

# The Way of Wisdom in Ministry Decisions

Colossians 1:9ff

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## Introduction

We are thinking together about our Chapel Distinctives. These are foundational commitments and functional ministries. We are a gospel-grounded, Christ-centered, cross-embracing, sacrificial people seeking to serve and please the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are committed to expositional preaching. We will preach from and following the text itself.

We are under the supremacy and centrality of Christ. He is formally and functionally over and in the center of all we do.

Our philosophy of ministry is framed, focused, and functions by the grace of God, the people God gives us, and the goal of all growing up in Christ to maturity.

Everything that people and a church does is a reflection of how it makes decisions. We have been intentional in thinking about this. As a result of careful Biblical and practical reflection, the Chapel leadership, in its decision making, adheres to what is known as The Way of Wisdom.

First, listen to a text... Colossians 1:9-12

<sup>9</sup> And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

I hope that you will understand better how we, in all our ministries, make decisions about what we do and what we don't. And, I hope that you will be encouraged to walk with God according to the way of wisdom

## **What is the challenge?**

What kind of challenges will we face together as we approach this subject?

### **To hear what the Bible is saying...**

To read the texts for what they say and not read into them what we already believe. For many of you this is a new way to think and to realize that a whole church's decision follows this.

### **To listen to what we are teaching...**

To be a Berean – that is, to listen to teaching, examining the Scripture to see if it is true with a heart poised to hear and believe. **Acts 17:11 (ESV)** – Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

### **To be willing to accept and understand...**

Christians should always interpret their experience by the Scriptures and be willing to change their ideas if they find them or, more importantly, *don't find them in the Scriptures*.

## **What do we assume?**

There are some basic assumptions that are usually held that we are going to address.

### **That God has a personal will for each person and the right choice for each ministry...**

Many Christians think that there is a personal, particular, even point will of God for each person.

### **That God wants us to find that personal will...**

For some reason, most Christians believe that this will is hidden from them either because of sin, humanness or something about God. Why would God hide His will from us?

### **That each decision has only one right choice...**

In each decision there is only one choice that is pleasing to God or is in God's will.

## **That it is possible to miss God's will and thus:**

The church will be out of God's will in ministry decisions.

We will miss the best that God would have had for us. Who then defines what is best?

What if the next major decision is a junction that will put the Chapel on the wrong path permanently? Who gets to assess that?

Can you be married to someone who is not God's will?

So, you choose the wrong person to marry?

Or, you chose not to marry the right person?

Or the person you were supposed to marry chooses someone else?

## **That the Bible thinks like we do...**

We assume with very little proof that the Bible teaches all of the above...

It is impossible to prove a negative – I cannot go to the Bible to prove that this view is wrong. I can go to the Bible and not find this view in it –

People have tried to proof text the traditional view and we will deal with one of the most common ones in a moment.

## **Why is it important?**

How does this subject affect us? We have recognized and thought through that, as a church...

## **We make small decisions every hour, every day...**

In the moment by moment of ministry, just like in life, we are making decisions that affect others...

## **We make large decisions regularly...**

As elders and ministry leaders, we have been given the authority and the responsibility to make decisions for the church. The Bible is very clear that the church is expected to submit to those decisions.

## **Our decisions affect the church's future...**

We understand that our decisions affect the trajectory of the church. The Chapel is what it is today because of important wisdom decisions made years ago.

## **People expect that we will make making the right decision.**

Since the Bible does not tell us specifically what decisions to make, how then do you know or we know that the decision you just made is right?

## **What if we make the wrong decision?**

You can immediately see a problem – you have already made the decision and you may not be able to undo it...

Second, how do you know that it was the wrong decision? Why are we using right and wrong language about decisions that are not moral?

## **Where do we all, leaders, and members, get stuck?**

Why are people, why are your church leaders, concerned about this whole topic?

We want to please God. This is a good thing...

