Being Wise in Life's Decisions
September 26, 2019

Between the age of about 13 and 25 we make the most important critical moment (choices that we make in a short amount of time) that we make in our lives. Some have said that the most important choices in life are made by teenagers. Spiritually, there are seven important choices that we make in this age group that affect the rest of our lives and our spiritual destiny. Too often we fail to see that these are critical choices, and that we need to have the most wisdom possible in making them. We can break these critical choices into three areas: our spiritual choices (discipleship and church membership); our relationships (friendships, dating/marriage and how we treat ourselves); and our vocation (education and work).

1: The Decision to Follow Jesus - Luke 9:57-62, Mark 4:3-20, Luke 14:25-35

For those who have decided to follow Jesus, we have made the most important decision of our lives. We have made a decision that few people make (Matthew 7:13-14). Sadly, many who make this decision will not remain faithful to that decision. Jesus taught us this in Mark 4 and the parable of the soils. In that case, four people heard the Gospel, three responded two it, two began to grow, but only one was successful.

Jesus taught us to count the cost of this discipleship in Luke 14. He used the example of building a tower; one did not commit to it without knowing what it would cost. When we committed to Christ, we need to understand that the cost is uncertain; it could even cost us our lives. It is not that Jesus wants us to reconsider our commitment, as He will provide us with all the things necessary for our success. He gives us a complete manual of Christian life (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and a support group to enable our success (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Jesus uses the term "disciple" to describe being His follower. It means that our entire life is within a pattern that He has created in Himself. In effect, we live a life that asks at every decision "what would Jesus do?" Everything else has to come second to that. Our families, our work, our hobbies are all under the umbrella that is Jesus. Being a Christian is not just a book on the shelf that is your life; it is the shelf itself, and every part of your life must fit into that shelf.

2: Choosing a Church Family - 1 Corinthians 12:12-20, Acts 9:26-29, Hebrews 10:23-29

While we are young, the choice of our church family is usually not given to us. However, we all must at some point make a decision as to what church family we will join ourselves. In the New Testament, the Bible calls this joining "membership" (1 Corinthians 12). In Acts 8 we read about how Paul joined the church in Jerusalem. This is an example for us of making an identification with a local church. Since a local church is like a family, joining them establishes the commitment to work together. Local churches worship together (1 Corinthians 11:17-29), work together (Ephesians 4:11-16) and ultimately seek to go to our eternal reward together (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). If we do not show a love for the other Christians with whom we assemble, we do not have the love of God (1 John 5:7-11).

Not all congregations are the same. In Revelation 2-3 there are seven churches mentioned; two of them are firm in their faith (we might use the expression "sound", as it speaks to integrity); three of them are in trouble; two of them are dead. All may have called themselves a "church of Christ", but they were not all the same. If you had lived in that time and in that area, what congregation might you have chosen for

membership? Too often, people use the wrong criteria in choosing their church family. They look are worldly things such as which church has the most people, or which church has the largest group their age. Maybe they choose the richest church, or the one with the most eloquent preacher. Maybe they choose the one where their friends or family attend. But is that always the best choice?

The Bible says that Lot was a righteous man in an unrighteous town (2 Peter 2:7). Why was he there? He made an important decision based on worldly perceptions, and ultimately suffered for it. If we choose our local church family based on worldly criteria, we too might suffer greatly, possibly even eternally, as a result.

3: Choosing Our Future by Education - Proverbs 8:8-13, Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

Our God is a God of knowledge. He desires that we should be able to read (Ephesians 3:3) and to use critical thinking to understand His ways (Proverbs 20:5). Once of the oldest public education systems was the priesthood of Levi, charged with teaching the Israelites the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 24:8). In the New Testament we see that schools were used as places to preach (Acts 19:9). Education has a secondary value to other parts of our lives. It enables us to pursue a career or other means of employment (1 Thessalonians 4:11).

There are also dangers involved in the process of education. Solomon once said that with much learning is much sorrow (Ecclesiastes 1:18). Many things we are taught are contrary to the truth. Our education system is founded on the philosophy of materialism, and promotes ideas such as humanism, atheism, evolution, and moral equivalency. These ideologies war with the Truth, and we must enter this process knowing our adversary.

After high school many people go straight into the work force. Others will choose to go into school. From a spiritual perspective, neither is better or worse. College is an important step that many make, but fail to spiritually plan when doing so. When you choose what school to attend, is your spiritual life first among priorities? Is there a church that you can faithfully attend? As well, college offers more opportunities for worldly conduct that require greater self-control. Sexual activity, drinking and drugs are more prevalent. Many Christians leave home at 18 and then fall away because they made poor decisions in choosing their school and then their lifestyle.

4: Choosing a Wise Vocation - Ecclesiastes 5:15-20, Ephesians 6:5-9, 1Timothy 6:6-11

Christians are obligated to work for a living; Scriptures speak about the Christian obligation to work for a living (2 Thessalonians 3). We also are obligated to work in a way that glorifies Christ, as seen in Colossians 4 and Ephesians 6. One of the great blessings we have today is to be able to choose the profession or work we enter in life. We can choose anything we desire; to be a doctor, a farmer, a lawyer, a mechanic. But we must choose wisely. As Christians we are to be committed to a local congregation. Some jobs can take us away from that obligation weeks or months at a time. Other jobs require us to move often or to places where there are no Christians with whom we can gather. Our service is to God first; "*you were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men*" (1 Corinthians 7:23).

