

Introduction

According to studies, each adult in the room makes approximately 35,000 decisions every single day. From what we will eat to what we will wear to whether or not we will answer our crazy relative's ridiculous post on Facebook, we make a decision approximately every 2 1/2 seconds. That's a pretty rapid clip. And the simple reality is that we are challenged by Scripture to make every, single decision for the glory of God. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:31

1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV - So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Most of the time, that is easy, even if we don't always follow through. We know that it's not God honoring to yell at the guy who cuts us off on the interstate (even if we do it sometimes). But what about the hard decisions in life? What about the decisions like which job to take or if you should say yes to that marriage proposal or if you should speak up at work when something unethical happens. What then?

In World War II, "Winston Churchill was forced to make a painful choice. The British secret service had broken the Nazi code and informed Churchill that the Germans were going to bomb Coventry. He had two alternatives: (1) evacuate the citizens and save hundreds of lives at the expense of indicating to the Germans that the code was broken; or (2) take no action, which would kill hundreds but keep the information flowing and possibly save many more lives." ¹ We know that Churchill chose the latter, but what a choice to have to make.

The early church also faced a difficult decision - what to do about Judas and his seat among the Apostles. Certainly, Judas had already taken his life in shame for his role in the crucifixion of Christ, but did Jesus make a mistake by choosing him? Do they need to replace him? If they do replace him, who do they pick? What are the criteria for selecting a new Apostle now that Jesus had ascended into Heaven?

Decision making is hard enough but when we stop to consider that we should make decisions that glorify God, it becomes more so. I am convinced that we can look to our text today and see how to make Godly, Gospel-Driven Decisions.

Gospel Decisions are Informed by Scripture

As we look at our text today, we see Peter taking the role as representative for the apostles. In this, the very first thing he does is appeal not to his own authority, not to the authority of learning from Jesus Christ directly but the power and authority of Scripture itself. In one setting, Peter affirms not only the authority of Scripture, but he affirms the inspiration of Scripture as well. He states clearly and authoritatively that what happened with Judas wasn't an accident but fulfilled the Scripture. Then, Peter turns again to Scripture to affirm what he felt was God's prompting in calling a new apostle to replace Judas. Scripture drove Peter's decision-making.

Recently, I spoke with a pastor of a church whose denomination is undergoing a fight over a hot topic social issue. As we talked about what is happening and what it might mean for him and his local congregation, we agreed that this issue really isn't the topic everyone thinks that it is – that is the social issue. The issue is really the authority of Scripture. Because the Bible clearly forbids the particular behavior that is debated, you have to deny whether or not the Bible actually meant what it said. The problem isn't if you agree or disagree with the lifestyle, it's whether or not you agree or disagree with the Bible. When church leaders reject the authority of the Bible and the right interpretation of the Bible, leaders open themselves to all sorts of false teaching. Thus, that issue isn't about love or acceptance or approval. It's all about the authority of God's Holy Word. If we want to make Godly, Gospel-Driven decisions, we need to see what the Scriptures say about the matter at hand.

Thus, we need to understand that like Peter, gospel decision makers are held captive to the Word of God. They must study it, learn from it and apply it to their lives. They must be people who follow what it teaches, even when it is hard. Following Jesus begins with following his word. As we read in 2 Timothy 3:16

2 Timothy 3:16 ESV - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

The only way I know to make decisions informed by Scripture is to have a life that is informed by Scripture through consistent, regular reading of God's Word. Each one of us needs to have a plan to spend time regularly in God's Word, not only having it refresh our very souls, but transforming our minds to look, think and act more like Christ. God-honoring, Gospel-Driven decisions begin with a foundation of Scripture and having it inform the way we think and act.

Simply put, gospel decision makers must be people who are both students of the

Word and followers of all that it teaches. This is why I've spent time in our Thursday night studies not just studying the Bible, but teaching you a framework by which you can study as well. Because I want you to be able to study the world for all it's worth in order that you might make Godly, Gospel Driven decisions in all areas of your life.

Gospel Decisions are Made in Prayer

Based on Scripture, Peter lays out some requirements that the new leader must be a man who had walked with them from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry and would testify to the resurrection. They then narrowed it down to two. From there they stopped and asked God what to do. When we are faced with difficult decisions in life, we need to be people who go to God in prayer.

Prayer is our way of communicating with God and asking him to guide us in our decision making. The disciples knew that Jesus often withdrew to pray before big events in ministry. Likewise, if we want to make Godly, Gospel-Driven decisions, we need to be people who make time to withdraw and pray, asking God to give us the wisdom to deal with the day and the challenges it presents. This is why our prayers must include a request for wisdom, as James 1:5 says,

James 1:5 ESV - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Wise, God-honoring, Gospel-Driven Decisions come from time in both prayer and in God's word. But too often, we say, "Well, I'll pray about it" when in reality we mean, "I'll think about it" and what we really mean by that is "I just don't want to say no right now, but I know I will." The disciples here prayed in such a way that it recognized that God will show us what He wants from us if we would simply ask him to show us. God is not sitting on high, watching us stumble around in the dark and then yelling at us because we fall down. He wants to show us the way to follow Him.

