

# Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

## Topic 18 – Decision Making

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### Introduction

As we read the Bible and grow in our knowledge and understanding of who God is and what He desires for us, we immediately see that God has specific commands for us. These are “Dos” and “don’ts” that are for His glory and our good. However, life is full of decisions that do not specifically have prescribed Biblical “dos” and “don’ts”. These are the gray areas of decisions. For example: what to eat or drink, what to wear, how to spend free time, what to buy, what job/career to pursue, whom to marry, etc.

❖ **What are some specific decisions that fall in the gray area?**

❖ **How do you make those decisions?**

We have looked at God’s sovereign will when studying about suffering. Now we want to look at how God’s sovereignty relates to believers making decisions. If we misunderstand what the Scriptures teach in this area we may experience much emotional turmoil. We may go through life filled with “buyer’s remorse” due to decisions that, from our perspective, do not turn out well. Our walk could become laborious and stressful. Before we study about making decisions, we must first understand what the Scriptures say concerning God’s will.

### God’s Sovereign Will

We have already described God’s sovereign will as God’s predetermined, perfect plan in which He is directing all events according to the counsel of His will and for His glory (Eph 1). Let’s review a few concepts related to God’s sovereign will.

– God’s sovereign will is certain – nothing nor no one can thwart or resist it. It **will** come to pass.

<sup>1</sup>Then Job answered the LORD and said, <sup>2</sup>“I know that You can do all things, And that **no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.** Job 42:1-2

<sup>9</sup>“Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, **‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’;** <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.** Isa 46:9-11

❖ **How you surrendered yourself to God’s sovereignty?**

– God’s sovereign will is detailed – from the smallest events to whom will be saved.

<sup>4</sup>“I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. <sup>5</sup>“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! <sup>6</sup>“Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? **Yet not one of them is forgotten before God.** <sup>7</sup>“Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. Luke 12:4-7

<sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having **been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** Eph 1:11

❖ **Does God’s comprehensive and detailed sovereignty give you peace?**

- God's sovereign will is known only to the Godhead except when revealed by prophecy or statements concerning the future in the Scriptures.

<sup>29</sup>"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things **revealed** belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. Deut 29:29

- ❖ **Is God's sovereign will comforting to you? If not, in what ways are you not surrendering to God's revelation in Scripture?**

### God's Moral Will

God's moral will is found for us in the Bible. It is the precepts (commands) and principles (general guidelines) given to us by God in the Scriptures.

- God's moral will is fully revealed in the Bible.

<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17

- The proper response to God's moral will is to purpose to know and do what it says.

<sup>7</sup>"Only be strong and very courageous; **be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left**, so that you may have success wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>"**This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it;** for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Josh 1:7-8

<sup>21</sup>Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup>**But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.** James 1:21-22

- ❖ **Have you set your heart to know and do God's moral will?**

### God's Individual Will

God's sovereign will and moral will are clearly taught in Scripture. Many people also believe that God has a perfect individual will for their lives. God's individual will would be defined as God's detailed plan for each specific person which they are responsible to find and live "in the center of". According to this belief, God's perfect individual will is discerned through internal and external signs which may include: the Bible, an inner witness, personal desires, circumstances, mature counsel, common sense, etc.

Also, according to this belief, a person can make choices that miss God's perfect will for him. For example, if a man makes a permanent decision, like marriage, but missed the "road signs" for marrying the one woman that God had chosen for him, then he is out of God's perfect will. A person who subscribes to this thinking would then say that God has a backup plan for this man, but that plan B that is not as perfect as plan A. A Christian who believes that God has an individual will might think or say something like: "I need to find God's will for me in this situation."

- ❖ **Do you live as if you were trying to find God's perfect individual will for your life?**

However, God's "individual" will (called "the traditional view" by Friesen) does not appear to be taught in the Scriptures. There are several passages that seem to indicate an individual will, but under closer examination refer to God's sovereign or moral will. See for example: Ps 32:8; Prov 3:5-6; 16:9; Isa 30:20-21; John 5:19; 10:3-4, 16, 27; Rom 12:1-2; Eph 2:10; 5:15-17; Col 1:9; 4:12. We do not have time today to look at each of these passages, but for a good treatment of this topic you might like to read Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View by Garry Friesen.

The traditional view holds that the Bible (God's moral will) gives most of the guidance needed to make a decision; but additionally, knowing God's individual will is essential for complete leading to the correct choice. Decision Making and the Will of God, Gary Friesen, p. 82

There are several instances in Scripture where God does appear to have a specific plan for an individual (e.g. the prophets and the apostles). However in each of these cases God spoke to these individuals directly through angels, visions, or an audible voice. There was no need to try to discover what God's will was or any way to misunderstand what God wanted (e.g. Dan 2:19; 10; Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19; 22; Acts 16:9-12; 22:10; Rev 1:1-2).

