

Decision-making & the will of God

a theology
of guidance

Does God guide His people? How?

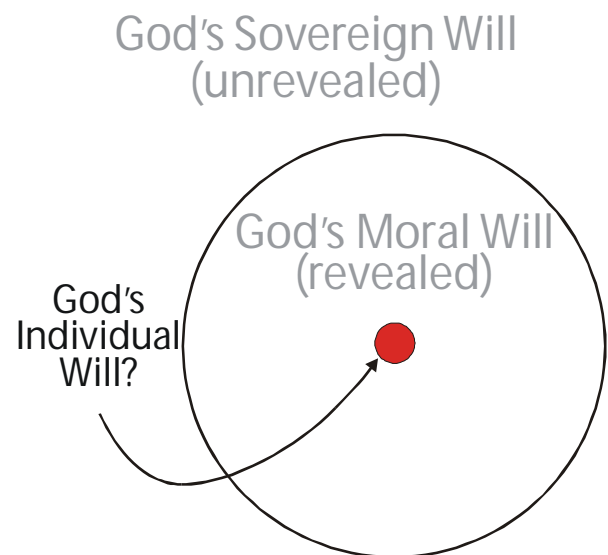
What is the aim of the class?

The aim is to help Christians make good decisions in every aspect of life.

Why do we need this study?

1. Decisions are woven seamlessly into the fabric of life. We make decisions, at some level, each day of our lives. Most of these decisions are minor, even trivial, yet most contribute in some way to the accomplishment of our goals and our purpose in life.
2. There is some confusion among believers about how we make decisions. Some feel that God has a specific, ideal, detailed plan for their lives. They look for some "leading" or some feeling that tells them what God wants them to do. Even some who don't go that far frequently speak of "finding God's will for my life," or words to that effect. But these approaches to decision-making are not scriptural. This study will promote a biblical view of the decision-making process.
3. We need to understand how to apply the biblical principles of guidance to the specific decisions and choices we make in our lives. We'll examine some of those decisions, and apply the principles we've learned to specific choices we make.

Does God Have a Plan for You?



Our approach to this study

The class will proceed along two lines:

1. We'll examine and discuss what the Bible says about decision-making and the will of God.
2. We'll apply the principles of guidance that we learn to the specific areas of decision-making that most often confront young couples, such as marriage, financial, child-rearing and job issues. We'll use a "case study" approach in this segment of the study.

Discussion-Starters

1. How many “wills” does God have?
2. Analyze the oft-asked question, “*How can I know the will of God?*” Do you believe this is a *biblical* question?
3. Briefly describe the process you use today to make major decisions.
4. What is one word used in the Bible that describes the person who consistently makes good decisions? What, generally, does God’s word say about this concept?
5. As a Christian seeks to make biblically-oriented decisions, is the Bible more like a *road map* or a *compass*? Why?

Assignment 1

The “dot” theory is the idea that God has a specific, detailed will for every person. It is incumbent upon the individual, before undertaking any major endeavor or making any major decision, that he discovers that will so that he will make a God-honoring choice. For example, a young man faced with the choice of a university is not free to make his own choice in the matter, but must discover what God wants him to do. The assumption is that the choice of a college is a major decision that God has made for the prospective student. It follows, of course, that if God chooses schools, He certainly decides who one should marry, what job to take and even when to start a family and how many children to have.

Questions

1. Think about the “dot” theory as described above for a moment. Before we study any passages on the matter, what problems do you see with it?
2. Terms like “inner urging,” “leading,” “inner impression” and “sign” are customarily used to describe the guidance God is giving one who is seeking God’s individual will. What “impression” do you have about these terms?
3. Read the following passages that are commonly used to support the “dot” theory. Comment on whether you feel they support the dot, or not. Proverbs 3:5-6; Psa. 32:8; Isa. 30:20-21; Jn. 16:12-14; Colossians 1:9; 4:12; Rom. 8:14; 12:1-2; Gal. 5:18; Eph. 2:10; 5:15-17.

