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The Building Blocks for Sound Decisions Selected Passages

Keywords: Decision-Making, God's Will, Prayer, Word of God, Wisdom, Counsel

PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: In this second installment on biblical decision-making we now consider some of the common pitfalls in making a decision and the basic foundation to begin to be in a position of sound, God-centered decisions.

CGL Time Management for Good Discussion Dismiss Decisions by Age Group

I. Introduction.

- A. Last week we established that there are two aspects to God's will.
 - 1. Decreed/sovereign/secret and revealed/preceptive/moral.
 - 2. We are expected to order ourselves as Christians under the revealed.
 - 3. We are never expected to search out the secret will. This is revealed through providence.
 - 4. If you learn just that you will be well on your way to better decisions.
- B. Ephesians 5:15-17 (briefly discuss context).

Haddon Robinson writes in his book *Decision-Making by The Book*, "Among the followers of the ancient pagan religions, knowing the mind of the gods was a central concern. Leo Oppenheimer, in the department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago, estimates that about 90 percent of the ancient cuneiform writings from Sumeria, Assyria, and Babylon have to do with divination—the attempt to understand the mind of the gods when making choices in life.

. . . Unfortunately, many modern followers of Christ do seek guidance in ways dangerously close to divination. . . . I have a friend who tells me that when he wants to find the mind of God, he sits down in an easy chair, clears his mind of every thought, and asks God to direct him. This friend believes that the first thought to come into his mind is divinely prompted. . . . Others play "biblical Roulette" to seek God's direction in their decision-making. They let their fingers walk through the sacred pages, seeking some kind of guidance as they scan the surface of God's

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Word. If a verse pops out at them while they're scanning, they believe that's what God is trying to say to them. Other people play "biblical roulette" by letting the bible flop open at a particular passage or verse and accept that as the voice of God.

There's an old, tired story of a man who was trying to find God's will this way. He simply shut his eyes, opened up his bible, and put his finger on a passage. Opening his eyes, he read the passage from Matthew 27 which says, "Then he went away and hanged himself." Somehow, the fellow didn't think that gave him the direction for his problem, so he closed his eyes again and opened his bible to another passage. He looked and read Jesus' statement in Luke 10: "Go and do likewise." That wasn't quite what he was looking for either, so he tried one more time. He shut his eyes, opened his bible, and read the statement in John 2:5, "Do whatever He tells you."

Another method well-meaning Christians have employed for finding God's will is the use of "promise boxes." You've seen these promise boxes; they're sold in many religious bookstores. The boxes contain cards listing a thousand verses, many of which are taken completely out of their context. For many sincere Christians, these promise boxes have sometimes served as instruments of divination.

A well-known Christian leader faced the impending death of his wife who was in a hospital intensive care unit. One morning as he was eating breakfast before going to the hospital, he noticed the promise box on the kitchen table. He reached in and pulled out a card. It said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me will never die" (John 11:25). Struck by the promise of the verse, he put it back in and reached in and pulled out second [sic] card. It said, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (Ps. 118:17).

The man was convinced that God had spoken to him. With the elation of his newfound inspiration, he left for the hospital filled with joy, convinced that God was going to raise up his wife and bring back her health again. He testified to his wife's nurses that God was going to perform a miracle. The next morning, his wife died. Not only was this good man crushed, but the name of God was blasphemed in that hospital. People observing this bizarre chain of events could choose their conclusion—either the man was a religious fanatic or God had gone back on His promise.

. . . When I was in seminary, I had a professor who used to say, "God always speaks loud enough for the willing heart to hear." That, too, seemed to be eminently good counsel. My heart was will, or at least it was willing to be made willing. But what my professor didn't tell us was precisely how the willing heart heard. Would I have a hunch that felt particularly inspired or perhaps a warm feeling in my willing heart?" (pp. 15-21)

- C. I have witnessed countless tragedies and heartaches due to faulty decision-making. As a pastor, it often seems that I am called in to help fix the consequences of foolish decisions.

