

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Decisions

Presented by Graeme Best

Good morning.

Decisions. Choices. Life is full of them. Someone once wrote, “My life is the total of all my decisions and their corresponding actions. The sum total of my choices.”

Now of course, our lives can be very much affected by the decisions of others .. like if another driver decides to run a red light and runs into our car .. but it is true, that much of our life is the sum total of our decisions. We make choices. Every day. Many times a day. Where to go. What to do. What to say. What to eat.

The problem is of course, unfortunately, sometimes we make bad choices, bad decisions. This is primarily of course, because we are fallen, sinful beings who aren't perfect like God. God always makes the right decisions because he is perfect. He has all knowledge and all wisdom, unlike us, who have limited knowledge and who make subjective, sometimes emotionally driven decisions.

This morning I would like to share with you some thoughts on making wise decisions.

Song

What kind of decisions do you find difficult? My family will tell you that for me it is standing in a bistro deciding what meal to order. It really shouldn't matter to me because the food isn't that expensive and it all normally tastes fine, and yet I often struggle with such a simple decision.

Perhaps for you it is choosing what pair of shoes to buy or what to cook for friends coming for dinner. Of course, those sorts of decisions are hardly life-changing. But of course many decisions are. Who to marry? Whether to marry? Where to live? How to invest finances? What career to take? When to retire? Decisions. We make them. They then turn around and make us. And sometimes unfortunately they break us.

And so how can we avoid making bad decisions? Well in order to help us answer that question I want to look at some of the mistakes that people make when it comes to making decisions.

The first mistake that people often make is knowing the right thing to do and not doing it. In the Garden of Eden, Adam made this mistake. He was with Eve when she was being tempted by the snake. Standing right alongside. Genesis chapter 3 and verse 6: “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”

Adam knew what God had said concerning that fruit. It was not to be eaten. Adam knew what he should have done. He should have intervened and stopped Eve from. Instead, he let it all happen. And he ate of the fruit himself. A decision that turned out to be the worst ever made by a human being.

Many people make this same mistake. A corrupt NSW policeman testified to the fact that when he was given his very first \$100 bribe, he knew it wasn't right. He knew he should have handed it back. But he didn't. He didn't do what he knew was right and this opened the door to many such payments and a life full of corruption. Now he has lost everything.

A well-known footballer knew it wasn't right to have an affair with his team-mate's wife. But he did. And again, it cost him and others so much ..

Of course, as Christians, we must know what is right in the first place. That is why we should be studying God's word on a regular basis for the Bible teaches us what is right and what is wrong. But as James points out, we must not just listen to the word, we must do what it says.

Disobedience to God's word won't attract the blessing of God. God's word tells us over and over again, if we do the right thing .. do what he wants us to do ..then he will bless our lives. And so, we need to learn what the right thing to do is, and do it. Any decision based on God's word will certainly be a wise decision.

Right choices, godly choices are of course, not easy to make at times. It may cost us to do what is right. But be warned, sin is appealing .. but it is also very destructive.

Song

A second mistake that people make is making decisions based purely on appearances. Consider the decision Lot made after his herdsman had been fighting with Abraham's. Abraham suggested they should separate and so he offered Lot the chance to choose where he would live. Lot looked around. Genesis 13 tells us that Lot looked and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. And so Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan.

Lot made his choice based purely on appearances, however he should have thought things through more thoroughly. The towns of Sodom and Gomorrah were on the plain of Jordan. Cities full of corruption and evil. By choosing to live near those cities, he was exposing himself to sin. To trouble. And as it turned out, trouble soon came. Lot and his family were captured and dragged off by invading kings. Later on he had to flee the Lord's destruction and he lost his wife.

Lot made a big mistake when he made his decision based on appearances.

Eve in the Garden of Eden also made this mistake because the Bible says, she looked at the fruit and saw that it good for food and pleasing to the eye .. and she ate.

