

## Articles and Sermons :: Christian Freedom in Decision Making

### Christian Freedom in Decision Making - posted by theopenlife, on: 2008/9/30 3:44

The following is a letter written to a friend. She wanted help understanding how to make decisions, especially when each of the options appeared comparably good. My response is somewhat rough-at-the-edges, and not a very developed view. It is, however, my present outlook.

Your thoughts are welcome. May God bless it to you.

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Dear (\_\_\_\_),

Thank you for your patience in waiting for my response. It is not unusual for several weeks to pass before I return emails; the habit may be inconvenient, but please accept that no offense is intended. I am happy at last to reply.

In the first place, thank you for such kind encouragement regarding my articles. It is rewarding to hear that others are benefited, though God's judgment will bring our works into clearer light at the end.

You are certainly right, whatever wisdom I or anyone has, it is "bestowed by God." Our Lord spoke from a whirlwind to Job, that "God hath deprived the ostrich of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding." God, who has power to withhold wisdom, may also impart it. James writes, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraides not; and it shall be given him." All promises in Christ are 'yes, and amen.'

I confess, your questions are not simple; the way one answers may lead to undesirable or even painful consequences. Therefore, with some trepidation I will attempt a response in harmony with God's word. I appeal now for His wisdom, found within the word. Help me, Spirit!

If I have understood correctly, the essence of your questions is,

'If one has multiple options equally available, how does she determine which to choose?'

I offer the method which I use when determining between choices:

First, I ask, do any of the options involve obvious sin? Does one or more of the options contradict the clear will of God revealed in the scriptures?

I write 'obvious sins', on purpose. We can easily get worked up over subtleties, fearing what future sins might hide beneath every decision. The Devil attempts to paralyze our service to God by whispering constant accusations about our motives. If we give him an ear, the accuser will find sins in everything, true or not. Suppose you go to the store, he will suggest you are actually going to covet and lust, and not to purchase necessary or lawful things. If you desire some time of healthy rest or pleasure, that hound will bark, "lazy! loiterer! glutton!" We ought to be more concerned about what is apparent, and leave most of the subtleties to God. Pray with David, "hold back thine servant from presumptuous sins," and trust your Heavenly Father to do it.

At the same time I do not want to promote negligence, and so advise you to know the scriptures well. Some choices have the appearance of great service to God, yet contradict His revealed will. The pharisees allowed people to donate possessions to the temple rather than support their own needy parents. These disrespectful sons and daughters fancied they had 'killed two birds with one stone'; expecting rewards from God for the donation, while conserving money for their selfish lusts. Jesus exposed their sin, declaring that to "honor thy father and thy mother" is of God, and vain traditions are from men. So I say again, consider whether any of the options give the appearance of serving God while denying His true commands elsewhere.

Supposing that none of the options are apparently sinful, I present also the following observations. Throughout the New Testament we witness godly individuals making decisions. A pattern becomes visible, wherein the apostles practice a da

ily pursuit of holiness, and then freely make choices within the bounds of the scriptures. Having their desires set upon glorifying God, they are free to be providentially guided through their own prayerful ambitions. The inspired writers do not fear making choices, but rather show a broad ability to do "whatever, unto the Lord."

For example, Paul writes,

"We endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, again and again — but Satan hindered us." 1 Thes 2:17-18

Paul tried several times to visit these believers, and did not accept initial hindrances as a certain sign that God wanted him to give up. The Apostle knew the great commission, and knew his calling. He was free to 'go into all the world.' He had been 'sent forth' by the Spirit through the elders in Antioch. To the devil he credited interruptions in his ministry, and hoped that God's will may yet be for him to go.

"Taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus." Acts 18:21

Again, Paul desired and freely purposed to return to the Ephesians. He did not need to hear a voice from heaven telling him to return; he recalled his commission years earlier to preach to the Gentiles, which he received on the road to Damascus. However, Paul accepted that God's wise will might redirect the course; he was content with this.

"Without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine." Romans 1:9-12

Now we read how Paul sought God's aid through prayer to visit the Romans. His motive was biblical - it was to preach the gospel and edify the saints. He felt no shame asking the Lord again and again; this desire was not primarily for himself but for God's glory and the sake of others. Rather than deny his godly longings, he sought the Lord's help to fulfill them.

"I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power." 1 Cor 4:19

"If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me." 1 Cor 16:4

Paul's decisions were not rash. He consulted the wisdom of others, and the word. "Is it advisable?" When an option seemed prudent to him, Paul prayerfully pursued his course and left the Lord to prevent or prosper the decision as He willed.

"Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity." 1 Cor 16:12

I think no greater example of freedom in Christian decision making can be shown than this passage. Here are two brothers in Christ, both with different opinions about what is best for the ministry. Paul does not say, "I knew God's will, and Apollos did not." He simply writes, "I urged him," and "it was not his will."

How would Apollos know when to go? Would he wait for an angel to fetch him, as it was for Peter? Would he expect a dream, such as Joseph had? Or visions like John's? No, nothing so revelatory. Apollos would go when he had an opportunity. He knew he could go, for his purpose was to glorify God, and he would go when his wisdom deemed best. If he succeeded, then he knew the Lord had willed it.

Hopefully you see that we have great freedom in Christ to pursue any choice which is unto God's glory. We should not be rash, or negligent of scripture. The council of godly believers is to be sought, when available. We may choose what seems desirable, if it is in harmony with the word.

But I give this last bit of advice. Jesus told of a man who took a chief seat at the dinner table only to be removed to a lower seat. A more humble man also came to the feast, but took his place at the bottom. The head of the feast saw the humble man sitting low, and raised him to the place of honor. We should ask ourselves, which choice places the welfare of others highest and oneself lowest? Perhaps that is the option which brings the most glory to God.

Thank you for allowing me to consider this with you, it has been a blessing for me to meditate on our freedom in Christ.

My prayer is for the grace of Christ to empower you through the faith He gives by His Spirit in the Word.

God bless you,

Michael Spotts.