We are generally cautious and risk adverse. We want to be safe as much as possible...

We all want the church to be and do what we want. Personal desires and expectations become our primary aim in life and ministry, our biggest heart idols.

We have too many choices. If the Chapel doesn't do what I want, then I will just go somewhere else.

We feel the pressure to make decisions that will please people.

# Three Models of Decision Making

Let's think about how people, and therefore, ministries make decisions....

## The Charismatic Model (Isaiah 30:21)

<sup>21</sup> And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

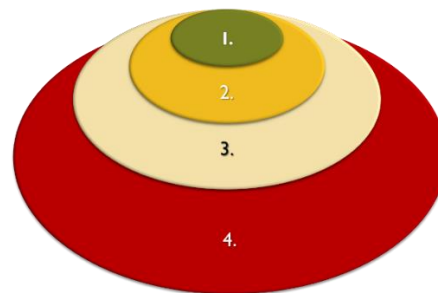
The Holy Spirit will impress on each person's heart the authoritative will of God for each decision. Therefore, inward impressions, thoughts, beliefs are equated with the Spirit's work and create the will of God. The will of God, even subjectively, is to be followed. The leading then is personal, subjective, feeling-oriented and absolutely authoritative. To disobey the Spirit's voice through impressions is to disobey God and grieve the Spirit. In some circles, it is thought that one can have the Spirit's leading and sovereign "word" or "knowledge" over another person's life.

## The Traditional Model (Romans 12:1-2)

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

God reveals His will for all decisions. The moral commands of the Bible cover every area of life. Therefore, from this text, the traditional model says there are four major circles of God's will.

1. Perfect
2. Good
3. Acceptable
4. Out of God's will



This model is very dependent on impressions and on the concept of "peace". If one has peace about a decision, then it is probably God's will.

There are so many questions that are difficult to answer in this model.

If you are out of God's will, can you get back in?

What if an "out of God's will" decision, is permanent?

What do you do if someone else has made decisions that puts you out of God's will?

What is God's perfect will when you disagree with duly appointed leadership?

Having grown up with this model and seen its bad, bad effects, I am thankful for the grace of God through a mentor who introduced me to the Way of Wisdom in college. Esther and I have lived it out in 46 years of marriage.

## **The Way of Wisdom Model (Colossians 1:9-12)**

This model is articulated in the books: *Decision Making and the Will of God, Step by Step, Just Do Something*

Now let's turn our attention to the text we read at the beginning. We will focus on expositing the text and explaining the model

### **Examining the Scripture**

We note right away that Paul makes this a matter of prayer with the effect it is a matter of life and ministry.

<sup>9</sup> And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

### **The Importance of Prayer**

Paul puts a premium on praying for what is important in God's working in all believers. James 1 highlights the necessity of knowing God's will and asking for wisdom from God. Prayer then is an important element in decisions making.

### **The Foundation of God's Will**

A deep, growing knowledge of Christ and His will is very important for all decision making. God wants you and US to be filled with the knowledge of His will. God's will is His commands in the New Testament. This is how we know what God's will is.

We, as a church, must know what God requires and forbids. As leaders, we must be filled with that knowledge.

## **The Necessity of Practical Wisdom**

Knowing what God commands, His will, is to be worked out “in all wisdom and understanding.” This is the application of God’s Word. It expands to include the principles, patterns, and practices of the New Testament. Wisdom and understanding are not separated from knowing God’s Word.

There is a kind of human wisdom, natural wisdom in the world. What is often heard in churches is a spiritualized form of it. All true, godly wisdom is a practical application of the Scriptures. So, we are not just to know the Bible well, but it is to inform our practical wisdom and deepen our understanding.

## **The Aim of all Decision Making**

There so many ways to think of this next phrase. But it tells the design, the trajectory, the purpose in knowing God’s will and living out God’s wisdom.