Part of trusting God means we trust him not just for our salvation, but for all of our lives. God cares about where you work, who you marry, what you spend your money on, how you discipline your children, what shows you watch on tv - and because he cares, he will guide you through his word and through prayer to help you understand what you should do in those situations.

Let me ask you, do you have a plan to pray? Do you have a pattern to consistently spend time in prayer, seeking God's will for your life and asking him to work in other people's lives? I will tell you that the one thing I have done that has helped me the most in my prayer life is to keep a list and assign certain days to certain requests. Then, I know what to pray for each day and the list isn't overwhelming. The key isn't to pray like I did, but to pray regularly – and a plan will help you with that.

There are those who would say that God will give you a clear and precise direction for every decision when you ask him. “Lord, should I have the butter or the jelly on my toast?” That sort of thing. I don't think that is the case. Why? Well, look at our text today. They picked two, but God didn't speak from on high and say, “PICK MATTHIAS!” They threw lots to decide. You could say they flipped a coin to determine which one would replace Judas. and that leads us to our next point - that Gospel Decisions are Surrendered to God.

Gospel Decisions are Surrendered to God

Once those two requirements were met, the church picked two men and put them forward. Certainly there were more than two, but Matthias and Justus were the two that the assembly put forth. Here we see that the body of Christ plays a role in picking and nominating the leaders of the church. Peter lays out the requirements based on Scripture and then the local body puts forth two and one will be selected from there.

What's interesting is they didn't vote on them. There was no campaign commercials from the Justus for Apostle committee and Matthais probably never said, “I approve this message.” Since both men met the requirements, they went back to a Biblical method of selecting their leaders: they cast lots to determine which one of the two would take Judas' place. Certainly the idea of leaving this up to random chance seems odd - but casting of lots is hardly random. Consider Proverbs 16:33 and Proverbs 18:18

Proverbs 16:33 ESV - The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Proverbs 18:18 ESV - The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders.

Both of these verses remind us that there really is no such thing as chance.

Ultimately, God is the one that selected Matthias. We see that selecting Gospel leaders within the church is a joint effort between God and the assembly - just like every other God-honoring, Gospel-Driven decision we have to make.

So if you have two choices that can honor God, you have a couple of options. Consider if you have a choice between two careers - both are good choices that will provide for your family. You can study to be an electrician or you can train to be a plumber. You ask God which one to pick but you don't get a clear answer. At some point you need to choose - what should you do? There are a couple of options. First, you could decide to pick the one that sounds more appealing. That's ok. God gave you a brain and a personality with desires. It's OK to pick based on that. But I also think if you still can't decide, it's OK to flip a coin, the modern equivalent to casting lots. Why? Because that coin isn't flipped by chance. God determines how it falls.

Ultimately God-Honoring, Gospel-Driven decisions remember that God is most honored by HOW we do things rather than WHAT we do. Certainly, what we do is important, but too often we are paralyzed because we wait for a clear sign from God about the "bestest" option. Rather than that, we should ask, "God, how can I honor and glorify you and proclaim the Gospel in whichever choice I make?" Rather than asking, "Do I go to Iowa or Iowa St to study journalism?" ask "How can I honor God in that course of study?" And then pick Iowa - Go Hawks!

Gospel Decisions are Ministry Minded

When the disciples made their choice, they kept one thing in mind. The leader they picked was a leader who would have a job to do. Look at verse 25. They understood that the decision they were making wasn't to have someone do their bidding or assume an office. It is to appoint a leader in the church to lead to do the work of ministry that Christ had left for them to accomplish. Either Matthias or Justus would be men leading the gospel charge into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth.

Too often, we think of our decisions without considering the gospel implications of the choice. Every choice we make has an impact on how we can share the gospel. The disciples understood this. This is why they knew they needed someone who had been around since the beginning and was a witness to the resurrected Jesus. Imagine how powerful of a witness it was to say to someone, "I saw Jesus with my own eyes! I shook his hand! He is ALIVE!"

But even on a smaller scale, let's talk about the decisions we make every day. It's dinner time and I have a choice to make. Do I talk to my family or do I read the news on my smart phone? Our tendency is to say "It's the smartphone's fault!" but a decade ago, the temptation was to watch the news on TV and before that it was to read the paper at the dinner table. The issue isn't the technology, the issue is what choices do we make with the technology. God-honoring, Gospel-Driven decisions prompt me to ask my boys how their days were and to share things about Jesus at the dinner table. Now, I don't always make those choices as I ought to. But I know the best choice is to invest dinner in a gospel conversation with my family.