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- D. Any pastor or elder would find that many of the following actions and consequences have been seen in their local church:
 - 1. Marriages that have been rushed into or out of.
 - 2. Jobs that have been abandoned.
 - 3. Babies that have been aborted.
 - 4. Diseases that have been contracted.
 - 5. Integrity that has been destroyed.
 - 6. Reputations sullied.
 - 7. Debt accrued.
 - 8. And at the end of so much of it is the sound of sorrowful sighs as the life begins to enter the final stages and regret settles upon the person.
- E. It is important to understand that many events happen long after the initial flow of bad decisions are made.
- F. Dr. Stuart Scott, whose doctoral study was on this subject and is the source of much of what I will teach, said that “it is rare to encounter Christians who think discernibly when it comes to determining God’s will, understanding God’s guidance, and making decisions with confidence before God.”
- G. Yet, life is nothing more than a series of decisions strung together. And how a believer makes decisions sets into motion many potentially long-term events in their lives and those around them.

II. Foundational problems with good decision-making.

- A. Lack of clear, biblical knowledge and understanding.
- B. Lack of careful study of the biblical data related to God’s will.
- C. The influence of subjectivism.
- D. A wrong understanding of man’s heart.
 - 1. Jeremiah 17:9.
 - 2. Ecclesiastes 9:3.
- E. The use of ungodly and unwise people.
 - 1. There is a real temptation for all of us to surround ourselves with people who will approve of our actions rather than give God-centered, wise counsel.

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2. Proverbs 2:20.
 3. Proverbs 12:5.
 4. Proverbs 13:18.
 5. Proverbs 14:7
 6. 2 Corinthians 11:13.
 7. Ephesians 4:14.
- F. Satanic and demonic forces.
1. Satan's primary function is that of deception.
 2. 2 Corinthians 11:14.
 3. 1 Timothy 4:1.
 4. James 3:14-15.

III. Foundation for biblical decision-making.

- A. An aspect that commonly is missing from the decision-making process of believers is the pursuit of delighting in God in all that we do. Often decisions are made for the moment rather than with a sense of eternity and with a desire to enjoy the Lord and His gifts.
1. 1 Timothy 4:1-6.
 2. Romans 14:4-6.
 3. 1 Corinthians 10:31 (show the following verses as well to show that there is another aspect that needs to be thought of as well—the salvation of souls. But point out that this second aspect must come after the conviction of first the glory of God).
- B. Broadness of Scripture's value.
1. 2 Peter 1:3, “. . . seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”
 2. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

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- C. Only reliable source of truth for salvation and sanctification (holiness).
 - 1. Psalm 19:7-9, “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.”
 - 2. John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”
- D. The renewing of the mind.
 - 1. Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
 - 2. Ephesians 4:20-24, “But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”
- E. Prayer.
 - 1. I do not mean that type of prayer where we vaguely ask God to show us His will. Rather this is a type of prayer that is a consistent prayer that is seeking God’s work in maturing us so that when we must decide it is done well.
 - 2. Philippians 1:9-11.
 - a. Verse 9:
 - (1) Shows that there is the presence of this love already in their lives. This is a simple truth of the Christian. As John says it in 1 John 4:7-8 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

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- (2) This love is not a vague love that is designed to primarily create warmth of feeling. Divinely wrought love operates and dwell “in real knowledge,” which is an intensified form for “knowledge” in Greek. This term speaks of a deep knowledge of religious truth and doctrine. It is nothing less than biblical and theological knowledge.
 - (3) The love is also defined in that as true, divine love increases in the person there increases a level of discernment. This helps confine and conform that love to the glory and delight of the Lord.
- b. Verse 10:
- (1) Note the purpose of this growth in love, biblical knowledge and discernment (“so that”).
 - (2) The person is now equipped with the ability to approve that which is excellent. “Approve” refers to putting things to the test, examining something to see if it fits the criteria of being “excellent.” “Excellent” here is interesting in that it speaks of those things that are superior over other things. In other words, it is not knowing just good or bad, but also better and best.
 - (3) When one has matured in this manner there is a natural result (“in order”). There is a practical holiness that becomes resident in your life. “Sincere” speaks of moral purity and clarity in living. “Blameless” speaks of living in such a way as to not be a trouble to others (cf. Acts 24:16 "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.)
3. Ephesians 1:18ff.
4. Ephesians 3:14ff.
- a. You will notice that this prayer is very focused and purposeful.
- (1) This is the type of prayer that a mature believer would give.
 - (2) Not a lot of wandering around or improper theology.

