

How to Make Wise Decisions

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[0:00] We're in the middle of a series called How To. I'm attempting to answer some of the basic questions of how to live the Christian life. And this afternoon is more for younger Christians. But I have no doubt if you've been a believer for a long time, this message will be good for you to hear.

But like I said, it is more for younger Christians. But some of you are not Christians at all, young or old.

And maybe it's time for you to start thinking about that, start talking to someone about that. And this is just to remind you that your pastors, we're here to hear you. Our doors are open.

If you have any questions about what it means to be a Christian, about the Christian life that we heard about this morning, or if you're just not sure about your spiritual condition, our doors are open. We're ready to hear.

This afternoon's topic is how to know what is right. How to know what is right. And by that I mean two overlapping things. I mean right as opposed to wrong, and I mean wise as opposed to foolish.

[1:15] So every day we are making hundreds of decisions that make up our life. We generally don't live on one decision. There are some decisions that are very, very big, no doubt about that.

But every day we're making up, we're choosing things that make up our life. That when we look back, we can see a long line of decisions that we've made.

And so today we want to talk about, this afternoon we want to talk about, how do you know what's right? How do you know what's right to do in situations where right and wrong are hard to cut that line?

And how do you know the difference between wisdom or folly? And I feel like we can talk about those two issues at the same time, wisdom and righteousness, because that's the way the Bible talks about things.

The book of Proverbs clearly says that wisdom is righteous living, and righteous living is wisdom. And, you know, there are distinctions that we could be making, that we could make, but to a great degree, what is right and what is wise are one and the same thing.

[2:25] So, should I listen to this kind of music? Should I sleep in this morning or wake up early? Should I watch this movie? Should I go out to eat tonight or should I stay in?

Should I play the sport? Should I sign up for this class or that class? Should I take this promotion or let it go? Should I buy this car? Should I buy this house? Should I study for this field?

Should I marry this person or not? Little questions, little decisions, big decisions. And every one of those decisions calls for us to think about what is right.

So, we've all been there in those very, these sort of, these questions, we feel them most distinctly when we have a very big, important decision to make.

You know, whether that man is sitting there thinking, okay, I think I want to propose to this girl. And I think I want to do that, but that's a big, big decision.

[3:27] So, how do you know what's right? How do you know what's wise? Some of the most excruciating times in our lives are when we're in that in-between stage when we don't know if we're going the right way.

Which field should we choose? Which option should we choose? And so, it's those times that it's so important for us to have some basic questions, a basic outline to figure out how to know what's right.

And I'm afraid that's all I'm going to be able to give you today are the questions that you need to be asking yourselves. And hopefully, with God's guidance, with your own thoughtfulness, you can think through a lot of the decisions you have to make and come up with what is right.

So, here's how to know what's right. Ask yourself these five, five questions. Here's the first question. Is it lawful? Is it lawful? Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 6.

1 Corinthians chapter 6. We're going to read a few verses as we go along here. This whole passage Paul is dealing with living righteously.

[4:38] The Corinthians were young Christians. They hadn't been in the faith for very long. And to be honest, they were making a lot of foolish, disobedient, unrighteous decisions.

And Paul, in this section, is sort of setting them straight, giving them some ideas of how they need to start thinking about things. They need to replace some of their old ways of thinking with some new questions, some new thoughts.

So, look at verse 9. And this is all under the topic of, is it lawful? And I think you'll understand where this question comes from. So, verse 9. Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now, that's obviously a list of some things that Paul thought would be pertinent for those Corinthian Christians to hear. And so, where did Paul get that list? Well, he got it by reflecting on the Corinthians culture, what's going on around them, and the Ten Commandments.

[5:54] The Ten Commandments. So, if you take the time to look through that list, you're going to see who won't inherit the kingdom of God. Who's going to be making decisions that totally disqualify them for heaven?

It's people who are lawbreakers. They break the seventh commandment. You shall not commit adultery. They break the eighth commandment. You shall not steal. They break the ninth commandment.

