



PRAYER AND WISE DECISION MAKING

TO: LEGISLATORS

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Not every decision a public servant needs to make is black and white. Often there are competing principles that come to mind in support of the different options on the table.

Am I right to say when there is no particular biblical passage one can turn to for simple and clear moral guidance, that decision making can be very difficult, agonizing and stressful?

What are some biblical principles you can incorporate into making such decisions? How do you sort things out in your mind and rest assured that what you decide to do is glorifying to God? It may surprise you how much Scripture has to say about this! Hopefully what follows will help your resolve, processing abilities, and peace of mind.

I trust you are getting some needed time with family and friends during the August recess.

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**WEEKLY MEMBERS BIBLE STUDY**  
 IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF  
 FIRST-VOTES-BACK (MONDAY OR TUESDAY NIGHT)  
 Dinner Served • Capitol Room H324 • Spouses Welcome



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**LEADERSHIP: PRAYER AND WISE DECISION MAKING**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

Life is a series of decisions - personal, familial and vocational decisions, decisions that include matters pertaining to finances, education, associations and careers (to name but a few). Many are complex, some are important; some, such as "How should I come down on this particular Bill?" "What office should I run for?" "How should I counsel my son on the woman he is dating?" "What should I invest in?", are both complex and important. To navigate successfully through life and all of its decisions, we need a foundational understanding of what the Bible teaches regarding Prayer and Wise Decision Making.

Often the Bible seems to contain little in the way of guidance for a specific decision. The Scriptures however are replete in their elocution of each of the words that I have used in this title. Accordingly, the following study will attempt to unpack each of them in a progressive, orderly fashion—and build an understanding of each throughout this treatise. The intended result is to illuminate the subject of prayer as it specifically relates to wise decision-making in the life of the public servant who names the name of Christ. You will better understand what I mean by first taking a look at the compounding nature of the main outline.

**II. THE BELIEVER AND DECISION MAKING**

When examining this subject one must first understand how today, God reveals His will and guides His chosen people. This is a prerequisite to considering the role various forms of prayer play in wise decision-making. A broad understanding of how God reveals Himself to His people will allow the believer to examine more appropriately and sensibly which forms of prayer to exercise.

The classic Evangelical work on this subject is Garry Friesen's book, *Decision Making and the Will of God*.<sup>1</sup> (I have a habit of scouring the libraries of

Christian leaders I visit and this book is on most everyone's shelf!) In the book Dr. Friesen summarily divides Scripture into four distinct categories relative to God's revealed will and guidance in the life of the believer. The following is a condensation of his excellent work:

**A. HIS SPECIAL GUIDANCE**

Scripture reveals that in the past God has supernaturally guided believers by a divine voice, angel, dream or miracle. It is unique and according to special revelation. Without limiting God's capability to do that today, most theologians writing on God's present-day guidance do not suggest the believer wait for such a revelation.<sup>2</sup>

**B. HIS SOVEREIGN GUIDANCE**

This pertains to God's secret guidance of believers by His sovereign control over all the events in the world. Whereas man is *active* in God's moral and wisdom guidance (descriptions of which follow) he is *passive* in God's sovereign guidance. Accordingly, man's prayers have no determinative factor in God's special or sovereign guidance.

**C. HIS MORAL GUIDANCE**

By means of the revealed commands and principles recorded in Scripture, God directly guides believers. For instance, if some contemplated decision necessitates the violation of one of the Ten Commandments, then such action would not be God's will. Similar to both A and B, seeking direction through prayer is unnecessary to discern the will of God relative to this category of God's guidance. For instance one cannot biblically justify saying, "I am praying about dating my neighbor's wife." It goes without saying that one need not pray to ascertain God's will relative to something He has clearly declared in Scripture to be outside His will. You don't have to pray about that.

**D. HIS WISDOM GUIDANCE**

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In areas of decision making that have no scripturally-based moral command or principle, i.e. non-moral decisions, God expects believers to make decisions by their acquired wisdom with a view toward spiritual suitability and His glory. This is the category of God's guidance that pertains to this study.

It is only the singular category of *His Wisdom Guidance* that relates to and necessitates the believer's prayers. God's Moral Guidance is already known through Scripture, and God's Sovereign Guidance "has no direct bearing on the conscious considerations of the decision maker."<sup>3</sup> Lastly, God's Special Guidance, if it does happen today, will not require prayer, since by definition it indicates God's intervention and direction, versus man's attempt to ascertain and understand it.

