

Biblical Decision-Making

Weekly letter from the Senior Pastor

Richard D. Phillips

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC, January 10, 2010

In our evening sermon last Lord's Day, we learned about the Urim and the Thummim, which were a form of lots provided by God to Israel's high priest. By means of these lots, leaders like Joshua or David were able to gain information from God. In Joshua's case, the lots were used to identify Achan as the man who had brought God's judgment on Israel by sinning at the fall of Jericho (Jos. 7:10-20), and with the Urim and Thummim David received confirmation from God of betrayal by the people of Keilah (1 Sam. 23:12). How greatly we would like to get our hands on these means of divine communication today! Instead, when it comes to making decisions about our lives, God requires us to make our choices based on biblical reasoning and prayer. Many of our young people today are selecting colleges to attend. Adults make decisions about which jobs to take or whether to accept a new assignment at work. How often we feel anxiety regarding these and other decisions!

In our study of David last Sunday evening, I provided a series of steps to biblical decision-making that are found in Sinclair Ferguson's excellent book, *Discovering God's Will* (Banner of Truth, 1982). Here are five questions that we should consider prayerfully in making decisions:

1. *Does the Bible prohibit this action?* Ferguson comments that "no action which is contrary to the plain word of God can ever be legitimate for the Christian." This is one reason why it is so important for Christians to know the Ten Commandments. Any course of action that involves lying, hating another person, or seizing possessions that belong to someone else are in violation of God's law. This seems obvious, but Christians can avoid many serious mistakes if we first simply place the grid of the Ten Commandments over our decision-making.
2. *What biblical principles inform this choice?* Which action is going to be spiritually profitable? Even if a choice is not forbidden explicitly in Scripture, it still may be unwise and unprofitable. For instance, when considering a college choice, we should inquire as to the presence of a faithful church nearby and the likelihood of strong Christian fellowship and support. When considering a job, a husband should consider whether it will enable him to support his family, accomplish good things in the world, and still be able to lead a balanced life as a faithful husband, father, and church member.

Ferguson writes: "It is possible to make choices which, eventually, will tend to squeeze out our spiritual energies; to commit ourselves to things which, however legitimate in general terms, will eventually become the dominating and driving force in our lives."

3. *What kind of effect will this choice have on others?* It is true that the Bible teaches Christian liberty in matters of biblical permission. Yet our liberty must always be guided by responsibility and love. Paul writes that we should never allow our choices to "destroy the work of God" or "make another stumble" (Rom. 14:20). Christians should not be surprised if the best choice is one that involves personal sacrifice for the sake of others.
4. *Are there relevant biblical examples or illustrations?* How did faithful men and women in Scripture handle a similar situation? The Bible also directs us to the example of faithful Christians we have known: "Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7).
5. *Consult the advice and prayerful insight of trusted Christians.* In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas were set apart as missionaries while the church in Antioch was fasting and praying together. In Acts 16, Paul received a divine vision instructing him to carry the gospel to Macedonia. Still, in the morning, he gathered his associates to discuss the matter. Luke says that they together "concluded" that God had called Paul to go to Macedonia. Those who think they are called into a certain ministry should likewise come to trusted Christians to have their idea tested and their calling affirmed. Christians making weighty decisions about college, jobs, marriage, etc., would do well to have believing friends discuss the matter with them and pray for God's wisdom together. Years ago, when Sharon and I were considering a call to a certain church, I telephoned an eminent, aged minister to consult his advice. How blessed I was when he not only listened and shared his thoughts, but then added, "My wife and I will spend the day fasting and praying for you while you are visiting and making your decision."

May God help us all to become more biblically wise through study of Scripture, prayer, and obedience. Your elders and pastors are available to you for prayer and counsel and we are always encouraged when church members seek our help in making biblically informed choices.

May the Lord bless you all this week.

In Christ's Love,

Pastor Rick Phillips