

Making Moral Choices: ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Starting on New Year's Eve and continuing throughout this past month, we have been considering the way we go about making moral choices in our lives. We have seen that God is the source of all morality. We have affirmed the fact that God's Word speaks to us regarding the standards to apply in making moral choices. Last week, we talked about the need to witness to others about the Good News of Jesus Christ in a gentle, respectful way—the goal being to show them their need to reconsider some of the choices that they made over the course of a lifetime. Throughout all of this, God and His Word have been absolutely central to everything we have considered.

Most of the time, the situations and choices confronting us can be addressed directly by God's Word. But sometimes the answers are not always so clear. And when that is the case, we need to know how to approach the Bible in order to make those really tough moral decisions? So today, I would like to cap off our discussion by offering an approach to apply to those difficult moral choices. Basically, consider asking yourselves four questions and then carefully and honestly come to an answer before acting upon the decision itself. So let's consider these four questions.

Question #1: **How will it affect my relationship with God?** Whatever moral choices you are making, how will they affect your standing with God? Now that may sound like an obvious question to ask if we think about things from a Christian perspective. But, the reality is that our natural tendency is to come to a snap judgment about what we are going to do based on our personal desires, not God's. We need to change that. We need to follow Paul's advice when he says: **"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."** Romans 13:14 (NIV) What does it mean to ***"clothe yourself with Jesus"*** when making a moral decision?

There was saying or slogan—an acronym really—that with popular among Christians about ten to fifteen years ago: The letters **WWJD**. Most people thought that it was something new. Actually, it appeared long ago back in 1896 in a Christian book entitled, *In His Steps*. When faced with making some choice of conduct or behavior, we are told to pause and ask ourselves, ***"What would Jesus do?"*** in a similar situation. It was very popular to see necklaces, bracelets, books, even posters that had the letters ***"WWJD"***—standing for exactly that, "What would Jesus do?" The idea was that Jesus would always do whatever would be pleasing to God the Father. In fact, that is what Jesus meant in John's Gospel when He said: **"The One who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, FOR I ALWAYS DO WHAT PLEASES HIM."** John 8:29 (NIV) ***"What would Jesus do"*** is a good question to consider before giving

into whatever our typical sinful nature might otherwise prompt us to do. Now all Christians need to work on that. Not long after the “*what would Jesus do*” slogan became so popular, there was a news report out of Omaha, Nebraska about Crestridge Elementary School where the students had a special event set aside called, “Dress Like Your Favorite Book Character” day. One 11 year old boy decided to dress up like Jesus and that’s exactly what he did. He arrived at school with sandals on his feet, carrying a staff and wearing a robe. When another student made fun of him by calling him “Little Bo Peep,” the two of them got into a fight. Each boy claimed that the other threw the first punch, and a local newspaper covering the event, reported in bold print that “***Jesus got a black eye.***” The news account went on to ask a very good question: “What would Jesus do if he were an elementary school kid and someone called him Little Bo Peep?” I am sure as to what Jesus would do. He would ignore the ridicule, i.e., He would “turn the other cheek”¹ and keep right on going.

The more you practice that, the more godly behavior becomes your default mode, rather than acting the way the old self might want to act. Your reaction to things will eventually become more Christ-like. And even when you give a spontaneous response to some adverse thing may might pop up in your life, your actions will be more consistent with what Jesus would have you to do. Now, I have to admit, it is not easy. From time to time you may stumble. But, maybe when that woman pulls out of her driveway right in front of your car when you are in a hurry and continues along in a 45 m.p.h. zone at 15 m.p.h., you won’t go berserk—like a certain person I know very well. (I won’t say who it is, but I’ll give you a hint: This person lives in my house. It isn’t my wife. Only the two of us live there.) You see, there are some grown-ups who behave no better than elementary school children when it comes to following “what Jesus would do.” And that’s the problem, when we as Christians fail to follow Jesus’ example, we too give Jesus a black eye when it comes to the perceptions of those around us.² Get in the habit of trying to make your choices in life, both the spontaneous ones and the ones that require reflection and time to act, based upon whether or not it will be pleasing to God. Ask yourself, how will this affect my relationship with God? If whatever course of action you choice will diminish your relationship with God, then it is the choice to avoid.

