

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE -

11.20.2022

MAKING WISE DECISIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

- How can I know God's will for my life?
- How do I know if the decisions I make align with God's will?
- Can we know the perfect will of God?
- At the heart of these questions is a desire to be in the center of God's perfect will.

- Today we'll look at what Proverbs has to teach us concerning making wise decisions.
- Solomon and the sages have a lot to say about the application of wisdom to our decisions and our plans.
- God's Word gives us principles for wise decision making that removes the fear of being out of God's perfect will.
- The application of these wisdom principles can guide your decision making and fill you with trust in God's sovereignty and peace after having made a decision.

- **Colossians 1:9-10** And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

II. FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR WISE DECISION MAKING

PRINCIPLE #1 — GOD'S WORD REVEALS GOD'S WILL

- Before we had the written word, God made his will known by direct revelation.
- By the time of the conquest of Canaan, God's people had the law written down—The Book of the Law.
- God continued to speak to the prophets by direct revelation and those things were also written down.
- The ultimate revelation God gave us came through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Hebrews 1:1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

- Christ's teachings were captured by his apostles and everything they wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit was also Scripture.
 - We have now in our Bible, the full disclosure of God's will for us.
 - Everything we need to know in order to please God and make wise decisions is contained in His Word.
- **1689LBCF 1:1** The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly demonstrate the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that people are left without excuse; however, these demonstrations are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation. Therefore, the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church. To preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary, because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased.
- **1689LBCF 1:6** The whole counsel of God concerning everything essential for his own glory and man's salvation, faith, and life is either explicitly stated or by necessary inference contained in the Holy Scriptures. Nothing is ever to be added to the Scriptures, either by new revelation of the Spirit or by human traditions. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for a saving understanding of what is revealed in the Word. We recognize that some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church are common to human actions and organizations and are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian wisdom, following the general rules of the Word, which must always be observed.
- This is the foundational principle for making wise decisions, you have to know God's revealed will as found in His Word.
 - God's Word is where his moral will is fully revealed for our knowledge and obedience.
 - Explicit Commands (The ten commandments)
 - Implicit Commands (the exercise of our liberties in Christ)
 - Everything Christ commanded us.
- As we fill our hearts with God's Word, as our minds are renewed, we are able to discern the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).
 - Many don't even take a moment to consider what God has said concerning the very thing they are about to make a decision about.
 - Proverbs 16:25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.
 - Ultimately the greatest hindrance to knowing the will of God is ignorance of the Word of God.

PRINCIPLE #2—WHERE GOD DOES NOT COMMAND WE HAVE FREEDOM

- The bible will not give us a clear answer for every decision we will have to make in life.
- These are the kinds of decisions that have a wide-variety of options, any number of these options may be acceptable and pleasing to God.
- To make a wise-decision in any of these, we must not choose something in violation of God's clear moral will.
- In so long as what we choose does not violate God's moral will, we have freedom in making the choice among a variety of options.

- God is not going to dictate that to us. The individual is free to make the decision.
- God could certainly direct us in our decisions via dreams, visions, fleeces, audible voice, but that is not normative since we already have the fullest disclosure of the divine will.
- That kind of direct guidance that many want is not essential or necessary to making wise-decisions.
- We have the Word of God which is adequate for all of our decision making.
- What does this freedom of choice look like in areas God has not given us a command?
- The freedom to make decisions exists within the boundaries of God's moral will.
- Because God's Word tells us what is morally right and what conforms to God's character, we are able to make decisions with the creaturely freedom we are given.
- Example: God's command to Adam in the garden.
- Example: Freedom in selecting a spouse.
- 1 Cor 7:39 A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.
- Who can she marry if she is widowed? Anyone she wishes. She has freedom to choose.
- There is a circle around that freedom of choice where God's moral will commands that a believer is to only marry another believer.
- 2 Cor 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.
- But the choice of which particular believer to marry is a matter of freedom.

PRINCIPLE #3—IN FREEDOM OF CHOICE WE USE WISDOM

- This principle is the goal of exercising freedom of choice.
- Where God does not command something specific we are to make wise decisions that have spiritual benefit.
- A spiritual benefit is one that acknowledges that the decision we are making is governed by the moral will of God and the principles in God's Word.
- Wisdom is defined as the skill of living rightly.
- In this case we're talking about the skill of decision making.
- That is the skill of evaluating the outcome of a given decision in a given situation to determine if our decision will be spiritually profitable.
- If we want our decisions to yield the best and most favorable outcome, we need wisdom.
- The NT has many examples, in Acts and the apostolic letters where believers applied wisdom to decisions considering the most favorable outcome.
- You'll read phrases like, "*I have thought it necessary,*" "*If it seems advisable,*" "*I have decided.*" (Phil 3:25; 1 Cor. 16:3-4; Titus 3:12)
- Paul's exhortation on the principles of marriage and counsel to the unmarried and widows uses terms like "*good,*" "*better,*" and "*even better.*" (1 Cor 7:1, 9, 26, 38)
- They were expressing things that were not determined by God's clear commands and moral will and were a matter of freedom.
- Yet the terms they used indicated some kind of standard. They were seeking the highest and best good in decision making, the best spiritual outcome.