You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor. They break the first commandment. You shall have no other gods besides me. And this is so simple. But this is so important for us to hear. It's so necessary for us to hear in our day and age. How do you know what's right and wrong, wise and foolish? It's so obvious that we miss it. Do you ever miss something right under your own nose where you've looked a hundred times, and finally someone else points it out to you, and it's been there that whole time.

And where do we go if we want to know what's right and wrong? We go to the Ten Commandments. So the law has three uses. The first use is that it convicts us of sin.

[7:04] We talk about that. The second use is it curbs the wicked. When a wicked person sees that God's law forbids it, it has a restraint on them.

It puts fear in the hearts of evildoers. And the third use is what we're talking about today. It's God's means of guidance. Listen to what John Calvin had to say, and think about what he's saying. Quote, For it is the best, the law, the law is the best instrument for enabling them to learn with greater truth and certainty what the will of the Lord is which they aspire to follow.

So, brother and sister, do you want to know the will of God? Do you want to know what is right? Well, don't leave your best instrument in the bag. Okay? The law is what will help us to understand and give us clarity about what the will of the Lord is.

And so, a doctor who wants to hear a person's heart but doesn't use a stethoscope, he would say it's foolish. But so often, that's how we try to discern what God's will is for me.

[8:14] We put our ear to our own chest, and all we end up hearing is our own breathing. And so, we have to make some decision based on that. We're leaving the best instrument that we have in our bag out of it.

And so, should I date this person? Should I date this person or that person? Well, what does the law say? What does the Bible say? It says, do not be unequally yoked.

Don't put yourself into life's yoke with an unbeliever. Don't do it. And the Bible has a basic doctrine of dating. Young people, did you know that?

The Bible has a basic doctrine of dating. The Bible doesn't know anything about just dating around for the fun of it, to be romantically involved with this person and that person just because it feels good.

The Bible clearly portrays courtship as a means for the purpose of marriage. And so, there's no point in dating an unbeliever.

[9:15] So, you follow the argument. Should I date this person or that person? Well, what does the law say? Do not be unequally yoked. You can't lawfully marry them, and so you have no business dating them.

So, that's the first question. Is it lawful? The second question. Will it bring glory to God? Will it bring glory to God? I won't ask you to turn there, but you remember those very famous words.

1 Corinthians 10.31. So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Now, eating and drinking are very small decisions.

When you went through that line down there and you picked potatoes and this and that or whatever you picked, very small decisions about what to eat and what to drink.

But whether you're a Christian, young or old, we are called to do even those smallest things for the glory of God. So, no decision is too big and no decision is too small to call it before the bar of God's glory.

[10:16] So, whatever you do. So, how do you know what's righteous? How do you know what's wise? Well, you ask, will this bring glory? Will this bring glory to God? When I have done this, will it give me greater thoughts of God?

That's what it means to glorify God. To have God exalted in people's thoughts. So, will it make my thoughts of God bigger or will it make them smaller?

And when I have chosen this path, will other people see God as bigger or smaller? Will they think higher thoughts of Jesus or smaller thoughts of Jesus when I've made this decision?

So, you're on the lawn of this house that you want to buy. And you're only thinking, wow.

This house has everything that I could want. It has everything that I could need. The lawn looks great. The kitchen is gorgeous.

[11:22] The floors are beautiful. The garage has enough room for all my stuff. And so, let me ask you, if that is all you're thinking, it's not wrong to be thinking those things, but if that's all that you're thinking as you're looking at that house, are you doing it for the glory of God?

My guess is probably not. If that's all you're thinking about, you're probably thinking, this house will make much of me. This will be what I need.

This will serve me. Others will think higher thoughts of me. And so, now, my point is not that the only way that you can glorify God with a house is if you buy something ugly and run down.

That's not the point at all. But I'm saying, to live righteously is to have this question ringing in your ears and reverberating in your heart. If I do this, will other people think much of God?

Well, people say, wow, that person must serve a great God when I buy this house, this car, this furniture, when I play this sport, when I choose this major, when I listen to this music or watch that movie.

[12:33] So that's the second question. We bring all those decisions and we bring it before the most important, the reason we exist. Does this fit in with why I exist?

To make much of God? To glorify Him? If it does, then we're doing what's right. We're doing what's wise. If not, we need to turn around.