Making decisions using our eyes without engaging our brains is a dangerous thing to do. But again, many make this mistake. For example, how many people buy cars that are either totally unsuitable for their needs or are nothing but trouble, all because they look good on the outside. We need to be warned about this because the world of advertising is out there, doing its best to appeal to our senses, in particular, to our eyes.

The Bible warns us about such mistakes. It often refers to the trouble our eyes can bring. God says in Ezekiel 6:9 “How I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols.”

2 Peter 2:14 says, “With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning.” Proverbs 27:20 “Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man.”

Our eyes can lead us to trouble. Because so much temptation can come through our eyes. So much sin can flow from looking. Greed. Gluttony. Sexual sin.

Our eyes can lead us to lust after many things. Our eyes can lead us to make bad decisions .. chasing after things that will give us momentary satisfaction but in the end lead to nothing but problems.

The writer of Hebrews got it right when he said, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

And so, beware of making the mistake of making decisions based just on appearances. God gave us his word to read God and a brain to use. We need to use both of these, because the most attractive choices often lead to the most unattractive results!

Song

A third mistake people often make is fearing the rejection of others rather than seeking the approval of God. Consider King Saul in 1 Samuel 15. He was the ultimate people pleaser. God told Saul to attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belonged to them.

And so Saul attacked the Amalekites .. But, Saul and his army spared the king, and the best of the sheep and cattle .. everything that was good. And the Lord said "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."

Why didn't Saul do what God had said? In Verse 24 Saul said, I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. Saul was more concerned with what the people thought than with pleasing God. He was consumed with being seen in a good light by others, just as many people are including many Christians.

Some Christians see it as being more important to please those around them than to do what is right in the sight of God. And so they give in to peer pressure. They might swear or tell dirty jokes or drink too much, or be part of the lotto syndicate and so on, just to be accepted by others.

They might even pretend they don't go to church, or get involved with other activities that are plainly ungodly, just so that others won't give them a hard time.

I said before, making right decisions may come at a cost. We may be criticised and even ridiculed by others. It is good to be liked. But we need to ask ourselves, who are we trying to please. Our friends? Our family? Or God?

A fourth mistake often made is making decisions to act, because people just can't wait any longer. Consider Esau in the Bible. He was starving hungry. He couldn't wait any longer for food. And so he sold his birthright to his brother .. for the price of a bowl of stew.

And David. David was on the roof of his palace when noticed the beautiful Bathsheba . She was taking a bath. And he couldn't control himself. He wanted her. He wanted to have his sexual urges satisfied. And so he had her brought to the palace and he slept with her. A big mistake that led to even worse decisions.

Bad decisions can be made when we lack self control. When we desire immediate gratification. Of course, the world encourages us to satisfy our needs immediately, whatever those needs are.

Buy on credit. Have it now. You don't have to wait. Young people, you don't have to wait until you are married to have sex. Have it now! But sometimes God does want us to wait. He wants us to make sacrifices for his sake and for our sakes.

So many lessons can be learnt through waiting. We learn patience, perseverance and self control. Characteristics of God himself. Fruit of the Spirit that God wants us to have.

In many ways, the "I want it now" attitude seen in young children never leaves us. Therefore, we need to warned about not being able to control our urges. About not being willing to wait and do things God's way.

Song

Many decisions for us as Christians are easy. Should I pray? Yes. Should I steal? No. Should I be patient and loving? Yes. Should I abuse others? No. Easy decisions. Right decisions as set down clearly in God's word.

But not every decision we make is easy. Far from it. Choices are often hard to make. Sometimes we just need to take steps of faith .. as we pray and read and seek God's will.

However, if we learn from past mistakes and from the mistakes of others such as those we have looked at this morning, if we get right information, especially what God says about things and also think before we act, considering the consequences of our decisions, then with God's help sought through prayer, he can give us the wisdom to make wise choices. Choices that will lead to blessing. To happiness and fulfilment.

Of course, the most important decision anyone will make during their life is what to do with Jesus. My prayer is that everyone of you will choose to believe in and follow Jesus .. because that choice doesn't just have consequences for this life but for all eternity!

Thank you for listening. God bless.