4. Two charts are presented which attempt to describe the way one arrives at the individual will of God and to explain how he can be sure. What *practical* difficulties do you see in them?



5. Read Judges 6, especially 36-40. Gideon requested a "sign" from God to be sure that Israel was to be delivered through Gideon. God supernaturally affected a piece of wool (a "fleece") and Gideon knew God was with him. Those who embrace the dot theory commonly refer to getting assurance from God by "putting out a fleece." Is there anything wrong with using a comparable approach today?
6. Do you believe everyone has an individual *part* in God's sovereign plan? Distinguish this from God having an individual *will* for each person.
7. Analyze statements– are they biblical? Are they practical?
1. "I figure when it's my time to die, nothing I do will matter."
 2. "I prayed to God and He sent Janet to be my wife."
 3. "God answered our prayers and he got well."
 4. "God must have bigger plans for me."
 5. "I prayed real hard and got this job; my prayers have been answered."
 6. "I just feel like this is what God wants me to do."

2 Our Source for Good-Decisions

The “dot” theory states that God has an individual, detailed plan for you that you must discover and that God will “lead” you to the right choice. If that idea is not scriptural, then what is the source for making good decisions? If there is no such thing as an “individual” will, then that only leaves God’s will – His sovereign will and His moral will. Since we can only know His sovereign will to the extent He has revealed it, then we must rely on His revealed moral will as guidance for decision-making.

From God’s moral will, as revealed in Scripture, we can state four principles that will help us make good decisions:¹

1. In those areas specifically addressed by the Bible, the revealed commands of God (His moral will) are to be obeyed.
2. In those areas where the Bible gives no command or principle (nonmoral decisions), the Christian is free and responsible to choose his own course of action. Any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God.
3. In nonmoral decisions, the objective of the Christian is to make wise decisions on the basis of spiritual expediency.
4. In all decisions, the believer should humbly submit, in advance, to the outworking of God’s sovereign will as it touches each decision.

Assignment 2

Questions

1. Find some passages that describe God’s sovereign will.
2. Find some passages that describe God’s moral will.
3. Give a biblical reason (or cite a passage) demonstrating the truth of the four principles stated above.

Bible Case Study

Read about Lot’s choice of land in Genesis 13, then read Genesis 19 and consider the following questions:

1. Did Lot have a *moral* right to make the decision he made?
2. What factors did Lot consider before he made his choice?

¹ Garry Friesen, *Decision Making & the Will of God*, pp. 151-152

3. What factors should he have considered that he didn't?
4. Would you say he made a (wise) (unwise) decision? Why or why not?

Modern-Day Case Study

Annie Jones, 26, is a faithful Christian from a fine Christian family. She has been dating a guy for three years. Annie has discussed marriage on several occasions, but her beau, Zo, who is 30, keeps changing the subject. When he does "engage," he comes up with several logical reasons why they should wait, and he is very persuasive.

Zo is not a Christian. While he attends regularly with Annie, he hasn't shown much interest in studying. Annie prays for him all the time, specifically that he will have an "open heart." She has encouraged her friends to pray for him as well, and they have. On the few occasions when Zo has been willing to discuss marriage and religion, he assures Annie that he will be baptized someday. . . just not now.

Annie has fallen for Zo, head-over-heels – he is educated (he has his Masters in Philosophy and is working on his doctorate), has a great sense of humor and is very good-looking. He is sensible with his money — actually, he's a penny-pincher: the fanciest restaurant they have been to in three years is Applebees, and they shared a Southwest Chicken Salad. But he treats Annie with respect and is never angry toward her (though he has lost his temper a few times while driving on the freeway). He is very competitive, and has gotten jealous a few times, but he does not seem overly possessive. In fact, he's fairly modern in his approach to relationships and feels it's OK for Annie to do what she wants (including going to church services), just as he likes to spend time with his friends.