We need to go a different way. Here's the third question. Will it help me? Will it help me? Now that can sound just like the opposite of what I was just talking about, but it's really not.

Your Bible should be still open to 1 Corinthians 6. Look down at verse 12. Everything is permissible for me, but not everything is beneficial.

So brothers and sisters, in the NIV it has this, everything is permissible for me in quotes because this is sort of a saying that the Corinthian church had.

[13:32] And it was true to a certain extent. You have great liberty in Christ. The Christian life is not a life of a thousand do's and don'ts, of a bunch of man-made rules where it feels restrained, where the burden is heavy.

Jesus came to give us a light burden. And so in following Christ, there is great freedom. Everything is permissible. But, Paul says immediately, but that's not the whole story.

Everything is permissible for me, for sure, but not everything is beneficial. Not everything is beneficial. So how do you know what is right? You ask this third question.

Is this beneficial to me? Is this good for me? The Corinthians seem to be thinking that if there's nothing wrong with it, then you might as well do it.

Have you ever met people like that? You walk in and you're like, why are you watching this movie?

Well, there's nothing wrong with it. Yeah, there's nothing wrong with it. There's nothing right about it

either.

[14 : 38] We aren't called to live at this bare minimum, always asking the question, well, how close can I get to the edge without doing something wrong? That's not how you live a righteous life.

So you ask yourself, will this help me in the long run? Will this strengthen me in my walk with Jesus? Will this help me on my way to heaven? Will this choice, will this career, will this person help me to get closer to Jesus or will it make me further away from Jesus?

So young people, let's think about sports. And I want to be very clear at the beginning. I'm not giving you direction here. I'm just telling you, I'm asking you to think with me.

In our culture, we live in a very sports crazed nation. And so we just can't barely ask the simple question, is there anything wrong with it?

There's nothing wrong with it. You have freedom. You have freedom. You're free to make those choices. And I'm not going to tell you otherwise. But you need to ask yourself, is it beneficial in the long run?

[15 : 47] Is it beneficial? When you get to heaven, will you be glad that you spent your time that way? I'm not giving you an answer. I'm just asking you to think about the question.

Are you going to be glad that you lived your life that way? That you chose that thing? Or will you regret the time that you spent doing it? So I want you to live life to the fullest.

I'll be honest. I want you to live life to the fullest. I want you to have a happy, joyful, meaningful life.

And so you need to at least honestly ask this question. Is this really good for me?

I know it's not wrong. But is it good for me? Is it the right thing to do? And so this question, it's going to be answered in a lot of different ways depending on the situation.

But at least we need to be asking ourselves that question. Is it going to be beneficial for me? That's how we know what is right. How do we know what's wise? Fourth question.

[16 : 49] Does it enslave? Does it enslave? So we're still in the middle of verse 12. Here's the Corinthians saying again. Everything is permissible for me.

And Paul's answer. But I will not be mastered by anything. The Corinthians had an idea of freedom. They wanted to live a free life. And the sad and ironic thing about it was that the way they were thinking about it easily led them into slavery.

Their freedom was actually the means of them becoming enslaved. And so when we only look at it like, when we look at our decisions like, well, I can do whatever I want.

I'm free, right? When we look at life like that, we can easily get ourselves involved in all sorts of things that don't actually make us free.

They actually enslave us. They master them. And the point is, we only have one master, the Lord Jesus. And so nothing, nothing else can be our master.

[17 : 59] So how do you know what's right? Ask yourself, will this compromise Jesus' lordship in my life? Will this enslave me? And don't be naive to think that it's only bad things that enslave people.

It's not just bad things that enslave people. It's good things that get too much control. So pornography, romance novels, movies, video games, exercise, academics, social media.

We went from bad to good to indifferent. Guess what? All of those things can enslave you. And Paul is saying, don't let anything enslave you, bad or good.

And so you ask yourself, will buying this thing make me free or not? You know, some decisions end up being slavery and some decisions, some purchases end up being freedom.

So will watching this movie, will playing these games make me, free me to love Jesus or will they enslave me? Will this enslave me to have small thoughts, enslave me to silly ideas, to just worthless things?