#### E. LIBERTY IN HIS WISDOM GUIDANCE

A quick overview of the New Testament reveals that decisions made within the non-moral arena of life, i.e. where God has not already clearly indicated His will through a scriptural, moral edict, are for the believer's own choosing. In Romans 14:5, 10 & 12, Paul gives evidence of this understanding:

***Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind...For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God...So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.***

This passage, while underscoring the intended point about freedom in making non-moral decisions, underscores the fact that...

**GOD WILL ULTIMATELY HOLD THE BELIEVER ACCOUNTABLE RELATIVE TO THE FREEDOM HE HAS GRANTED HIM IN MAKING DECISIONS**

The concept of freedom in decision making in the non-moral areas of life is further illustrated by the following passages: Christ's disciples assumed their

liberty to make decisions as captioned in the titles of the following passages:

#### 1. We thought it best

***Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone; and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith.*** 1Thessalonians 3:1-2

#### 2. I thought it necessary

***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; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.*** Philippians 2:25-26

#### 3. Whomever you may approve

***And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.*** 1Corinthians 16:3-4

#### 4. It is not desirable for us

***And 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. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.'*** Acts 6:2-4

#### 5. It seemed good

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***For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials; that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well.*** Acts 15:28-29

These passages serve to illustrate that related to non-moral-based decisions, areas where decisions need be made, but Scripture gives no clear edict, that....

**THE BELIEVER IS TO MAKE A WISE  
DECISION BASED ON HIS OR HER  
ULTIMATE INNER MOTIVE TO BRING  
GOD GLORY**

Colossians 3:23 serves to remind Christians of what should be their ultimate aspiration in all areas of life...

***Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than men...it is the Lord Christ whom you serve.***

Furthermore, Luke, in writing the book of Acts reveals Paul's motive as to why he asked the elders of the Church at Ephesus to meet him at the port of Miletus: because, "he was hurrying" (20:16). These various glimpses illustrate that the Apostles exercised personal freedom of choice in non-moral related decision-making in order to best advance the cause of Christ. Where God is silent in the Scriptures, God not only gives, but expects us to exercise our minds to make good, God-glorifying decisions. Francis Schaeffer in his book, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* adds insight:

It is my thesis that as we cannot bind men morally except with that which the Scripture clearly commands (beyond that we can only give advice), *similarly, anything the New Testament does not command in regard to church form is a freedom to be exercised under the leadership of the Holy Spirit for that particular time and place...* It seems clear to me that

the opposite cannot be held, namely that only that which is commanded is allowed. If this were the case, then, for example, to have a church building would be wrong and so would having church bells or a pulpit, using books for singing, following any specific order of service, standing to sing, and many other like things. If consistently held in practice, I doubt if any church could function or worship.<sup>4</sup> (Emphasis mine).

Schaeffer's quote relates specifically to Church forms, but it serves to underscore the inference that God expects His children to exercise personal freedom in decision making. All of this brings us to the question, "How does one go about making *wise* personal decisions?"

### **III. THE BELIEVER AND WISE DECISION MAKING**

#### **A. DECISIONS WITH SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES**

By way of review, believers are to make unequivocal decisions commensurate with the revealed moral will of God. For instance, the issues of abortion and homosexuality, to name only two which are popularly held to be controversial, are clearly dealt with in Scripture. But the decisions in life that need be made apart from the specifically-revealed moral will of God, being non-moral in nature, nonetheless contain elements of God's revealed moral will, and if certain options were chosen, would either affirm or else violate those principles of Scripture. So, what decision, if made, does not violate principles of Scripture? That becomes the guiding question for the public servant. For instance, someone might be making a decision to buy a house (non-moral) but needs to rob a bank in order to do it (moral: "Thou shall not steal"). In these situations the applicable principles of Scripture remain the guiding force.



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**B. DECISIONS WITH NON-SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES**

But in some decisions there is no scriptural guidance or principle(s) that play(s) into the equation. When Scripture is silent as to how one should decide, then what should one do? Here the believer is free to make the best decision possible—always with an eye toward God’s glory. In these situations how does one make the wise and right decision—especially in light of the noetic effect of sin? J. I. Packer defines such decision making as, “The power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it.”<sup>5</sup> Friesen defines these kinds of decisions as, “The ability to figure out what is spiritually expedient in a given situation.”<sup>6</sup> In these common situations for public servants,

**WISE DECISION-MAKING IS THE BEST INFORMED JUDGMENT OF THE DECISION MAKER TO ACCOMPLISH THE MOST SUITABLE GOD-GLORIFYING OBJECTIVE**

Even if there appears to be no moral issue, God’s glory always remains the overarching objective and guideline. Wisdom and judgment are closely linked in Scripture. Paul said in his mentoring of Timothy (2Timothy 1:7) who was apparently timid in his leadership and decision making in the Ephesian church,

*God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and sound judgment.*

Context reveals (cf. 2Tim. 2:1&2) that Paul is admonishing Timothy to “get your rear in gear, be strong, lovingly lead and make tough decisions!” God expects believers to incorporate the guiding power of the indwelling Holy Spirit who already enables **sound judgment** to achieve God’s glory via the decisions believers make.