### The Process of Decision Making

We understand that God has a sovereign will which decrees all events that will come to pass. We understand that God has a moral will which is revealed to us in Scripture. We understand that there is NO perfect individual will which we are somehow required to discern and live in. So, how do we make decisions in life (big or small)?

1. Obedience: In moral decisions we must obey the moral will of God. If it is prescribed in Scripture, the only decision to make is if we will obey or not.

#### ❖ What are some examples?

2. Spirit Filling: Ensure that you have not bowed to other masters. If you have, repent and bow before the Lord. You will be filled with the Spirit and exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit.
3. Freedom: In non-moral decisions (those not prescribed in Scripture), we have the freedom to make our own choice and the responsibility to use wisdom in making the choice. The choice is based on spiritual expediency (see the principles listed in the next section). Some decisions have multiple choices, any of which are acceptable to God. Yet, some decisions are wiser than others. Additionally, in some decisions, part of the decision is a moral decision and part is not-moral (i.e. marriage).

<sup>2</sup>So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "**It is not desirable** for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Acts 6:2

<sup>2</sup>Then **it seemed good** to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, Acts 15:22

<sup>1</sup>Therefore when we could endure it no longer, **we thought it best** to be left behind at Athens alone, 1 Thess 3:1

<sup>3</sup>When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; <sup>4</sup>and **if it is fitting for me** to go also, they will go with me. 1 Cor 16:3-4

See also 1 Corinthians 7:1, 9, 26, 38 for some of Paul's decisions being better than others.

<sup>25</sup>But **I thought it necessary** to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; Phil 2:25

<sup>12</sup>When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for **I have decided** to spend the winter there. Titus 3:12

- Wisdom is commanded

<sup>15</sup>Therefore **be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise**, <sup>16</sup>making the most of your time, because the days are evil. Eph 5:15-16

#### ❖ Do you seek to make wise decisions?

– Wisdom is provided

○ By God

<sup>5</sup>But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

○ Through research

<sup>28</sup>"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup>"Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup>saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." <sup>31</sup>"Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>"Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. Luke 14:28-32

○ Through wise council

<sup>22</sup>Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed. Prov 15:22

#### ❖ Where do you seek wisdom to make decisions?

4. Trust: If we obey in moral decisions and make wise choices in non-moral decisions, we humbly submit (a heart attitude of "if the Lord sovereignly wills") ourselves to God's sovereign will to work all things together for our good.

<sup>28</sup>And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Rom 8:28

<sup>13</sup>Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." <sup>14</sup>Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup>Instead, you ought to say, "**If the Lord wills**, we will live and also do this or that." <sup>16</sup>But as it is, **you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.** James 4:13-16

<sup>21</sup>but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again **if God wills**," he set sail from Ephesus. Acts 18:21

<sup>19</sup>But I will come to you soon, **if the Lord wills**, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. 1 Cor 4:19

<sup>5</sup>But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; <sup>6</sup>and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. <sup>7</sup>For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, **if the Lord permits.** 1 Cor 16:5-7

#### ❖ Do you submit to God's sovereignty?

### The Principles for Decision Making

The process for making decisions is: 1) obey in moral areas; 2) in non-moral areas exercise freedom within the bounds of Scriptural principles; and 3) trust God's faithfulness and sovereignty to work all things for my good and His glory. So, what are the Scriptural principles of decision making in areas of freedom?

It must be noted that it is up to each believer to apply these principles and cultivate their own convictions in areas of freedom. To force your own convictions on others is legalism.

1. Will the decision glorify God?  
<sup>31</sup>Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.** 1 Cor 10:31
2. Will the decision cause a hindrance to the Gospel?  
<sup>12</sup>If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will **cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.** 1 Cor 9:12
3. Does the desire for the thing overshadow your desire for God?  
<sup>33</sup>But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matt 6:33
4. Is the decision spiritually profitable?  
<sup>23</sup>All things are lawful, **but not all things are profitable.** All things are lawful, but not all things edify. <sup>24</sup>Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor. 1 Cor 10:23-24
5. Will the decision bring bondage?  
<sup>12</sup>All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but **I will not be mastered by anything.** 1 Cor 6:12
6. Will the decision allow sin to be easily accomplished?  
<sup>14</sup>But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.** Rom 13:14
7. Will the decision defile God's temple?  
<sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup>For you have been bought with a price: therefore **glorify God in your body.** 1 Cor 6:19-20
8. Will the decision violate my conscience?  
<sup>22</sup>The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. <sup>23</sup>But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. Rom 14:22-23
9. Is the decision worth imitating?  
<sup>1</sup>Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. 1 Cor 11:1
10. Does the decision fit the Phil 4:8 pattern?  
<sup>8</sup>Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. Phil 4:8
11. Will the decision cause my brother or sister to stumble?  
<sup>21</sup>It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles. Rom 14:21  
<sup>13</sup>Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. 1 Cor 8:13
12. Will the decision build up or tear down?  
<sup>1</sup>Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. <sup>2</sup>Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. Rom 15:1-2  
<sup>19</sup>So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Rom 14:19