[19 : 07] And so will playing these sports, will taking these classes, dating this person, free me for what really matters? Or will it enslave me and keep me constrained so that I can't do what God wants me to do?

See, freedom is not getting to do whatever you want. Freedom is having the ability to do what's right. And so will this enslave me? How do you know what's right? Ask that question, that fourth question.

Is it enslaving? Here's the fifth question. So we're circling around these questions. We're circling around these decisions and we're trying to look at each decision from a different angle.

Now this fifth question, we come at it and we say, Will doing this thing, when making this choice, make me more like those godly men and women of the Bible? Or will making this decision make me more like ungodly people? So basically the question is, is it godly? Is it godly?

[20:08] When I choose this, will I be more like God? Will I be more like godly men? Or will I be more like this world? Every day we're making steps.

Every day you take steps. You take steps towards godliness or you take steps towards worldliness. And so we want to be making the choices that get us on the path toward godliness and away from worldliness.

Now, this world is centered on me. Right? I mean, the world is the collective, this is about me. It's what I want. What I feel like doing. I am the Lord and I will do what I want to do. And so that's the world. And brothers and sisters, we need to ask ourselves, will making that decision make me more like that?

Or will it make me more like the Hebrews 11, Hall of Faith? The kind of people like Moses who said, you know what, I don't want that riches of Egypt because I have Christ.

[21:13] For the sake of Christ, he forsook all those things. And so all those people were living for the Lord, who lived under the Lord, who lived to the Lord.

And that's the direction that we want to go. And so every day we're making these decisions and we're either going one way or another. No decision is too small that won't affect that. Even if you just roll over an inch, you're making it some sort of directional.

You're going in a direction. And so Paul is saying we need to move in the direction of honoring and obeying Jesus more.

And that's kind of what he says next. And so the kind of the broad idea of the sentence is that Jesus is the Lord.

He has full authority and no actions that we take should subvert his authority. So Paul applies Jesus' Lordship in this place to the area of sexual immorality.

[22:26] And we need to apply Jesus' Lordship to every decision we make. Is this decision consistent with the Lordship of Christ? And that's another way of asking, is it godly? Is it making me more obedient?

Does this fit as Christ's servant? I am his servant. So if I make this decision, does that correspond, does that fit with the idea that Jesus is my Lord?

And that all that I have and all that I am is to be for him. Now, as we conclude, let's think through some actual examples. So, what shall I do this Sunday?

What shall I do this Sunday? Well, Jesus is Lord, isn't he? And this is called his day. Called the Lord's day.

The Lord, Jesus says a number of times in the Gospels, I'm the Lord of the Sabbath. And so that means that whatever we do today should have reference to him.

[23:32] Whatever I do has to be in some way consistent with Jesus' name as written over this day. We acknowledge him.

We honor him as Lord. Now, that's going to look different for each person. But the direction should still nevertheless be the same. We should be asking those questions.

If I do this on this day, will this honor Jesus? Will this make much of him? Or will people see that and think smaller thoughts of Jesus because I've done this? So, will it glorify God?

So, we kind of mix all those questions together. We've asked, is it lawful? Yeah, we need to do what's lawful on the Lord's day. What glorifies?

And we could talk about what's really beneficial to do on this day. And so, we come to this question of, well, what do you do on the Lord's day? It's going to look different, but the questions are still going to be the same.

[24:29] Here's another example. Must I work hard at my job? And obviously, everyone's like, yeah, I know the answer. Yeah, we have to. You know, but no one seems to.

I mean, I'm not talking about you. But when I went into work, there were people that just didn't work very hard. And so, as a young person, it's easy to see what they're doing and just do what they do. You come back late from work, you know. You just don't work very hard. You just do the bare minimum. And so, that's a decision that you're making. You're making it every day. You're going to choose what kind of work you're going to be.

Well, what does God's word say about which I should choose? Should I be right there on time at work? Or is it just fine to mosey on in whenever I want?

And how I work. What does God's word say? If a man will not work, he shall not eat. And then it says, in six days, a man will work. So, what's the right thing to do?