Question #2: Ask yourself: **Is this something that I would be ashamed to be doing upon Christ’s return?** This is a good question to think about before deciding whether or not to engage in a particular course of conduct. And, it is a question that is derived from something the Apostle John warns us about when he tells us to “continue in [Christ], so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.” 1 John 2:28 (NIV) I. E., what he is asking you to consider is whether or not your choice of conduct would be something that you’d be ashamed of if Jesus were to return and found you

so engaged. Clearly, if you would be ashamed of whatever moral choice you may have made, then don't make that moral choice in the first place. This is just common sense. It is something that we all have learned from the time of our youth. We know what it means to be caught with "our hands in the cookie jar." When I was a child, my mother reminds she'd catch me poking around in the refrigerator with my hand in the olive jar. Speaking of His Second Coming, Jesus states in Matthew 24:46, "Blessings on you if I return and find you faithfully doing your work." (TLB) Yes, our moral decisions need to be oriented toward His work, not that of Satan. Whether it's a cookie jar or olive jar or whatever it may be that you wouldn't want to be caught doing, then it's a pretty good sign that it's a choice that you should not pursue. Remember the things that God's Word teaches. Let the Scriptures guide you in making the right choices because for those who don't—well, one day they'll stick their hand in something more hazardous than a cookie jar or olive jar. Their hand might end up in a lion's mouth and it will become the cookie or olive for that hungry beast.

Question #3: **How will my moral choices affect other people?** When people see Christians making those tough decisions for Christ—decisions that may be unpopular within the context of our society, yet we make those choices according to God's Word—people take note of it. They may even be impressed enough by what they see to want to know more about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, when they see Christians acting no differently than the rest of the world, they take note of that too. They take note of the hypocrisy. They take note of the lack of integrity. And they make a note to themselves to avoid the Church at all costs. Jesus said that the Second Great Commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.³ You don't love your neighbor by turning him or her off to Christ.

In this regard, be mindful of two important things that Paul has to say in Romans 14:21-22. #1: ²¹ "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble." [And #2:] ²² "You may believe there's nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. . ." (NLT) What Paul is telling us in that first verse is this: We might be engaging in perfectly legitimate behavior that, in and of itself, is not wrongful. But, if it is something that could hinder the faith of someone who is watching us, then it is best if we refrain from doing it—even if it's not sinful. Let me give you an example of what he is talking about here.

At the age of 19, Kylie Bisutti competed against 10,000 other contestants in the 2009 Victoria's Secret Model Search contest. And she won that contest and became one of their top models. Now admittedly, Victoria's Secret models are not known for their modest dress. Yet, they are not strippers and pole dancers either. (Although they might get pretty close to the line.) But as much as Ms. Bisutti

loved her career as a Victoria's Secret model, she loved Jesus Christ even more. And though what she was doing was perfectly legal and admired by so many, she also knew that there were young ladies who were coming of age who looked up to her. And once she became married and her Christian faith deepened even further, it caused her to see her career in a different light. During an interview she reflected upon this and made the following comments: "[The modeling world] is a very hard industry to be in without falling into things you don't want to do . . . It's a very tempting industry . . . Victoria's Secret was my absolutely biggest goal in life, and it was all I ever wanted career-wise . . . [But] I'm a Christian, and reading the Bible more, I was becoming more convicted about it . . . My body should only be for my husband, and it's just a sacred thing. I didn't really want to be that kind of role model for younger girls because I had a lot of younger Christian girls that were looking up to me and then thinking that it was OK for them to walk around and show their bodies in lingerie to guys."⁴ Modeling is a legitimate profession. There are certainly Christian models, as Kylie Bisutti demonstrates. But, what a sacrifice on her part! She refrained from the very modeling job that she'd always dreamed of so as not to cause younger Christian women to stumble. That's what Paul is talking about in that first verse—refrain from **actions** that cause others to fall away from God, even if they are not sinful. Think about that the next time you drink that beer or smoke that cigarette in the presence of a young person.

Now in verse 22, Paul is referring not only to actions, but also to **beliefs**. We have talked about the fact that our basic Christian beliefs—those things that we call doctrines—are completely non-negotiable. We don't compromise on them—things like: The deity of Christ; the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus; the inerrant authority of the Holy Scripture, and so forth. But, there are other beliefs that are important to us, but they are not necessarily doctrines—they are not core beliefs. Different churches and different denominations have differing **non-essential beliefs**, yet they are all considered followers of Christ. We may believe in some of our **non-essential beliefs** strongly, but don't let them separate us from others within the Body of Christ who hold different beliefs.

