

WHAT IN THE WORLD? A SERIES ON DECISION-MAKING

Part 1: Decisions about Practices

Does Anybody Here Know Right From Wrong?

(Caleb Phelps • 5/16/12)

Introduction: Do you have trouble making decisions? For most of us it is difficult to know if we're using good judgment as we make daily decisions about life. It becomes even harder with important, life changing decisions. When making decisions everyone must use one common denominator – judgment. The truth is, that everybody uses judgment every day in the decision making process. It just gets complicated when other people evaluate that judgment. It seems like whether the choice made was good judgment or bad judgment depends on who you ask.

So how do you know who to listen to? Who gets to decide if you're showing good judgment?

Cultural Background: In our generation, "youth sets the pace." Everyone wants to be youthful. We can see this evidenced by face-lifts, tummy tucks, health clubs, youth fashions etc. Because of this trend toward youthful thinking we live a day in of questions - questions that deserve to be answered.

The questions asked are not asked by the world alone. Many Christians are asking "why can't I do it?" Sadly questions that begin with "why" have been shot down for years. Some wrong answers to this question include:

1. Because my church says so . . .
2. Because my school says so . . .
3. It doesn't seem right
4. I don't know
5. Because

Sadly the reason that the question "why" is so often answered incorrectly is because of Biblical illiteracy. Surveys have been done regarding Biblical literacy in America. USA Today published an article on March 14, 2007 entitled "Americans get an 'F' in religion." In the article it says that 60% of American's can't name 5 of the 10 commandments. 50% of high school seniors think Sodom and Gomorrah were married.

Another article published by USA Today on September 29, 2010 showed that 45% of American's believe that the Golden Rule was one of the 10 commandments. Time magazine observed in a 2007 cover story that only half of U.S. adults could name one of the four Gospels. Fewer than half could identify Genesis as the Bible's first book. The Barna Study Group published in 2009 that 73% of American's believe that there is no such thing as Satan. The Bible seems to have been forgotten by American's across the country.

Spiritual Responsibility: As Christians we need to set the pace in our generation with principles from God's Word.

For Christians the answer is easy – look to God for the solution. We believe that God's Word is completely reliable and infallibly, we believe that relying on the Bible will shed light on just about any issue. James 4:17 teaches us that, "to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

The church is supposed to be the divinely appointed example of Biblical morality. Christ made the Church the Pace-maker saying the church is "light" and "salt" (Matthew 5:13). The question then bears asking: Why is today's church doing such a poor job of setting the example?

A: Because of sinful men and because carnality has taken its toll

There are times when it is easy to follow God's Word because the Bible gives a clear law that we should obey like "Don't commit murder" or "Don't commit adultery." But what about issues we face that are not clearly addressed in Scripture.

Interrogative: What if the Bible does not explicitly say whether or not something is right or wrong?

Transition: Before we look at the true Christian ethic, let's look at some of the alternatives that are commonly held.

MAN'S ETHICAL CONFUSION

Ethics = the system that one uses to determine right from wrong

1. Ancient Men

- Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus sought after something called Ethereal good.
- They felt that somewhere there existed good, but that good could not exist in matter because matter is evil
- What kind of problem would a person that holds this view run into? A: Explaining Christ in flesh

2. Modern Men

- Dewey, Komte, and others, taught that there is no superior good
- They say that all there is matter
- Man becomes deity because his universe is all there is
- The following are some of these men's most famous statements
 - "Life is a war of survival of the fittest." (Darwin)
 - "The end justifies the means." (Marx)
 - "If it feels good do it." (Freud)
 - "We must determine right or wrong from the individual situation." (Hegel)

What seems to be the underlying cause of all this confusion? A: sin (Romans 7:20)

GOD'S ETHICAL COMMANDMENTS

God presents many standards that the Christian must guide his life by. All of these standards are to be balance by three principles.

1. *The principle of Love*

- Explanation: Proper love will allow us to live perfect Christian lives
 - Love towards God (Matthew 22:36-40)
 - Love towards others (Romans 13:8-10)
 - Love towards self (Galatians 5:10)
- Christians have the potential ability from the indwelling Spirit to be living a life of proper love (Romans 5:5).

2. *The principle of Law*

- Warning: Watch out, don't say, "Here comes the legalism that I've been expecting!" If we say that we should be aware of 1 John 5:3 where the Scripture says that the true lover of God will keep his commandments.
- Explanation: God's commandments are 3 directional:
 - Keep the law for God (Exodus 20:3)
 - Keep the law for others (Romans 12:10)
 - Keep the law for self (Colossians 3:2)

3. *The principle of Liberty*

- Warning: When some people come to this principle they immediately assume that we as Christians can do anything we want and get away with it. Can we?
- Explanation: Because Christ has redeemed us from the law, we now have liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 5:1; 1 Corinthians 8:9)

They Key is BALANCE

If a person isolates any one of these three principles he will have problems

- Too much *love* brings *lust*.
- Too much *liberty* brings *license*.
- Too much *law* brings *legalism*.

Galatians 5:13; Romans 6:22, and many other verses tell us that we must make every attempt to live a balanced Christian life according to the "BIG THREE" ethical principles of Love, Law, and Liberty.