Jobs are also places where sinful behavior can be rooted. Many different jobs offer social interactions where drinking is common place. Inappropriate socializing is also a temptation in the workplace. Some jobs require employees to entertain clients in inappropriate places. Another danger the work place can have is the competing sense of comradery or fellowship some jobs offer. Some professions have a sense

of “brotherhood”; this is not a bad thing of itself. However, sometimes we become more attached to that brotherhood that to our true brotherhood.

One of the biggest mistakes Christians make with work is not looking ahead to the consequences of our decisions. We need to think more about what our labors will cost us rather than what they will pay us. Will this make me miss meeting with brethren? Will this prevent me from serving the church in roles like being a teacher?

5: Choosing Our Friendships - Proverbs 1:10-19, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, 10:23-33,

God decided in the beginning that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18). This led to the creation of the institution of marriage. But throughout scripture we see that friendships were a valuable part of the lives of Godly people. David’s friendship with Jonathan is well known (1 Sam. 19:1-4), and perhaps it is this friendship that Solomon is thinking of when he tells us in Proverbs 18:24 that some friends are closer to us than a brother.

The Bible says quite a bit about creating friendships. First, we are told some things that are obvious: if we want friends, we need to be friendly (Proverbs 18:24 NKJV). But there are deeper truths in Scripture too. Jesus said that we ought to consider making friends with those who have need (Luke 14:12). Jesus was friends with many undesirable people (Matthew 11:19) who became utterly devoted to Him. “*The righteous should choose his friends carefully*” is the advice of Solomon (Proverbs 12:26). This is especially true because "*bad company corrupts good morals*" (1 Cor. 15:33). While we are permitted to have friends who are not Christians (1 Cor. 5:9-10, 10:23-33), we need to know that while we are trying to influence them, they are necessarily influencing us.

6: Being Wise in Dating and Courtship - Song of Solomon 8:4-7, 1 Corinthians 7:25-40, Proverbs 4:23

In times past dating was very, very different than it is today. Chaperones were always present, and dating was a firm commitment looking to marriage. Even when people were engaged, it was expected that they not spend time alone. Today, dating looks a lot different than ages past. As Christians, it is probably pretty clear that the world’s view of dating and ours is going to be dramatically different.

There are multiple dangers in dating today that Christians must overcome. Some are obvious, and some are not. Perhaps the most dangerous issue is fornication. We are repeatedly warned in the New Testament of the danger of fornication (Matthew 15:19, Acts 15:20, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, etc.). But most Christians who stumble in this sin did not intend to do so; they simply put themselves into situations where the temptation to sin was too great to resist. As Christians we need to know that overcoming sin means avoiding temptations. We need to see that there are circumstances that we can be in that may not be sinful of themselves, but offer temptations that are difficult to overcome and then give birth to sin (James 1:15).

The second danger in dating is not guarding our heart. We are encouraged by the world to follow our heart, and to “fall in love”. But simply allowing our hearts to be emotionally unstable is dangerous. Solomon repeatedly provided this advice: “*do not awaken love until it pleases*” (Song of Solomon 2:7, 3:5, 8:4). We must guard our hearts (Proverbs 4:23). This means we need to not be anxious (Philippians 4:6-7) about the one whom God will enable us to find, and devote this to prayer. Too many people are obsessed with finding someone, and date someone with disastrous consequences. People who allow their hearts to attach themselves to others without spiritual consideration hurt themselves terribly.

7: Being Wise Dwelling In Our Temple - 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Colossians 2:20-23

The Bible says that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, a temple was the place where sacrifices were offered and prayers were made. Today, we are able to offer our lives as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2), and our prayers can be heard without the intercession of anyone except Christ in heaven (John 14:13-14). A temple was a holy place; it was a sin to permit it to be desecrated. According to 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, we desecrate our temple when we sin.

Many in the world teach that it is our body and our choice. But this is not so. Self-harm and self-murder are a sin; in fact, self-murder is a sin from which we cannot repent. Self-harm is also a sin, for several reasons. First, it is committing violence upon ourselves. We are told that we need to learn to love ourselves so that we can love our neighbor (James 2:8), our spouses (Ephesians 5:28), or seek after wisdom (Proverbs 19:8). Second, denies God the service He deserves.

Why do people struggle to love themselves? Sometimes the guilt of sin causes us to doubt our worth. Christians need to esteem the work of Christ in removing sin. We need to believe God that when we confess our sins, He will cleanse us of ALL unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Sometimes people struggle to love themselves because they have a worldly view of life. They think that they need to be more attractive, more successful, or more interesting as people. These are things that the world measures as value. But it is not so with Christ. *Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting*. We need to esteem the fear of the Lord.

It is not just our physical body we need to care for. Our mental health is important too. Some may think that emotional or mental health is purely a spiritual condition, but this is not true. Many times in Scripture we meet men and women who are emotionally drained and distraught. There are some conditions of the mind that are medically discerned and treated. We need to see that even Jesus, from time to time, needed to restore His emotional self (Luke 4:42, Matthew 14:13, Mark 6:31).