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Questionable but Popular Decision-Making Selected Passages

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PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: In this third installment on biblical decision-making we begin to consider many of the common ways that Christians will go about making decisions. The goal is to see how well those ideas hold up under biblical scrutiny.

I. Introduction.

- A. Today I want to take us through common methods that Christians use to make their decisions.
 - 1. There is no intent to hurt or embarrass anyone.
 - 2. In this process we need to remember the grace of God in our lives, in spite of ourselves.
- B. Three main areas that all decision-making models fall under. These areas are very broad in nature.
 - 1. Subjective.
 - a. This model is one that is almost completely based upon subjective opinion.
 - (1) This refers to when you depend upon yourself and personal experience for the determination of what is real. It involves the idea that personal feelings and personal understanding are the key criteria for what is good or right.
 - (2) The primary tool used in this approach is your personal experience. As a result consistency is often ignored and it is difficult to debate with the person who makes decisions based on this model.
 - (3) There are terms that are used in this model: "still small voice," "inner prompting," "lack of peace." There is also the use of various devices such as coin flips, paper-rock-scissors, or dice rolls.

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b. This model sees that there is a specific, “perfect” will of God for each person and that we are to discover it through many different methods.

2. Objective.

a. This model rejects the use of subjective methods of finding God’s will. They view Scripture being sufficient for making our decisions.

b. It believes in the supremacy of the Bible and view subjective methods as unacceptable since they allow for some other type of revelation from God other than the Bible.

c. As a rule, this model does not see that there is “perfect” will for each of us that is defined down to the tiniest details that we are responsible to figure out. Instead, when a decision finds itself outside clear commands of the Scripture (non-moral decisions) there is a relative God-given freedom for us to make decisions.

3. Combination.

a. This view is quite popular and takes a little from both of the other two views.

b. These models recognize that the Bible is authoritative and critical in the process of decision-making. However, they also do not see it as sufficient, therefore it needs to be supplemented by more subjective methods.

c. The subjective methods used are usually not extreme; but are seen as needed to help you determine how to be in the center of the will of God in your life.

d. This model also sees that there is a specific, “perfect” will of God for each person and that we are to discover it through many different methods.

I. Questionable Decision-Making Models.

A. Questionable decision-making practices.

1. Reasons to question them:

a. Errors in application or interpretation of Bible passages.

(1) The sticking point for many people is that they have biblical texts that seem to support their methods.

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- (2) But often these passages simply do not hold up when scrutinized.
 - b. The ability to bring self-seeking ideas into play.
 - c. A lack of biblical authority; therefore they are subjective.
2. Devices (Numerology, coin flipping, dice, cards, scissors-paper-rock, etc.)
 - a. Let's flip a coin, God's in charge anyhow so whatever it says." "It has to be God's will because it has the number 7 on the price tag."
 - b. Leviticus 19:26, "You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor practice divination or soothsaying."
 - c. Deuteronomy 18:9 "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. 10 "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12 "For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you. 13 "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. 14 "For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do so.
 - d. While these are part of the Law of Moses they also reflect the mind and attitude of God in this sort of activity.
 - e. Think about what is actually going on in many of these activities. They can seem innocent, and I believe that they are intended to be innocent by those doing it.
 - f. What is interesting to me is how often a person will choose to use one of these methods on certain decisions but not others. The question I have is why not for everything? And also, how binding are these events to the person?
3. Signs, fleeces.
 - a. Based off of Gideon putting out a sheep skin and asking God to do specific things with it for a sign (Judges 6).

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- b. Current day methods center around saying things like, “God, if you let such and such happen, then I’ll know this is Your will for my particular decision.”
 - c. But consider Gideon’s fleece:
 - (1) Judges 6:12-14 shows God’s will.
 - (2) 6:36-40 is an example of God’s patience not on how to make a decision. No where do we have any reason to see this as an example for us to follow.
 - d. There is a dangerous assumption that you are able to know the "why" behind what happens when you put God to a test.
4. Dreams.
- a. You are in the midst of a major decision and you have a strange dream that you decide must be a message from God.
 - b. Ezekiel 13:1-7.
 - c. Hebrews 1:1-2 with John 16:13-16.
5. Waiting on the Lord.
- a. Psalm 46:10 (Be still and know that I am God . . .)
 - (1) It is not a text that is teaching about making decisions, and the command to “cease” must be applied within the context of the Psalm.
 - (2) This speaks more to those who are filled with anxiety as they see injustice and evil grow.
 - (3) Often this is used in conjunction with
 - b. Isaiah 40:31 (They that wait upon the Lord . . .)
 - (1) This passage is telling us that to trust in our strength will not help us; rather, we are to trust in the strength of the Lord.
 - (2) This is a word of comfort to Israel (review from vs 21 on).

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c. In many ways this process is simply a cop-out. Often, what happens is that the person is afraid to make a decision so he simply sits back and lets the events decide for themselves.

6. Circumstances (open and closed doors, windows of opportunity, etc.)

a. Joshua 9 tells a sobering story of how the Gibeonites tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them so that they would not die. Joshua looked at the externals and improperly interpreted them.

b. 2 Peter 1:16-21.

c. This is fraught with opportunities for personal agendas and selfishness. We ask the Lord to arrange the circumstances is a certain ahead of time, then, when they are coming to pass, we assume that it is because this is the right decision.

d. One man said that open doors can lead to elevator shafts.

e. There are many interpretations to these situations. An example is if you were thinking of becoming a missionary to India but you are turned down for a visa.

(1) Don't go to India ever.

(2) Don't be a missionary.

(3) Don't go to India right now.

(4) God is testing me, I need to try again.