Last night, Zo dropped a bombshell and asked Annie to marry him. He even had a multi-diamond ring that he had picked out for the occasion (she prefers a solitaire, but he never asked). Annie, caught totally by surprise, stuttered and stammered and finally said "Yes."

Annie has come to you for advice. What will you say to her? In your answer, use the principles stated at the beginning of the lesson and any passages that you feel apply to her situation.

3 Freedom within God's Moral Will

In reviewing the four principles we discussed in lesson 2, few would have difficulty with the first: 1. In those areas specifically addressed by the Bible, the revealed commands of God (His moral will) are to be obeyed.

The difficulty in making decisions – or at least in knowing that we've made good decisions – is felt in those areas where God has not spoken specifically. This lesson takes a closer look at principle number two:

2. In those areas where the Bible gives no command or principle (nonmoral decisions), the Christian is free and responsible to choose his own course of action. Any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God.

As Gary Friesen says, "For God's children, all things within the moral will of God are lawful (I Cor. 6:12), clean (Mk. 7:19; Lk. 11:41; Rom. 14:14, 20) and pure (Titus 1:15). In decisions that are made within that moral will, the Christian should not feel guilty about his choice. . . His plan for His children is for them to enjoy the freedom that He has granted. It is a freedom that is clearly established in Scripture from the nature of laws, the nature of sin, and direct statements of the Bible."¹

While we generally think of "freedom" as a good thing, there is a downside. With freedom comes responsibility. When I was in basic training in the Army, I was told when to go to bed, when to get up, when to eat, when to march and so on. I had no freedom in those particular decisions, but I had no responsibility to choose, either.

But we are responsible for making choices restricted only by God's revealed moral will. As the rule says, any decision made within that will is accept-

God's Sovereign and Moral Wills

God's Sovereign Will

1. A detailed plan for all events in the universe.
2. It is hidden—the believer cannot find and know it.
3. Believers are not expected to find it as part of the Christian life.
4. Believers cannot miss it because it always comes to pass.
5. Includes both good and evil.
6. Can only be discovered after it happens
7. Indirectly Ideal Plan: Though it includes evil acts and foolish decisions, it will ultimately lead to God's glory.

God's Moral Will

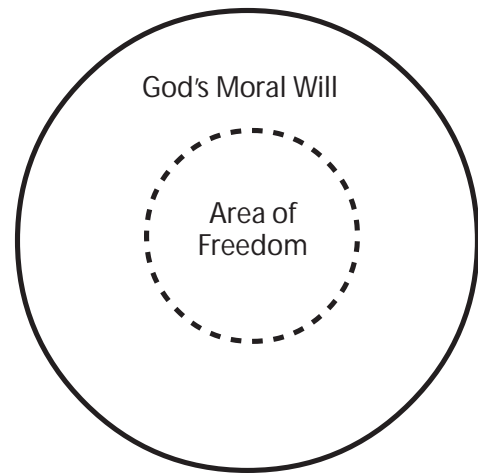
1. A body of general commands and principles for life.
2. Believers are expected to find and do it.
3. Believers can miss it by failure to discover or obey it.
4. It was revealed to apostles and prophets and can be found completely in the Bible.
5. It was revealed by the Holy Spirit through supernatural revelation.
6. Its directives are general for all believers.

¹Friesen, p. 179

able to God. However, we must be sure that the choice falls within God's moral will. That requires an understanding of the law of principles. In other words, while not every decision is regulated by a specific rule, there is a principle in Scripture that applies to nearly every decision. For example, there is no specific rule forbidding you from eating mashed potatoes with your hands while a guest for dinner at a friend's house. However, the principle stated in I Cor. 13:5, "love... does not behave rudely" would cover it, don't you think?