[25 : 32] Slack off with everyone else? Make that decision? No. No, that's not right. How do I know? Because it's not lawful. It's breaking God's law.

God says, go do this. You need to do this. And we're not doing it. Well, how do I know? Well, another way.

I know it's not good to slack off at your job. And make those kind of decisions. Is because it doesn't glorify God in the least. It does not glorify God in the least to be a bad employee.

Your employer won't say, you know, Bob there is a Christian. And that's kind of weird. But you know what? He's the best worker I have. And I wish I had more like him.

If you come in late, he's not going to say that. And if you slack off your job, he's not going to say that. He's going to say, you know what? Bob is a Christian. And he's as bad as everyone else. And I just can't believe he has the gall to talk to me about my problems.

[26 : 32] So, one decision makes God look good. And another decision makes God look bad.

And we could go example after example after example. Asking the questions. And that's how you come to find out what is right. Now, someone says, but that isn't my problem.

And this is the hardest problem of all. My problem is, I can't decide between two really good choices. Have you ever been there? Where you have just two good things and you don't know which to do.

You've thought about all the things. You've asked all the questions. And there doesn't seem to be any difference. This is good for me. This is good for me. This will glorify God. This will glorify God. This is lawful. This is lawful. This is consistent with Jesus' Lordship. This is consistent with the Jesus' Lordship. And then what can happen is, as we sit there, we start to become afraid.

[27 : 37] And we don't take any action. Because for some reason, we're afraid to commit to one or the other. We want a definite answer. And it's always easier to act when you have a definite, clear-cut answer.

But what do you do when you don't have a clear-cut answer? After all the questions are asked? Well, you just keep sitting there thinking and thinking and scraping your insides and asking and asking and talking and talking until you're not doing anything at all.

Well, what do you do? Here's the answer. You just do something. You just do something. Why? Because God is the God of providence. Providence means control.

And it means care. And so I can be assured that whatever I choose, in that case, God will work it for my good.

Because he's promised to. He loves me. He cares for me. And, you know, there is something very mysterious about life, after all. Because we've talked a lot about the decision parts of things.

[28 : 40] But in reality, when everything's been summed up, our comfort doesn't come in our ability to choose the best thing all the time. Our ability, our comfort comes in knowing that God loves us.

And that his providence, his sovereignty, is working together with my decisions. And he's going to be glorified. And if I'm a believer in Christ, I'm going to be taken care of.

And it will be okay. So, if I'm a believer in Jesus, then I can know that, without a doubt, all my decisions, good and bad, wise and foolish, God will work for my good in the long run.

And sometimes we don't know what the right thing to do is. And no amount of thinking brings any light. And then you just have to trust your Heavenly Father. He loves you.

He gave up his son for you. He's not going to let these small or these big decisions ruin you. He's going to keep you. He's going to love you. And he'll protect you all the way to the end.

[29 : 49] And so, on the end, at the end, we don't trust in ourselves and our own ability to figure out all these questions. We trust in the Lord who loves us. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you are with us in the Holy Spirit.

And so, all these decisions that we do face, and we face so many, we can't even count them all. And it's hard to even think about them in such a general way.

But thank you that despite the fact that we're faced with and we make hundreds of thousands of decisions, and so much seems to be riding on it, that you love us and that you are working all things together for our good.

Thank you for the Lord Jesus who died for us, who won us every good thing that we have and that we enjoy. Thank you, Father, that you loved us in him, that you chose us in him. And in the great scheme of things, all of what you are doing will bring you glory. And it will be for our good. So I pray that we would rest.

[31 : 05] But I pray also that we would be making wise decisions, that we'd be asking the right questions. We wouldn't just be asking, you know, or saying there's nothing wrong with it.

But we will be actively thinking about how we can do what is good. I pray for my brothers and sisters, and I ask that you would bless them this week. Keep them.

Keep them from the evil one. Protect them in the hour of temptation. Encourage them if they're discouraged. Convict them if they're hardened. And love them all.

And I pray that you would call sinners to yourself. A God that is so worthy to be praised. A God so worthy to be trusted. And to the Lord Jesus who saves sinners.

And we pray that you would save Lord Jesus this week. And it's in your name I pray. Amen.