(5) It's Satan.

(6) Not India, but somewhere else.

f. Similar to how many counseled me to stop trying to be a police officer because God was "obviously" closing the door.

g. The problem with using circumstances is that you do not have a guaranteed key to use that helps decipher the hidden meaning.

h. They do bring you to a decision, but they actually don't guide you or tell you the right direction. That is up to your interpretation of the circumstances.

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- i. The “door” concept is used at times in the New Testament, each time the context is about opportunities to evangelize the lost.
7. Results.
- a. Just because something works does not make it right or of God.
 - b. In Numbers 20 Moses was told by God to speak to the rock and water would come out. Instead he struck the rock, water still came out (by God’s grace) but Moses was severely punished.
 - c. Matthew 7:21-23 speaks of judgment day. People are claiming to have done tremendous works in the name of the Lord and though Christ does not dispute their claims, also says that they were not saved.
 - d. This is situational ethics. It also carries the assumption that the right decision results in positive, pleasant results.
 - e. God’s providential guiding of our lives often leads us through difficult times of testing.
8. Feelings (Goose bumps, chills, the warm fuzzies, feeling ‘wrong.’)
- a. This is a very common method of making decisions. All the time we hear or say that we feel that God wants us to do something.
 - b. The problem is that feelings should not be the basis of leading or decisions. A prime example would be with Jesus Christ in the Garden prior to the crucifixion. He felt one thing, but it did not control Him.
 - c. The Bible teaches that God is Spirit (John 4:24), therefore you can’t ‘feel’ Him.
 - d. 2 Corinthians 5:7.
 - (1) Often quoted when using this method.
 - (2) God has given you a peace or a really strong feeling/conviction that you should do such and such. And because you walk by faith and not sight you are going to follow it, trusting God’s leading.
 - (3) But notice the text itself.

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- e. In the ultimate sense, this method is mystical in its approach to God's will because you are trying to determine what is spiritually real by personal senses rather than the Word.
 - f. Having "peace" about something fits into this category. Jonah had peace, he was actually sleeping, but he certainly wasn't obedient. Most of the passages that are used to defend this view have no bearing whatsoever on making decisions. There is certainly no direct teaching from the Bible on this method.
9. Inner voice (impressions, promptings, 'a still, small voice.')
- a. We will say that God really impressed upon me that I ought to not do something. There is a reasonableness with this due to the convicting work of the Spirit. This convicting work is in conjunction with the Word of God.
 - b. Often this is used in the smallest of details and is simply subjective at its heart.
 - c. At no time does the Bible teach us to listen for that inner voice. Commonly it is taken from the narrative of Elijah's time with the Lord. 1 Kings 19:11-12:
 - (1) Here you have the story of when God caused a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire to pass before Elijah, but God was in the still, small voice that came after instead of in those mighty displays of power.
 - (2) Often you will hear this text to be used to mean that we need to get to a quiet place and learn to hear God's voice. And often that voice is small and quiet so it takes training to discern it.
 - (3) Context is that Elijah is hiding from the queen, Jezebel, even though he had just been a witness of God's strength. God confronts him in vs 9 and Elijah answers in vs 10.
 - (4) What Elijah needs to learn is not how to hear God's voice but about why he ought not complain or question God.
 - (5) After seeing these three events God again speaks (13).
 - (6) Notice his answer and then God's in vss 14-17.

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- (7) How many people is he to anoint? To what might these three correspond?
 - (8) Finally, look at vs 18. What, then, is the gentle blowing?
 - (9) Conclusion: the three powerful forces of nature are the three people who will be used by God to judge others. But the fullest expression of God's presence is in His preservation of the prophets and in that is the promise to keep a remnant.
- d. I would argue that when a person begins to lean upon promptings and such that it is reckless faith. It leads us away from the sureness of the Scripture and causes us to lean on our own understandings.
 - e. Bottom line with these 'voices' is that we can never know for certain that they are of God, unless they square with clear biblical passages—which then causes us to wonder why God needed to say them again.
 - f. We are commanded to study and meditate on the Scripture, to cultivate wisdom and discernment, to walk wisely and make the most of our time; to obey God's commands, but never to listen to an inner voice.
 - g. As one man properly observed, there is no actual difference between responding to an inner voice or leading and acting as a fortune teller.
10. Counsel/Advice.
- a. This is another method that can be good, but not fool-proof. Men can be fooled (cf. Joshua 9) and they do not know your heart and motives.
 - b. Here we need to have a good understanding of our sinful tendencies. Remember James 1:14ff and that the source of temptations come from within us.
 - c. One huge temptation will be to hear only those who you want to hear.
11. Prayer.

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- a. This is obviously fine, but must be understood biblically.
- b. Prayer is not a two way process where we talk to God and He talks to us. That is no different than the people who channel spirits.
- c. Prayer is us talking to God. The way the Lord talks to us is through His Word.
- d. Prayer is giving praise, thanksgiving, requests, confession, not conversation.
- e. This is often why I question people when they ask me if I "prayed about it." My question is, "How will I know if God answers it?"

II. Conclusion.

- A. I trust that this is helpful.
- B. Behind all of this is the problem that cannot be resolved. If you believe God leads you through some or all of these methods, how do you know it is God? I have never, ever read or heard a reasonable or sound explanation.
- C. I want to remind you that just as God was gracious and patient with Gideon, so too with us. Because of Jesus Christ we are brought into His family. He is pleased with us and He cares for us like a father.
- D. And next week we will begin to look at how to make sound decisions.

Small Group Questions

- Discuss how this sermon affected those who heard it.
- What other ways do people use subjective methods to divine/discern God's will?