So the freedom to choose, even in the absence of a specific statement from God, is not absolute. It is governed by principle. Most of us have developed certain precepts for our own behavior from principles (therefore, the *principle* that love is not rude creates the *rule*, "thou shalt not eat mashed potatoes with thy hands." By the way, you may be able to deduce from this how Phariseeism developed. A proper desire to apply principles resulted in rules that the Pharisees treated with the force of law).

The point here is that we have the freedom to choose. "Free moral agency" is not just a slogan to sling at Calvinists but a truth that accurately describes our situation in regard to decision making. We make these choices within the moral will of God and the imperatives of God's moral will touch every aspect and moment of life.



Assignment 3

Questions

1. State and explain the second principle of biblical decision-making.

2. What are the advantages of freedom (within God's moral will)? What are the disadvantages?

3. If you agree that it touches every aspect of life, state how God's moral will affects each of the following choices:
 - ▲ How to spend leisure time.
 - ▲ What kind of car to buy.
 - ▲ What person to marry.
 - ▲ Where to live.
 - ▲ What books to read, TV shows to watch, movies to attend.
 - ▲ What to do on a date.

Read the poem on page 10 and analyze it in view of what we have studied thus far.

Bible Case Study

Read Matthew 19:16-22. Think about each decision the rich young man made in the process: (1) the decision to approach Jesus (2) the decision to keep asking after Jesus gave him the first answer (3) the decision not to sell his possessions. Which of these decisions did he have a right to make and which, if any, did he not have a right to make?

Modern Day Case Study

Joe is getting nervous. Two weeks ago, he received a generous offer from his company and now the company is pressuring him for an answer. He has been praying about it, but does not believe he has received a clear answer. The offer is awfully hard to refuse: a major promotion with almost twice as much pay in a position that promises great potential for advancement in the future. The one negative is that the position requires a move to a remote part of Utah. The only sound church is a very small one 75 miles away, making it nearly impossible to attend every service and be actively involved in the work. Joe is concerned, not only for his and his wife's spiritual welfare, but for the effect on his three young children, ages 4, 7, 10. The new job would be too demanding to establish a new congregation.

But there are some advantages: living in a rural area is attractive, especially after spending 10 years in the hustle and bustle of the Bay Area. It would probably be a wonderful experience for the children to get away from the influences of a corrupt culture. And are houses ever cheap there! Less than a third of what a similar house costs in Santa Clara. Joe and his family could save a lot of money over the next few years. And, it's just a temporary move: 5-7 years at the most. Eventually, they would be able to get actively involved in a strong church again somewhere. And there is a very sizeable institutional church about 5 miles away. Although quite liberal, Joe feels he may be able to have a positive effect on them and is considering attending there, if he takes the job.

Joe comes to you for advice. He asks if you believe God has a unique, detailed life-plan for him. He asks how he can know God's will in this matter. Answer his questions, and point out which components of his decision lie wholly within His freedom to choose. Consider the following passages and comment on how they may affect our decisions.

Matthew 6:33; 16:24; Luke 9:62; 14:33; Hebrews 10:25.

Others: _____



My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me;
I may not choose the colors,
He knows what they should be;
For He can view the pattern
Upon the upper side,
While I can see it only
On this, the under side.

Sometimes He weaveth sorrow,
Which seemeth strange to me;
But I will trust His judgment,
And work as faithfully;
'Tis He who fills the shuttle,
He knows just what is best,
So I shall weave in earnest
And leave with Him the rest.

Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

Anonymous

4 “I Tested All This with Wisdom”

A Study of Ecclesiastes

We will explore the third and fourth principles of decision-making in the context of the book of Ecclesiastes. These principles are:

3. In nonmoral decisions, the objective of the Christian is to make wise decisions on the basis of spiritual expediency.

4. In all decisions, the believer should humbly submit, in advance, to the outworking of God’s sovereign will as it touches each decision.