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- b. The prayer is logically built and one cannot experience the goal until each step has been met.
 - (1) There are four, key verbs which direct the flow of his prayer to its goal—the exceedingly abundant work of God in our lives..
 - (a) The first is—to be strengthened (vs. 16).
 - (b) The second is—to dwell, settle down (vs. 17).
 - (c) The third is—to apprehend, comprehend (vs. 18).
 - (d) The fourth is—to know, especially in an experiential way, of spiritual things (vs. 19).
 - (2) Three *hina* (ἵνα) clauses found in verses sixteen, eighteen (actually 17), and nineteen denoting clear goals which are logically and necessarily built upon each other.
 - (3) Just one key observation regarding vs 16.
 - (a) Notice that little word “in.”
 - (b) The preposition "in" is eis, "into" and is a preposition of motion. The strengthening was to take effect by means of power imparted . . . through the Spirit of God into the inward man. The "inward man" is viewed here as the recipient, that into which the strengthening was to be poured, or the object towards which the gift was directed (Wuest, p. 88, vol 1).
 - (c) The idea then that Paul is praying for is that it is through the Spirit of God that this strength is brought into the inner man, building him up, renewing him, and giving him the strength to press on.
 - (d) The Spirit; therefore, is not merely increasing your strength, but is pouring His strength into your inner man.
 - i) This is important.

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- ii) If you are in the habit of quenching and grieving the Spirit, then you cut off this flow of this God-given source of vitality.
 - a) Your inner man suffers and grows weak.
 - b) And you never experience this power operating in you that Paul is praying for.
 - c) Why? Because you default at the most basic level!
 - 1) This is why you are called to holiness, this is why you are commanded to put away sinful things and put on godly attitudes and actions.
 - 2) It is not just because if you do that you look good.
 - 3) It is because it put you into the first step of having the fullness of God's power flow through you.
- iii) By the way, notice that it also says "with power."
 - a) That word is the Greek word *dunamis*.
 - b) Paul wants us to be filled with spiritual dynamite.
- (e) The unlimited power of God is gathered together on our behalf, yet we approach life as if we were an army equipped with spiritual popguns.
 - i) Beloved, too often we never get to enjoy the renewing, rejuvenating work of the Spirit for one simple reason. He is too busy doing

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His work of convicting us of sin that we are holding onto.

- ii) If your inner man is weak, how do you expect to fight the desires of your flesh? How will you ever fight the schemes of Satan or the world?
- iii) And what is that desire?
 - a) That they would be filled with the fullness of God.
 - b) And the prayer shows us the process that is needed for them to ever reach that goal.

IV. Conclusion.

- A. Good decisions don't just happen.
- B. Grace covers much folly but there comes a point where that ends. Where you become like those the writer of Hebrews writes, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food." (Hebrews 5:12)
- C. Be convinced that God desires your good.
- D. Be convinced that He has not left you without wisdom and His will.
- E. Be convinced that you will spend a life learning this so get started now.
- F. Be humble in that you don't know all things and that God's will may radically differ in reality from what you perceive it to be.
- G. Remember your High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is sympathetic to your struggles and who is your perfect Mediator before the Father. Therefore have confidence that your Father hears you as you plead your case and lay your fears and questions before Him.

Small Group Questions

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- Go through the group and list the kinds of decisions that are facing them. (Use your time well here and don't be afraid to tell a person to make their point if they get off topic)
- Now pick a couple of the decisions facing the people and begin to talk about how much of the Word of God is influencing their process of deciding. In other words, ask what passages and what theological points are driving and speaking into their process of decisions.
- Then, as a group, work out how a prayer might be constructed, based on the three we went through in the sermon, that reflects the key points learned. Watch out for "nothing" words like, "glorify God" or "Trust God." Ask for definitions after definitions of what is meant for often these are empty of any real meaning for the person.
- The is work, so roll up your sleeves and work at it.