[We] pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,  
<sup>10</sup>so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:

Paul is not merely concerned for holiness, but for our whole manner of life. The word for it in the Bible is “walk” or “conversation” in some translations. We use the word, “lifestyle”. For Paul, there is no such thing as “spirituality” as we think of it. You are either living a life that is worthy of the Lord or you are not. There will be times of sin and folly. But the question for you is simply, do you govern your life with an intention to do God’s will and to live with wisdom *in every area of life?*

We must ask this very same question of the church. Are we pleasing to the Lord? Do we live together and serve together as God’s people in a way that is worthy of the Lord? Is your poise and our participation in the life and ministry of the church reflect the centrality and supremacy of Christ?

Let me put it more pointedly... Is the way you live, is the way we are and do as a church, worthy of the One who has sacrificed His life for you and now rules over you from heaven? He is your Lord. Too many Christians are living for themselves, what they want, what they enjoy, their comforts. That is ok if it is all worthy of Jesus, our Lord.

Annually, and sometimes more often, we get together and ask, "Do we as leaders and as a church lead and serve in a way that is worthy of our Lord who redeemed us and rules over us?" Do you?

## **Understanding Core Principles**

### **Where God commands, we must obey.**

God has given us many commands in the Scripture which make up the will of God for us. The will of God for Christians is His commands.

### **Where there is no command, God gives us freedom and responsibility to choose.**

Notice that with the freedom to "do what seems best" comes the responsibility to accept consequences and to learn from those consequences.

### **Where there is no command, God gives us wisdom to choose.**

We must choose wisely even when obeying the will of God. This freedom, this area of wisdom, is where nearly all church ministries decisions are made. They are matters of preference, not perfection. We choose what we believe is best at the moment.

### **When we have chosen what is according to God's will and wise, we must trust the sovereign God to work all things together for our good and His glory.**

Romans 8:28-30

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be

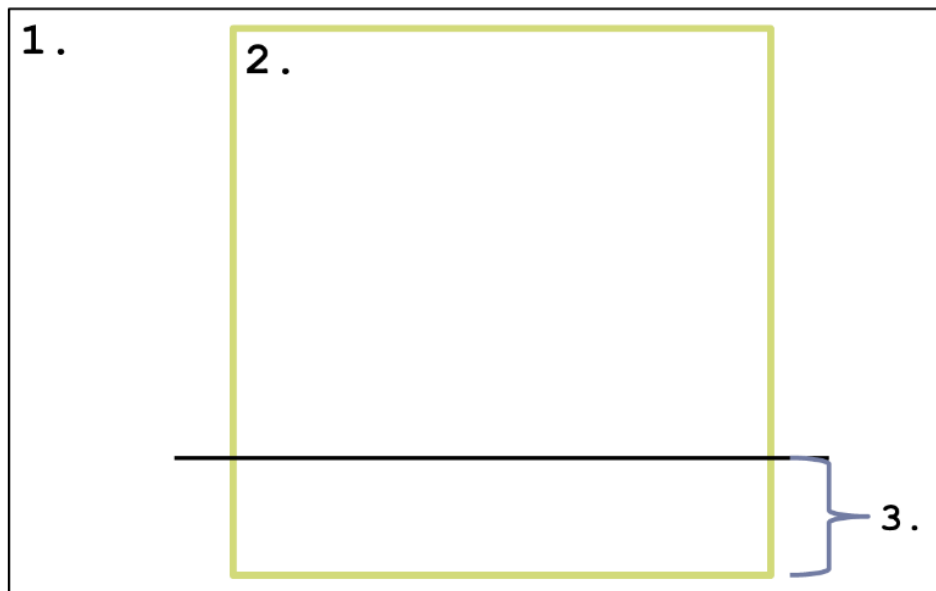


conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many *brothers*.<sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

## Explaining through Models

Here are some working models to help with decision making. We come back to some version of these over and over again in our leadership.