❖ **Are you willing to apply God's principles in make decisions in non-moral areas?**

## **Believer Interaction on Areas of Freedom**

We have seen the general Biblical principles for decision making. Yet, in the non-moral areas, decisions in which we have freedom, Christians can disagree. Sometimes, Christians believe they would be sinning if they made a certain choice within an area of freedom. Paul describes how Christians are to treat each other in these situations in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8.

The over-riding principle in Christian relationships with respect to non-moral issues (areas of freedom) is love and service.

<sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brethren; only **do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.** Gal 5:13

Romans 14-15 describes a person who is “weak in faith”. A “weaker” brother is a Christian who, because of the weakness of his faith and conscience or lack of knowledge, can be influenced to sin against his conscience by the example of a differing stronger brother.

<sup>22</sup>The **faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God.** Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. <sup>23</sup>But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and **whatever is not from faith is sin.** Rom 14:21-23

<sup>7</sup>However **not all men have this knowledge**; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. <sup>8</sup>But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. <sup>9</sup>But **take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.** <sup>10</sup>For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, **will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened** to eat things sacrificed to idols? 1 Cor 8:7-10

<sup>29</sup>I mean **not your own conscience, but the other man’s**; for why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience? <sup>30</sup>If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? 1 Cor 10:29-30

The weaker brother has placed restrictions on himself beyond what God’s word says because he would violate his conscious partaking in an activity. Each person must be fully convinced in their own mind that what they are doing is right (Rom 14:5).

A “stronger” or “not-weak” brother is a Christian who, because of his understanding of Biblical Christian freedom and the strength of his conviction, exercises his liberty with full peace of conscience without being improperly influenced by the differing opinions of others.

### **❖ Are there non-moral areas in your life that you believe you would sin if you partook?**

So, how are the weak and not-weak to interact and treat each other? Those who are not-weak in faith are to accept the one who is “weak in faith” (14:1). The weak are not to judge the not-weak and the not-weak are not to regard with contempt the weak (14:3, 10).

<sup>1</sup>Now **accept** the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. <sup>2</sup>One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. <sup>3</sup>The one who eats (not-weak) is **not to regard with contempt** the one who does not eat (weak), and the one who does not eat (weak) is **not to judge** the one who eats (not-weak), for God has accepted him. Rom 14:1-3 with explanation

### **❖ Do you accept or regard with contempt the weak or judge the not-weak?**

The one who is not-weak is to **determine** to not put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way (14:13). A stumbling block would be to exercise freedom and thereby move a weak brother to do something that violates his conscience.

<sup>13</sup>Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather **determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.** Rom 14:13

If believers are together and one or some are weak, the not-weak brother(s) must limit their freedom out of love (14:15).

<sup>15</sup>For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup>Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; <sup>17</sup>for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup>For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. <sup>19</sup>So then we **pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.** <sup>20</sup>Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. <sup>21</sup>**It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.** Rom 14:15-21

Self-limitation to not put a stumbling block before a brother is love. It is bearing the weakness of others, placing them before ourselves. We act for our neighbor's good for his building up.

- ❖ **Do you put stumbling blocks in brothers' way?**
- ❖ **Do you easily self limit your freedoms out of love?**

### Conclusion

The process for making decisions is: 1) obedience to God's Word in moral areas; 2) in non-moral areas exercise freedom within the bounds of Scriptural principles; and 3) humble submission and trust in God's faithfulness and sovereignty to work all things for my good and His glory.

The over-riding principle in Christian relationships with respect to non-moral issues (areas of freedom) is love and service.

### Real Life Scenarios

*Yourself #1:* Your vehicle has over 250,000 miles. It has served you well and you have lived the motto "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without". However, there are some things going wrong with it and with an expanding family it seems like the right time for a different vehicle. Work through the process for decision making and ask yourself the principles.

*Yourself #2:* Your vehicle has 50,000 miles. You simply do not like it. It is uncomfortable and gutless and you would like a different car. Work through the process for decision making and ask yourself the principles.

*Yourself #3:* You and some friends go out for a fancy dinner. One is newer to the group. Someone asks if anyone is having wine with their meal and this newer friend says, "I don't drink." What might you do?

*Someone Else:* A single friend, whom you know is a Christian, has told you that she has met a man and wonders if this is the man she should marry. She asks you how you would go about making this decision. Work through the process for decision making with her.