Ultimately, God-honoring, Gospel-driven decisions focus on the advance of God's Kingdom. Not every decision is equal, but it never hurts to stop and ask, one of two questions - "Will the gospel be advanced by my decision?" or "Will my witness be harmed by my decision?" That's the ultimate criteria we have. That's the beauty of the Gospel - it looks less on the outward actions and looks at the heart and desires behind them.

Gospel Decisions are Made

In board gaming, we have a term that isn't meant as a compliment. Sometimes there are so many choices that a person, when faced with them all, will suffer from Analysis Paralysis. This means that with the choices at hand, they can't decide and their turn takes forever. Some of us in life suffer from Analysis Paralysis as well. We agonize over choices or we refuse to move until God speaks directly to us about the situation. This is not a healthy way to live.

I think this goes back to the mistaken notion that when the Bible says, "I know the plans I have for you, plans for you to prosper", it then is up to us to figure out what this perfect plan for our lives is. God has a perfect job for me, so I will agonize over whether or not to take the job. He has the perfect spouse for me, so I will lose sleep over if I have found the right one.

Let me ask you a question - what would have happened if the lot fell on Justus and not Matthias? I will let you in on a secret - probably nothing major. I mean, of the 12, only Peter and John wrote books in the New Testament, Paul had his own unique situation and the rest, we don't know what they did. Neither Justus nor Matthias wrote any books that we still have and only Justus is mentioned later in Acts and then again in Colossians - and then only in passing.

I am convinced that the reason we agonize over so many of our decisions isn't because of their importance but instead because of our insecurities. The great joy of the gospel is that even if we make a bad choice, God has the ability and authority to turn things to good. Romans 8:28

Romans 8:28 ESV - And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

This means that while we should make decisions based on Scripture and prayer, surrendered to God so that the furtherance of the Gospel is in mind, we can rest well at night knowing that in all of this, God will make sure that the outcome is for his glory. Sometimes in life we need to forget about making the perfect choice and instead look to trust God will work it out in the end. A God-honoring, Gospel-Driven decision is one that is made trust God for the end result, just as the disciples did in our text today.

Gospel Decisions Require a Right Relationship with Christ

As we wrap up today, I want to close on one vital point. It is impossible to make God-honoring, Gospel-Driven choices without knowing Jesus and making Him the center of your life. This is the thrust of the passage we opened up with from 1 Corinthians 10:31. Whatever you do, do it for Jesus. Whatever decisions you make, make them for the glory of Jesus. That is the criteria that undergirds any attempt at making God-honoring, Gospel-Driven choices.

In our text today, verses 21-22 listed out the requirements for a leader in the church - that they know Jesus and could testify to his resurrection. In other words, that they were a true follower of Christ. And I believe that this is here to remind us that anyone who leads in the church must know Jesus and trust him. I think that is obvious. But what is the reason for it? I mean, teachers can teach things they don't always believe 100% and there are people who lead organizations even though they don't agree with everything in the organization.

The reason, I believe, is that the church is unlike any other organization. It is the bride of Christ. Thus, the church must help people know and trust Jesus above all. Leaders in the church must make decisions based not on the whims of the world or the dictates of culture. They must make decisions on behalf of King Jesus. If we are charged, as leaders in the church, to make decisions based on what we believe Jesus wants for his bride, then we had better make sure we are in a right

relationship with Jesus.

But it's not just church leaders who need to do this. We are all emissaries on behalf of our great King Jesus. Consider 2 Corinthians 5:20:

2 Corinthians 5:20 ESV - Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

If we are called to be ambassadors, we are ALL called to make God-honoring, Gospel-Driven decisions. If we consider an ambassador, they do not make policy on their own whims but their decisions day to day are made to reflect the administration of the current president. That's why we often get all new ambassadors when we get a new president. They want to know that the ambassador is on the same page as the administration they represent.

Likewise, church leaders must be on the same page as Jesus by knowing him and having a right relationship with him, thus keeping the gospel front and center. For the rest of us, we are responsible for selecting those leaders, as the early church did with Matthias and Justus. And we are responsible for making decisions that further the gospel in our communities. The only way to do that is to have a relationship with Jesus.

That means we must be a people who not only study the Word and commit ourselves to prayer, but we must surrender our lives to the cause of Christ. This is how the early church lived. And, we see that, for the most part, they made God-honoring, Gospel-Driven decisions. The question for us today then is will we put in the effort to do the same. Will we commit ourselves to living in this fashion so that we can lead this church and our families in such a way that our decisions further the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is my prayer that we will do just that.

Let's Pray

1 - Between Two Truths - Living with Biblical Tensions, Klyne Snodgrass, 1990, Zondervan Publishing House, p. 179

2 - Begg, Alistair & Derek On Being a Pastor pg. 48

