20; COL 1:9-12.**
 3. “There is more evil in the least sin than in the greatest affliction.” (Matthew Henry)
- H. Perhaps we may never in this life know why God let something turn out as it did.
1. God has not promised that we will know and understand everything.
 2. But God has promised a peace “...which PASSETH all understanding...” (**PHIL 4:6-7**) when we cast all our cares upon Him.
 - a. We do not have to know everything to have this peace.
 - b. It is enough to know that God understands what is going on and that He has our best interest at heart.
 3. When Job got his audience with God, God did not tell Job *why* he was suffering but rather impressed upon Job the superiority of His power and wisdom.
 4. If our trust in God extends only to those things we understand, then our faith is in our understanding rather than in God.
 5. *There is no searching of God's understanding (ISA 40:28).* Learning to humble ourselves, live with this fact, and still trust God is one of the greatest lessons we will ever learn.
 6. Learning this lesson may be the very reason God lets our decisions turn out *badly*.