### A Simple Wisdom Model

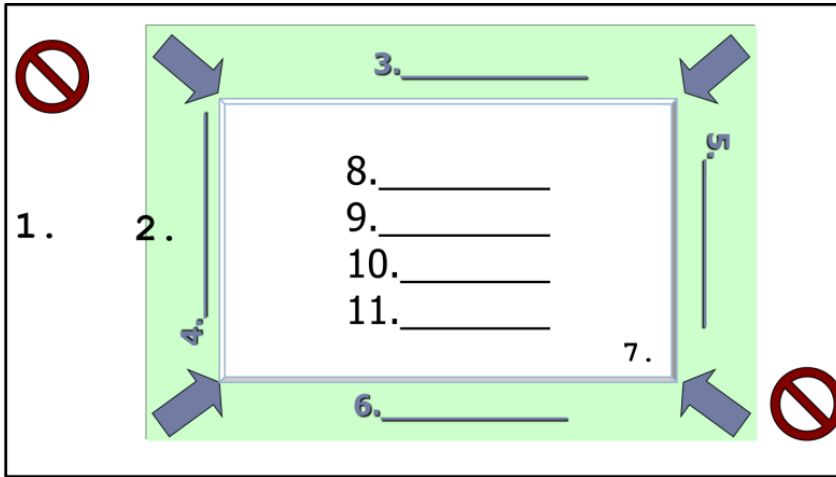


1. What God has forbidden
2. This is the field of wisdom. It is all that God has commanded and permitted. This is where we have freedom and responsibility. It includes God's precepts, principles and patterns.
3. This is the line of God's precepts.

Below the line is what we must do. Here is what God has clearly commanded for us. Even our obedience to God must be wise. It is possible to obey foolishly.

Above the line we seek for God's wisdom and apply principles and patterns to choose what seems best to us. This is where most of life's decisions lie.

# A Complex Decision Model



1. The field of what God has forbidden. It is His negative precepts.
2. The field of what God has commanded and allowed.

**This field may be constricted by four important things, all governed by Christian liberty.**

3. Covenants – these are promises, agreements, contracts we have chosen to enter. We must keep them. This can be a place where wisdom is a matter of God’s will.
  4. Conscience – we must not violate our consciences and we must retrain them to convict us of things that are sin and not to convict us of things that are not. A weak conscience has many rules and restrictions while a strong conscience has and relies on the Word of God. Personal and subjective.
  5. Convictions – these are guidelines for myself where I know I am vulnerable to temptation and set things in place to help me not sin. Personal and subjective.
  6. Culture – these are restrictions placed on me by the conventions of culture. There are absolutes we must never violate, but there are many cultural matters that we should take into consideration. They will limit my freedom some. Public and relative.
- So, the field of freedom and wisdom is made smaller by these four areas of our lives.

7. The narrowed field of choices where we are free to choose what we believe is best. This is the realm of preferences. This is where the

leadership listens to advice and counsel and then makes choices that people are expected to submit to and to support.

**The next four guide us in making wisdom decisions.**

8. Providences – The way that God is at work in our situations and in ourselves. We can only do what God has provided for,
9. Pursuits – What is in our hearts that we want to do. We have many examples of Paul making decisions because this is what He wanted or was pursuing.
10. Principles – The general principles of the Bible that are not commands but still guide us.
11. Patterns – We observe how the New Testament tended to do things in their own ministry contexts and are informed by their practices.
12. Purposes – having some understanding of how God has shaped us as church and what His purposes are for us in our time, place, and people in redemptive history..

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## **Closing**

We are committed to obeying the Scriptures no matter the cost.

We are committed to doing what is best in every ministry given the people God has given us.

Overall, we are committed to pleasing our Lord.

We do not conform to the world, even when other churches do.

Be poised to maintain unity, to be persuaded by the elders, to recognize how preferences function in the field of wisdom, to give yourself wholly to Christ and to His people.