Transition: Many people are living their lives as if there were no answers to their questions. Someone once said

Today there is no day or night
Today there is no wrong or right,
Today there is no black or white,
Only shades of gray,
Only shades of gray.

This is a pessimistic attitude. Yet, it is seen often in statements like: "The Bible does not say, 'Thou shalt not like rock music' or 'Thou shalt not smoke.'

Interrogative: How do I answer these questions when the Bible gives no direct commands?

STEP #1: BECOME WHAT YOU ARE

Those who have accepted Christ as their Savior are new-creatures.

Biblical Data:

- "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- "You have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:10)
- "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 3:10)

Explanation: When our minds and hearts are renewed by the Holy Spirit, we "put on Christ" we are "new creatures." We have "put off the old man with his deeds" and "put on the new man." We are changed literally "renewed" in knowledge and the spirit of our minds.

Application: So, "What responsibility does this place on those who are being transformed?" As new creatures we are commanded to do certain things and to forsake certain things.

1. Put off the old man

"That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." Ephesians 4:22

2. Put on the new man

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." Ephesians 4:23-24

“Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.¹⁴ But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:12-14)

Practice: Step #1 is the building block that holds all the rest of the principles. It’s the first filter that any decision must be run through. When you make a decision – big or small – ask yourself, “Does this help me become who I am?” Nothing is more important to God than our spiritual development.

STEP #2: OBEY GOD’S COMMANDMENTS

Interrogative: Is there a specific command in Scripture that would prohibit doing this?

God’s commands are to be obeyed. The reality is that there is not decision that needs to be made when there is a clear command in the Bible concerning the matter.

Biblical Data:

- “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” (1 John 2:3)
- “If you love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

Practice: Simple obedience is the proper response to the God’s commands. If God says don’t and you do that is sin. Don’t complicate a decision because you think the Bible doesn’t apply to your situation.

STEP #3: APPLY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Interrogative: Are there general principles in Scripture that would affect my decision?

When there is not a clear command that is to be obeyed, then God has given us principles in His Word that we should apply.

Biblical Data:

1. Principle of Glorifying God (We are supposed to be accurate billboards for our God.)

- “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

2. Principle of Association

- “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2) – *We are not to look like this world*

- “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (1 John 2:15) – *Lovers of this world are not children of God*
- “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4) – *Lovers of this world are enemies of God*
- “For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.” (Luke 12:2-3) – *What if everyone knew I did it?*
- We should not associate ourselves with that which is (or may be) inappropriate. We are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:22 to abstain from activities that have the appearance of evil. What is the dominant association of the activity? If people see you doing it, will they immediately think you are involved in something inappropriate for a Christian? If so, then you should not participate.

3. Principle of Edification

- *Will it edify me spiritually?* (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23)
- *Will it hinder me spiritually?* (Hebrews 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 9:27)
- *Will it make future sin easier?* (Deuteronomy 12:30; Romans 13:14)

4. Principle of Affect

- Romans 14:13,21 – I am commanded to not cause another believer to sin.
- 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 32-33; Philippians 2:1-3 – I am not to be self-focused but others-focused.

5. Principle of Doubt

- “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.” (Romans 14:23)
- When you are unsure as to whether an activity is right or wrong, the Doubt Principle says that you should not do the activity. According to Romans 14:21 and 23 we should not engage in activities if we are unsure as to whether it is appropriate. In fact, the Bible goes as far as to say that engaging in an activity when you are not convinced it is the right thing to do is sin.

6. Principle of Enslavement

- The Bible says a Christian is to be controlled by the spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

Practice: Instead of just doing things and wondering if God is pleased with them, let’s take the principles found in God’s Word and apply them to each and every situation.

STEP #4: ALWAYS PURSUE A LIFE OF WORSHIPPING GOD

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

Explanation: The aim of Romans 12:1-2 is that all of life would become “spiritual worship.” “The aim of all human life in God’s eyes is that Christ would be made to look as valuable as he is. Worship means using our minds and hearts and bodies to express the worth of God and all he is for us in Jesus. There is a way to live—a way to love—that does that. There is a way to do your job that expresses the true value of God. If you can’t find it, that may mean you should change jobs. Or it might mean that verse 2 is not happening to the degree it should.” (John Piper)

Biblical Data:

- “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24)
- “Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:9)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The Bible does not always say “Thou shalt” or “thou shalt not,” but it does give us principles that we need to use in order to answer the questions that we encounter in our lives.

Let the Word of God capture your affection. “His delight is in the law of the Lord.” Delight = Pleasure! The Word of God isn’t a Book of fables, myths and legends. To the child of God it is the very Word of Truth. The truly happy man is not under the law as a curse and condemnation, but he is in it, and he delights to be in it as his rule of life; he delights, moreover, to meditate in it, to read it by day, and think upon it by night.

“Never reduce Christianity to a matter of demands and resolutions and willpower. It is a matter of what we love, what we delight in, what tastes good to us. The righteous and the wicked are separated by what they delight in—the revelation of God or the way of the world. But someone may ask: How can I come to delight in the Word of God? My answer would be twofold: 1) pray for new taste buds on the tongue of your heart; 2) meditate on the staggering promises of God to his people.” (John MacArthur)