In all these passages wisdom is distinguished by good personal decision-making, which means on

their own, they come to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:15-17) in the non-moral areas of life. The question therefore follows, how does one gain the wisdom necessary for good decision-making?

**IV. THE BELIEVER AND PRAYER RELATED TO WISE DECISION MAKING**

James 1:5-8 embodies one of the foundational passages in the New Testament related to prayer and wisdom in non-moral decision-making:

*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

The context of this passage relates to answering James’s earlier implied question, “How do you handle trials with joy? (Cf. vs. 2). Paul’s answer? Ask God for wisdom. He is saying “ask God what He is attempting to teach you through the circumstances in which you presently find yourself.” Applicable to decision making, we should ask God to show us His intent via this means: **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.** This passage promises that God will reveal His intent via prayer: **and it will be given to him.** This is an aspect of prayer called Petitioning. Petitioning is one of many aspects of prayer that relates specifically to gaining wisdom for decision making in the non-moral areas of Christian liberty. States Eastman in *The Hour That Changes The World*:<sup>7</sup> “Petition is the aspect of prayer given over to asking God for specific personal things.” Andrew Murray said regarding petitioning God, “Let your prayer be so definite that you can say as you leave the prayer closet, ‘I know what I have asked from

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the Father, and I expect an answer.<sup>8</sup> “It is this form of specific and expectant prayer that God cherishes from His children, honors and answers.”<sup>9</sup> Take note and confidence from this! As one asks God for wisdom, simultaneously look to Scripture for answers; there is a direct relationship, albeit more subjective and intuitive, but Psalm 119:97-100 displays the fruit of such communion, of one who spends hours in the Word and Petitioning:

***O how I love Thy law!  
It is my meditation all the day.  
Thy commandments make me wiser than my  
enemies, For they are ever mine.  
I have more insight than all my teachers,  
For Thy testimonies are my meditation.  
I understand more than the aged,  
Because I have observed Thy precepts.***

Ryrie observes, “This psalm conveys the thought that the Word of God contains everything a man needs to know.”<sup>10</sup> The relationship between asking God for wisdom in decision-making and His answers is directly proportional to one’s knowledge of God’s Word—which thereby allows the Holy Spirit to illuminate and prompt the believer’s mind as to His directives. The Holy Spirit can bring to light the nuances of His particular will, but only to the degree one knows the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The Holy Spirit possesses the ministry of illuminating the Word of God in the believer’s heart. E. M. Bounds says concisely,

**“PRAYER ILLUMINATES THE WORD”**

Paul provides further insight into this when he states to the Philippians in 2:13,

***For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.***

God directs the believer’s will in and through the Scriptures; the will is aided in and through petitioning prayer. Psalm 32:8 provides further insight....

***I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.***

Psalm 37:4 further underscores this dynamic personal relationship with God through prayer....

***Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.***

In light of His personable nature, it is difficult for the believer who is constantly meditating on God’s Word and humbly petitioning Him for His will, to make decisions outside of God’s will. Why? God promises that He personally instructs, teaches and counsels His chosen people! Trust in that!

**VI. CONCLUSION**

The Bible provides many insights about how to make wise decisions when and where Scripture is silent. There are no short-cuts. Knowing His Word, and building intimacy with God through prayer are the keys to ever-increasing wisdom in decisions.

<sup>1</sup> (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 230, figure 27

<sup>2</sup> To state that God speaks audibly His will to people today creates a theological dilemma. Holding to a position of special revelation for today irresolutely juxtaposes one to the internal testimony of Scripture, which clearly states that the canon of God’s verbal revelation is closed (cf. Rev. 22:18-19; Jude 3).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 233

<sup>4</sup> (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1970), p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 188

<sup>7</sup> (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978), p. 87

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Murray, *The Prayer Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> This statement assumes that the petitioner is “at peace with God” (cf. Romans chapter 5) meaning he or she has repented of their sin and asked Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior. God does not hear the prayers of those who know not Christ. (See 1 John 5:12-15, Rom. 5:9 and Psa. 66:18).

<sup>10</sup> *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 911

<sup>11</sup> *Obtaining Answers to Prayer* (Springdale, Penn: Whitaker House, 1984), p. 137