Now I believe strongly in worshipping God in His House on Sundays. We Baptists, like most other Protestant denominations, have Sunday as our Sabbath Day. But, Seventh Day Adventists have a different belief—they go along with the traditional Jewish Sabbath, which is on Saturday. A few years back during the Gordonsville festival, I came across a group of young people who were carrying signs for Jesus. One of them was a young woman from who was new to the faith. I believe that she said she'd just arrived in this country from Kenya. We got to talking and she learned that I was a Baptist and that we worship on Sunday. And I could tell that this was something that greatly perplexed her as she was just beginning to come to the Christian faith. Now I could have given her a prolonged lecture on why

Sunday is the best day to worship—that the early Church adopted Sunday as the Sabbath to honor the fact that Jesus rose from the dead on that day. But I didn't do that. God had placed her among a group of faithful people who differed from me on the timing of the Sabbath and a few minor matters—but He had placed her there. It was apparent that she was growing in her faith amongst them. Sometimes we are called upon to use discretion before speaking. Sometimes, as Paul says, we "may believe there's nothing wrong with what you are doing [in fact, you may believe that it's the only right way], but keep it between yourself and God,"—if it is not one of those non-negotiable doctrines of faith. This is especially important when dealing with people who are new to the faith. Turning to them and insisting that something like dancing, for example, is one of the most sinful and disgraceful things ever, may not be the most constructive avenue in bringing them to Christ.

Finally and briefly, Question #4: **How will my moral choices affect my faith?** Answering this question requires honest self-examination. In writing to the Church in Corinth, Paul tells us: "Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith." 2nd Corinthians 13:5 (NLT) If whatever moral decision you happen to be making is going to be displeasing to God, then it will move you farther away from Him. And if that behavior is repeated again and again, it will begin to erode your faith. Whatever you do, don't ignore the need for such self-examination. It is essential to putting a check on bad moral conduct before it impacts your faith in a negative way. A. W. Tozer put it this way: "An unexamined Christian lies like an unattended garden. Let your garden go unattended for a few months, and you will not have roses and tomatoes, but weeds."⁵ It takes self-examination to keep you on the right moral track and to keep your faith in Christ strong. Those who continue to make bad moral choices and fail to engage in such personal exams soon find what a devastating affect it has upon them personally—guilt and shame start to dominate their lives. Self-examination, coupled with the Holy Spirit's care, kicks out the guilt and shame and helps to restore the peace and joy of Jesus.

So, there you have them—the four basic questions to ask yourselves when confronted with some difficult moral decision to make:

Question #1: **How will it affect my relationship with God?**

Question #2: **Is it something that I would be ashamed to be doing upon Christ's return?**

Question #3: **How will my moral choices affect other people?**

Question #4: **How will my moral choices affect me and my faith?**

Ask these questions in the light of God’s Word, but don’t rely solely on yourself in giving the answers. Prayer and a longing for the Holy Spirit’s guidance will help provide you with righteous answers—ones that will guide your actions in such a way that is pleasing to God. Then the reality of Psalm 119 will come into your life and you can join with David in saying: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Psalm 119:105 (NKJV) Just as importantly, you can firmly plant the words of Joshua in your heart. They are the words that we considered when first starting this sermon series. Joshua proclaimed, “But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”⁶

What about you and your house?—particularly that house known as ***your heart***—the house where Jesus stands outside, knocking on the door. You know, there is really a fifth question to ask yourself in addition to the four moral ones we discussed this morning. It is a simple question, but the most important one of all: When Jesus stands there knocking, will you let Him in? If you will do just that, your moral choices will take a remarkable change for the better.

Let us pray.

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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2018

¹ Matthew 5:39 (NIV) But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

² March 5, 2002, www.omaha.com (submitted by Jim Sandell). Jim L. Wilson, *Fresh Illustrations*, (Austin, TX: WORDsearch, 2004), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "WWJD".

³ Matthew 22:39 (ESV) And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

⁴ Hollie McKay, "Kylie Bisutti left lingerie modeling because it didn't mesh with her Christian values," Fox News (2-2-12); <http://www.preachingtoday.com>.

⁵ A. W. Tozer, *The Tozer Topical Reader – Volume One*, comp. Ron Eggert, (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 186.

⁶ Joshua 24:15 (NASB) “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”