

Biblical Decision-Making

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I. The Importance

- A. The Topic within Scripture

- B. The Topic to Our Daily Living

II. Key Definitions

- A. God's Decretive Will
 - 1. God's sovereignty
 - 2. Providence of God

- B. God's Preceptive Will
 - 1. Not mysticism
 - 2. Biblical principles
 - 3. Wisdom

III. Presuppositions

- A. We do not need to know God's decreed will and how He is providentially bringing it about before we make a decision (Deut. 29:29).

- B. The Holy Spirit's role is to convict, teach and conform us – all through the vehicle of the Word of God (John 16:8; 17:17).

- C. God only guides or leads His people today:
 - 1. By providence (we know it after the fact) – Proverbs 21:1
 - 2. By Scripture (we can know it before we act) – Psalm 73:24

- D. God is a gracious God who has provided everything we need in order to do what He wants us to do (2 Pet. 1:3).
- E. God holds us fully responsible to search out and follow His preceptive will (God's written Word) in all of life (2 Tim. 2:15).
- F. If we make a decision based on biblical commands and principles alone we can fully trust that we are pleasing God in our decision and fully trust that He will providentially (by circumstances out of our control) change our choice if it is not within His decreed will (Ps. 119:30; Prov. 16:9).
- G. To rightly interpret and apply the Word of God we must use a prayerful, literal, historical, contextual, and grammatical method of studying it (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 1:20).
- H. No one is ever outside of God's decreed plan (Lam. 3:37-38; Rom. 8:28-29).
- I. Every believer needs pastoral oversight and the body of Christ to help him stay true to God's Word (Prov. 18:1-2; Heb. 13:17).

The insistence of Jesus and the Old Testament writers was not on the importance of discovering the will of God, but always upon the necessity of doing it. It was as if they took for granted that we would know what we were to do (revealed will). The battle for us seems to be in the diligent study of His revealed will (2 Tim. 2:15), the application of it (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jas. 1:19-27), along with the proper motivation (Ps. 1:2; 40:8; 119:16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 174).

“The Bible must be our standard. Whenever we are confronted with a question about Christian practice, we must apply the teaching of the Bible. Sometimes the Bible will deal with it directly, and we must go by its direct teaching. Often the Bible will not deal with it directly, and then we must look for general principles to guide us. It does not matter what other people think. Their behavior is not a standard for us. But the Bible is a standard for us, and it is by the Bible that we must live” (J.C. Ryle, *Walking with God*).

IV. Accurately Interpreting God's Revealed Will

Principles:¹

1. Literal Principle
2. Historical Principle
3. Grammatical Principle

¹ John MacArthur, *How to Get the Most from God's Word*.

4. Synthesis Principle

5. Practical Principle

V. Methods and Motives to Be Cautious of

- A. Misusing the Bible
- B. Personal Advice
- C. Circumstances / Results
- D. Setting Up Conditions
- E. Opened and Closed Doors
- F. Ideas, Inner Feelings, Desires, and Impressions
- G. An Audible Voice
- H. Misusing Prayer
- I. Inner Peace
- J. Devices
- K. Signs
- L. Dreams
- M. “Waiting” on the Lord
- N. Conscience
- O. Reason
- P. Faith
- Q. Fasting
- R. The “Call”
- S. Small Group (“...where two or three are gathered...”)

VI. The Biblical Principles and a Suggested Method

A. Prerequisites for Biblical Decision-Making

- 1. Be rightly related to Christ (2 Cor. 5:14-21)
- 2. Pursue a life of worshiping God (John 4:23-24; 2 Cor. 5:9; Phil. 1:21; 3:10-14)
- 3. Recognize God’s sovereignty over all (Ps. 115:3,8; Eph. 1:11; Eph. 5:17; James 4:13-16; Prov. 16:9; Rom. 8:28-29)

B. Principles

- 1. Scripture has bearing on all decisions, one way or another (e.g., direction, motives, behavior, etc.)
- 2. Wisdom
- 3. Purposeful freedom
 - a. Matt. 22:37-40
 - b. Phil. 2:1-5
 - c. 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23-24

d. Gal. 5:13

4. Desire

a. Ps. 37:4

b. Phil. 2:12-13

c. “Wishes” (1 Cor. 7:36, 39; 10:27)

C. Process (these all interrelate)

1. Continually have a humble, yielded, and dependent will before God (Rom. 12:1-2).

2. Continually pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5).

3. Gather all the factual data (Prov. 18:13).

4. Study any direct commands in Scripture concerning this particular issue (2 Tim. 2:15). Make use of a Bible concordance, Topical Bible (with caution), and other Bible reference books.

5. Study any indirect principles/statements in Scripture concerning this issue (2 Tim. 2:15)?

6. Weigh the purposeful use of freedom (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 8).

a. Is there anything wrong with this activity? Is it lawful (1 Cor. 10:23)

b. Is it self-serving at the expense of someone else’s benefit? (Rom. 15:1-2; 1 Cor. 10:33; Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:1-4)

c. Is this something I can thank God for? (Rom. 14:6; 1 Cor. 10:30; Col. 3:17)

d. Is this something that will glorify God? (1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:9)

e. Is this worth imitating? (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9)

f. Is this following the example of Christ? (Rom. 15:7-8; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 John 2:6)

g. Will my choice affect others around me? If so, in what way?

h. Is it beneficial? Does it promote my spiritual life?

i. Is it a practice that over time will tend to master me? Will it stimulate a desire that will be difficult to control?

j. Is it constructive? Will it promote the spiritual well-being of other believers if they engage in this practice that is permissible for me?” —Jerry Bridges (*The Discipline of Grace*, 213)

7. Affirm that your desires are God-honoring (Ps. 37:4).
 - a. What do I want to do? Will it bring glory to God? (1 Cor. 10:31)
 - b. Is this an occasion where my “flesh” (sinfulness) is seeking to indulge itself? (Gal. 5:13)
8. If you still can’t decide:
 - a. Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:25 (“holding principle” = if it involves the conscience)
 - b. Gather more data (Start over)

VII. The Case Studies from Jay Adams’ the *Christian Counselor’s Casebook*

- A. #6 Page 12
- B. #18 Page 36
- C. #21 Page 42
- D. #26 Page 52

VIII. Further Resources

- A. John MacArthur
 1. *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993)
 2. *Found: God’s Will* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1978)
 3. *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991)
 4. *Reckless Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994)
- B. Jay Adams
 1. *A Call to Discernment* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1987)
 2. *What to do on Thursday* (Hackettstown, NJ: Timeless Texts, 1995)
 3. *A Christian’s Guide to Guidance* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 1998)
- C. Gary Friesen, *Decision-Making and the Will of God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980)
- D. Arthur Johnson, *Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).
- E. Jim Petty, *Step by Step: Divine Guidance for Ordinary Christians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999).
- F. David Swavely, *Decisions, Decisions: How (and How Not) to Make Them* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003).