- We also have a clear apostolic command to employ wisdom in decision making.
- Ephesians 5:15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

PRINCIPLES FROM PROVERBS

- **SEEK WISDOM FROM GOD**

- He is the source of all wisdom.
- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10).
- Proverbs 2:6 For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
- Because wisdom comes from him it is right to ask God for wisdom in decisions we have to make (James 1:5-6).

- **HAVE THE RIGHT HEART ATTITUDE**

- Humility and teachableness
- Prov 9:9-10 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
- Openness to correction
- Prov 15:31-32 The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise 32 Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

- **DON'T MAKE HASTY DECISIONS**

- Prov 19:2 Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.
- We need to have all the information and not make decisions hastily.
- Prov 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.
- Decisions that can have moderate to major impact or risk should never be made hastily.

- **EVALUATE YOUR MOTIVES**

- Prov 16:2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.
- We need to search our hearts for the motivation concerning the matter in which we have to make a decision.
- We evaluate our motives against God's revealed standards.
- Our decisions reveal what we treasure in our heart.
- We need to test our motives in light of the counsel of God's Word.

- **SEEK ADVICE AND COUNSEL**

- Prov 11:14 Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.
- Prov 15:22 Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.
- We need counsel from others and input from others because we all have blind spots.
- Prov 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.
- Making decisions without counsel is dangerous.

- **LEARN FROM PAST MISTAKES**

- Prov 26:11 Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.
- Learn from your mistakes! Don't repeat them!

- **CONSIDER THE OUTCOME**

- Prov 4:26 Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.

- Prov 14:15 The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.
- We need to learn to evaluate what kind of decision we are making and how we are going to exercise our freedom of choice.
- Every decision we make has some type of cost associated with it.
- Craft a pros/cons list.
- Do a risk assessment.
- Have a backup or contingency plan.
- Prov 13:16 Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool flaunts his folly.
- Ask: "Is there a net spiritual gain from this decision?"
- "Will this decision be spiritually profitable and beneficial?"
- "Could this decision bring reproach on my witness for the Lord?"
- Prov 10:19 Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.

PRINCIPLE #4—IN EVERY DECISION WE HUMBLY TRUST GOD

Proverbs 16:1, 9, 33

1 The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

9 The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

- Proverbs assumes God's sovereign control over all things and his wise providence in the outworking of his sovereign will.
- Our plans and decisions are subservient to the sovereign purposes of God.
- Yet, we are to make plans and decisions that are free, real and meaningful.
- God's absolute sovereignty and human responsibility in making free decisions are both presented side by side in Proverbs as they are in the rest of Scripture.
- It is a tension in Scripture that is never resolved. And both are presented as true.
- **James 4:13-16** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.
- James is rebuking those who arrogantly make plans and decisions without acknowledging God or His sovereignty.
- James isn't saying that one shouldn't make plans or decisions but that God's will overrules our plans and decisions, "*If the Lord wills...*"
- When we have made a moral and wise decision, following the principles we discussed, we must humbly trust our sovereign God to work out all of the details for our good and his glory.
- We can't know in advance the sovereign and secret will of God in our free choices; that can't be the basis of our decision making.
- There is a limitation to our knowledge, thus a limitation in our ability to knowingly make the highest and best decision.
- However, because God's sovereign will ultimately determines whether things go according to my plans and decisions, a humble posture and attitude should govern my decision making.

- I can trust God to work all things together for my good (Romans 8:28).
- Solomon's wise instruction concerning this is an important principle:
- Prov 16:3 Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.
- "Commit" means to 'roll away, to roll off.'
- When our desire is God's glory in the wise decisions that we make, we don't need to worry or fret about the outcome.
- We know the outcome depends on God.
- We roll the weight of the determination of the outcome off of us and roll it onto the Lord.
- When those don't go as expected or how we thought they would, we have peace knowing that there is a deeper plan at work, God's sovereign purposes prevail.

CONCLUSION

- The good news for us in Christ is that even our unwise decisions cannot dislodge us from our security in Christ.
- And even those unwise decisions God works into his sovereign plan to conform us to Christ.
- He can redeem our mistakes.
- He can correct our path.
- Commit to making wise decisions by humbly acknowledging God's sovereignty over all your ways.
- Obey what he has clearly told you to do.
- Use wisdom in the areas where you have freedom of choice within the boundaries of God's moral will.
- And then, commit those decisions to the Lord, be at peace, and humbly trust in God who works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph 1:11).
- Paul's prayer is God's will for you and for me: that we be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?