Questions

[If you are not familiar with Ecclesiastes, fill these out in class]

1. Briefly state the background, author and purpose of Ecclesiastes.

2. What is the main theme? What is the scope of the book (i.e., where do its principles apply, mainly)?

Write out a brief sentence or two that summarizes each chapter.

1 —

2 —

3 —

4 —

5 —

6 —

7 —

8 —

9 —

10 —

11 —

12 —

Describe the author's view of wisdom & decision making. How does the book illustrate principles 3 & 4?

Analyze I Kings 3:3-15. Skim over I Kings 4-10. Read I Kings 11. What happened to Solomon, who had more wisdom than any before him?

Assume that Ecclesiastes is "Solomon's swan song" and represents lessons he learned as he got older. How did he learn them and how could he have avoided the problems he faced in his life?

Be ready to discuss other ways that Ecclesiastes is valuable as a guide to wisdom.

Bible Case Study

Solomon is our case study for this class. Consider: what got Solomon in trouble? I.e., what caused this “wisest of all before him” to act foolishly?

Modern Day Case Study: Singleness, Marriage & Wisdom

Read the following situations and record your counsel for each one.

Situation one: An eighteen-year-old woman, Julie, has received a proposal of marriage from a man she loves. But she does not want to get married for at least three years. If she says no, Julie fears she will lose him. And if she waits another three years, she may not be able to find such a fine marriage prospect. Yet she recognizes advantages in singleness, and may choose to remain single beyond the three year period.

Situation two: To her great dismay, a Christian woman who thought her marriage was “made in heaven” is experiencing increasing dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Amy explains to you how both she and her husband, Glen, thought that they had found God’s perfect will when they decided to marry each other. After months of mounting doubts, they now fear that their problems stem from the fact that they missed God’s will. Amy explains, “We each married the wrong person. Now we are trapped in God’s second best, or worse, with no escape.” The thought of such a barren situation reduces her to tears.

Situation three: Herb and Carol are “engaged to be engaged,” but have not announced anything yet because Carol’s mother is dead set against the wedding. Carol’s mother is concerned about Herb’s back-ground. He came from a broken home, and was on drugs before his conversion. Herb has been “clean” for three years, but Carol’s mother wants another three years of probation. (Actually, she wants Carol to marry someone who is a preacher-type, and there is considerable doubt that another three years would make any difference.) Carol is very close to her mother emotionally, and the thought of hurting her mother would break her heart. Herb and Carol are both 22 years old and don’t want to wait until they are 25 to consider marriage.

As you work on this scenario, consider the issue of submission to parental authority: when, if ever, does it end?

5 Getting Wisdom from Experience

When it comes to making decisions, there are few things more valuable than experience.

Comment on these quotations about “experience”

“A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way” (Mark Twain)

“Experience is the best teacher”

“Experience is the comb that life gives you after you lose your hair.”

“You know more of a road by having traveled it than by all the conjectures and descriptions in the world!” (William Hazlitt)

“Men are wise in proportion not to their experience but to their capacity for experience” (Samuel Johnson)

“Experience keeps a dear school, yet fools will learn in no other” (Benjamin Franklin)

“It’s a wise man who profits by his own experience, but it is a good deal wiser one who lets the rattlesnake bite the other fellow.” (Josh Billings)

How do these principles from Ecclesiastes help us in making decisions? Be as specific as possible.

1. Eccl. 1:2. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. **Eccl. 1:14** I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

2. Eccl. 2:11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun. **Eccl. 2:13** And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

3. Eccl. 2:18-23 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

Eccl. 5:10-17 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity. When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep. There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him. As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. This also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

4. Eccl. 3:11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. **Eccl. 4:5-8** The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind. Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

5. Eccl. 3:11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

6. Eccl. 4:9-12 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart. **Eccl. 6:3-4** If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, "Better the miscarriage than he, for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

7. Eccl. 5:2-7 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words. When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

