Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

As I sit here in my soon-to-be-former home office, my mind is whirling with all the choices I have ahead of me. It’s a bit overwhelming, if not outright intimidating. Still, decisions have to be made and not all of them will be easy.

For the most part, our entire lives are actually based on decisions, be they good or bad. None of us has a crystal ball so sometimes it’s impossible in the moment to tell how a decision is going to turn out. At the time, we may think it to be the smartest move that could be made. Other decisions and circumstances that occur in the days and years that follow that impact that earlier decision could cause us to question how smart it really was after all.

Where is the Lord in the decision making process? James wrote, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5). Does that mean that the Father is going to whisper the right decision in our ears? Does it mean that He is going to do something dramatic that makes the right decision so very clear that we’d have to be complete fools not to see it? Some believe this but this is not what James is saying. As much as we’d all like the Lord to make our decisions for us, the fact is that He has left our choices up to us.

Again, where is the Lord in the decision making process? If He has promised to give us wisdom, how does He do it? Actually, He has already equipped each of us with the basics for making wise decisions in that He has given us brains that, along with the rest of our bodies, were “fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:14). Inside each of us is the basic processing unit necessary for determining right from wrong. We are not born with the capability of knowing the difference between the two, but instead grow into that capability (Deuteronomy 1:39; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Isaiah 7:15-16). Parents, teachers, friends, circumstances and other influences shape the principles that guide our decisions. For Christians, the Word of God acts as a governor on those worldly influences, causing us to stop and think about what God has said in the Bible before we act (James 3:17). Ideally, we make our choices based on the standard of God’s Word.

Why are some of our decisions bad and why do some, while initially good, turn out bad? Even though we often know which decision is best, our self-will can still get in the way. The Jews of Jeremiah’s day approached the weeping prophet and asked for Godly guidance in making an important decision. Should they surrender to the Babylonians or run in the other direction toward Egypt (Jeremiah 42:1-3)? The Word of God made it clear that they should subject themselves to the Babylonians (Jeremiah 42:11). The self-willed Israelites called Jeremiah a liar and headed toward Egypt, in spite of the obviously correct decision (Jeremiah 43:1ff). Concerning what initially appeared to be a good decision turning bad, we just have to realize that there is one process we all experience that will be absolutely filled with change. That process is called life. Yes, life changes. Sometimes we make bad decisions that affect the good ones we had previously made. Sometimes the good decisions are affected by nothing at all that we ourselves did. Sometimes life just happens. That’s when we have to make more decisions and go through the process of seeking wisdom all over again.

Let’s go back to James 1:5 now. The text says that the giving God will provide wisdom to the Christian who asks for it. How will God give this wisdom that we need when we have decisions to make? Since His written Word is all sufficient (II Timothy 3:16-17), it’s evident that His guidance will come through the spiritual knowledge a Christian has gained through his or her study of the Bible. But does the passage make it sound like God will actually do something beyond that which He has already written to provide us with wisdom? The answer to that question lies in the fact of the providence of God. Providentially, God opens doors (I Corinthians 16:9). We can even pray for those doors to open (Colossians 4:3). The wisdom that we seek when we study the Word or go to other Christians and get their insights regarding the Word can then guide us to choose the door which is best for us. The decision may not always be the one we want to make, but we have to trust that God will be there with us after we have made the choice.

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