8. Eccl. 7:1 A good name is better than a good ointment,
And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

9. Eccl. 7:2-4

It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart.
Sorrow is better than laughter,
For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.
The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,
While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

10. Eccl. 7:26 And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

11. Eccl. 8:14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

12. Eccl. 9:7-9 Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

13. Eccl. 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

14. Eccl. 9:11-12 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

15. Eccl. 10:20 Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

16. Eccl. 11:1-5 Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days. Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth. If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies. He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap. Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things. **Eccl. 11:6** Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

17. Eccl. 12:1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

18. Eccl. 12:13-14 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

The Principle:

How this might affect a decision:

"PROMISES"

by Bernard Ramm

From PROTESTANT BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION, Baker Book House, 1970, pp.192-195

"Every promise in the book is mine" is one of the overstatements of the century. Few Bible promises partake of such universality. In applying the promises of the Bible to our specific situations we need exercise great care. If we apply promises to ourselves that are not for us, we may suffer severe disappointment. Also, promises must not be used to tempt God. A reserve and a patience should temper all our usages of promises.

(1) *Note whether the promise is universal in scope.* The classic example of a universal is "and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:18). General invitations to salvation are for all men, but invitations to prayer or to special blessings are only for the company of the saved.

(2) *Note whether the promise is personal.* When God said to Paul, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (Acts 18:9-10), that was personal to Paul and may not be used generally. Missionaries in difficult situations may hope for this type of deliverance but may not command it.

(3) *Note whether the promise is conditional.* When it says, "Draw nigh unto God and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8), there is a human condition to be fulfilled before the promise is received.

(4) *Note whether the promise is for our time.* Some promises pertain just to the Jews in their land and have ceased with the coming of the New Testament. Some promises refer to future conditions that shall prevail upon the earth at the close of the age. Evidently, in Revelation 2 and 3 certain promises were restricted to different churches.

In connection with the use of promises some have used the Bible on the same principle of animistic divination. Divination is the means whereby primitives decide whether they should undergo a proposed venture such as hunting, fishing or battle. Common methods among primitives to decide the portent of future events are to read the entrails of pigs or chickens; to crack a bone in the heat of the fire and decide what to do from the nature of the crack; to throw an egg on a grass roof to see if it breaks or not; to use the fire test to determine guilt. On the sillier level, divination is predicting one's future by the reading of cards or tea leaves.

Whenever we force the Bible to say something on specific items in our lives, we are in danger of divination. If we do this, we leave the sensible, intelligent use of the Bible for that which borders on primitive divination. Most notorious is the custom of opening the Bible and putting a finger on a verse and taking that verse as divine guidance. This method dishonors the intelligence of God, the sobriety of the Bible, puts the Christian faith in a ridiculous light, and places the method of determining the will of God on a superstitious, magical basis. It ought to be added: *No promise of the Bible is to be used that is not in keeping with sane, exegetical principles.*

The type of divination mentioned above exists on a more sophisticated level with those who every day try to find specific guidance from the Bible—not guidance in the sense of getting truth, soul-food and principles, but in finding one particular verse that tells them exactly what to do that day, or how to resolve a given situation. To do this, they have to admit that God can give a message through the Bible that is completely divorced from the native, grammatical meaning of the verse. If this is permitted, then what is to prevent the interpreter from finding ANYTHING HE WISHES from the Bible?

To be specific, at the outbreak of World War II, a certain individual could not decide what his course of action should be—enlist? Join the merchant marine? Get a theological waiver? He went to his Bible and, finding a reference to those who go down to the seas in ships, he took it as his orders from God to enlist in the United States Navy. The action could not be based on any sensible exegetical

principle, nor upon any spiritual principle; it was a haphazard coincidence between the verse that had the word "seas" in it and the United States Navy.

The will of God is determined from the Bible only in terms of what it says in its first grammatical sense, or what can be derived from it in terms of great spiritual principles. To use the Bible as in the previous example is in direct violation of the nature of inspiration and of the character of the Bible. God does not "double-talk" when He speaks in Scripture, i.e., He does not have a historical, common-sense meaning, PLUS some special message to us in a given situation. If God speaks to us in a given situation, it must be in terms of the sound exegesis of the passage.

"The only way of ascertaining the will of God... is to learn it by zealous application as students of the revelation of that will contained in the Scriptures. Short cuts such as pulling verses out of boxes, getting guidance by daily motto books, and letting the Bible fall open like casting dice are not only useless; they are deceptive."

Paul Woolley, "The Relevance of the Scripture," THE INFALLIBLE WORD, p.195

Some of God's Promises for Today

I. PROMISES FOR LIVING IN TODAY'S WORLD

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| A. General promises for every day | Psa.84:11; Eccl.8:12; Rom.8:32 |
| B. God's promises for the needs of this life | Psa.23:1,5; Psa.34:9-10; Phil.4:19 |
| C. Promises for food and clothes | Psa.111:5; Matt.6:25,30-32 |
| D. Promises for long life and health | Deut.5:33; Psa.34:12-14; Prov.3:7-8 |
| E. Promises of Safety under divine protection | Deut.3:12; Psa.16:8; Psa.4:8 |
| F. Promises of Peace | Psa.29:11; Psa.119:165 |
| G. Promises of Direction | Psa.37:23-24; Prov.3:5-6; Prov.16:9 |
| H. Promises of Honor | Psa.112:6,9; Prov.22:4; John 12:26 |
| I. Promises of Success & Prosperity | Psa.1:1-3; Psa.128:1-2; Psa.37:5-6 |
| J. Promises of Weather & Money | Deut.11:13-15; Psa.112:1,3 |
| K. Promises concerning children | Psa.127:3-5 |
| L. Promises for our descendents | Deut.5:29; Prov.13:22; Psa.37:23-26 |

II. PROMISES RELATING TO THE TROUBLES OF LIFE

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| A. Our Lord can keep me from trouble | Psa.32:6-7; Prov.12:21; 15:19 |
| B. Our Lord can deliver us from trouble | Psa.34:19; Psa.107:19; Prov.11:8 |
| C. Promises for strength in the midst of trouble | Psa.9:9; Psa.27:10,13-14 |
| D. Promises relating to sickness & old age | Psa.41:1a,3; Isa.46:3-4 |
| E. Promises of deliverance | Psa.33:18-19; Luke 18:7-8; Heb.13:5-6 |
| F. Deliverance from oppression & slander | Psa.12:5; Psa.146:7-8; Matt.5:11-12 |
| G. Deliverance for the poor & needy | Psa.72:12-13; James 2:5 |

III. PROMISES FOR THIS LIFE AND THE LIFE TO COME

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| A. Promises of salvation | Eph.1:3-4,7-8; 2 Pet.1:3-4; Col.1:21-2 |
| B. Promises of prayer | Matt.7:7-11; 21:22; Jas.5:16 |
| C. Promises of grace and truth | John 17:17-19; Eph.2:8-9 |
| D. Promises of spiritual strength | Psa.92:12-15; 68:19-20; Isa.12:2-3 |
| E. Promises of victory over evil | Rom.7:21-8:2; I Cor.10:12-13 |
| F. Promises of fruitfulness and faithfulness | 2 Pet.1:5-8 |
| G. Promises of God's care for us | Prov.3:11-12; Psa.103:13-14,17-18 |
| H. Promises of Salvation & New Life Through Christ | I Cor.1:30-31; Heb.9:14-15 |
| I. Promises of the Spirit | Gal.3:14; 4:6; Eph.3:16-21 |
| J. Promises of God's Ministry to us & through us | Rev.1:5b-6; I Pet.2:9 |
| K. Promises of Peace, Joy and Hope | Isa.32:17; 2 Thess.3:16; Phil.4:6-7 |