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"Blessed be the LORD God of *Israel*; For He hath visited and redeemed *His* people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for *us* in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; That *we* should be saved from *our* enemies and from the hand of all that hate *us*; to perform the mercy promised to *our* fathers and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to *our* father Abraham, That he would grant unto *us*, that *we* being delivered out of the hand of *our* enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of *our* lives." Luke 1:68-75; the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic-Germanic-Scandinavian people are *ISRAEL!*

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WISE DECISION MAKING

by Brian Abshire

(This seems appropriate at the beginning of a new year, CIM)

Well, we certainly do not want to be like the fool; hopefully by now, not only are the benefits of wisdom, and the disaster of folly, evident, but also we are now committed to gaining wisdom in every area of your life. We have already talked about how to obtain wisdom in a previous chapter. Now it is time to look at how we actually apply wisdom to various, actual decisions. "*Do not be deceived, God will not be mocked, for whatsoever a man sows, so shall he reap*" (Gal. 6:10). The choices you make have consequences; good decisions lead to blessings, and poor ones to problems. Perhaps the most common cause of financial trouble for Christians is that they made poor decisions in the past and now they have to live with the consequences. Therefore, if we learn how to make wise decisions now, it should keep us out of trouble in the future, as well as clean up the mess we made in the past.

However, Christians are often more influenced by the world than they realize. My doctoral studies were in the sociology of religion. And while I think anyone with a Ph.D. in the social sciences ought to be considered guilty until proven innocent, there are things we can learn from a systematic study of human societies (interpreted of course from a consistently Biblical perspective) that help us understand the problems we face in making wise decisions.

For example, we now live in a *pluralized* society with many more options available than ever before. In the past, decisions were often easier to make because we just did not have many options. Two hundred years ago, if you wanted to know what your vocation was going to be, you just looked at your Dad's (or Mom's). If you wondered whom you would marry, all you had to do was look around at the twenty people near your age in the village you lived in and take your pick! What school ought you to attend? No problem, your local one-room schoolhouse was the only educational opportunity available!

However, when your options expand, your commitment to any one option decreases proportionally. Consider that today you have to find your future spouse from millions of potential mates; pick your vocation out of thousands of different jobs, and choose your education from amongst the hundreds of schools. Perhaps a more prosaic example might help illustrate this; what do you feel like eating tonight; chicken, hamburgers, tacos, sub-sandwiches, roast beef? They are all there for the picking. Furthermore, you have options even between these; if you decide on hamburger and fries, you can eat at Wendy's, McDonald's, Burger King and a host of others - not to mention Pizza Hut, and Eagle Boys or KFC. While you may

have favourites, you are not really committed to any one franchise over the other. In fact, your TASTES and personal preference becomes the only important criteria. You are not committed to a particular restaurant, and sometimes you find it hard making a choice because there are just too many options.

Life is like that today; there are many potential choices and people often find a real problem committing to one over the other. While it is no big deal in the long term whether you eat at Wendy's or Burger King, it IS a big deal to decide whom you will marry, where you will work, and how you will build your financial future. This sociological dynamic helps to explain the poor decision-making of so many Christians when they consider major life-choices. Many Christians find that they just cannot choose between options, and even when they do, they are not committed to that choice and do not "stick it out" when times get tough. They lack perseverance and endurance because they lack commitment to their choices. Many Christians will change CAREERS three or four times before they are thirty; they simply do not know which option is "best" for them. Adultery (and divorce) amongst Christians continues to rise, as they look at all the other "options" available to them. And this lack of commitment has a profound effect on their finances; while Christians are trying to find out which career fits them "best" they are not moving up the socio-economic ladder.

Secondly, we live today in a *secularized* society. Secularization is the sociological process wherein religious

IN THIS ISSUE:

Wise Decision Making,	1
The Apostles were Laymen,	9
The battle Between the Sun & the Wind,	10
Can "Facts" Ever Be Tongue in Cheek?	11
Toy Guns,	13
Being Different,	13

**MAY OUR HEAVENLY FATHER BLESS
YOUR NEW YEAR**

The views and opinions expressed in the articles herein or herewith are those of the authors and not necessarily those of CIM. They are written by fallible men. You must ask Jesus to guide your studies!

ideas lose significance in a culture and are replaced by non-religious ideas. In the past, when the Faith was stronger, men looked to God and His Word to govern every area of life. For the past 150 years, ideological forces have launched attack after attack against the Christian faith with the result that most Christians think that the Bible is simply irrelevant to the way they should live. They then, often consciously, adopt many principles from this world that are in direct opposition to God's. For example, many Christians have developed false expectations about life. They really do not know why they are here, or what their life is supposed to be about other than their own sense of self-importance. If you get a Christian outside of church, and ask him a few questions about what he REALLY thinks is important, you might be shocked. In many respects, his values are little different from those of his pagan peers. Have you ever heard Christians trying to justify Biblically the phrase "but you have GOT to love yourself before you can love others?" Thank you Carl Rogers; you have brainwashed an entire generation of Christians with your anti-Biblical philosophy; and done it so effectively, they actually believe God said it first!

Often, because of secularization, the modern Christian's real purpose in life is personal fulfillment. He wants to "be, all he can be" and will become quite upset if the church is not oriented around HIS needs. His decisions are based on what seems "right in his own eyes" rather than the commands or principles of God. I cannot tell you the number of times I have talked with members of various congregations, shown them clearly what the Bible teaches about an issue, and heard them respond, "But I don't see it that way." Many Christians have unconsciously adopted the humanist assumption that there is no absolute truth, that each man determines "good and evil" for himself. Does that sound familiar? It should, it is what the serpent tempted Eve with, way back in the Garden.

Secularization has so influenced the average Christian that his highest values are personal peace and prosperity. "I want to get through life with as few problems as possible, and with as many toys as I can collect." When the going gets tough for the average Christian, he gets up and runs away; from his church, his job, his marriage, his family, or anything else that makes him feel uncomfortable.

Finally, today we live in a *privatized* society where our religion is pushed into the private, inner, subjective parts of our lives. Since Christians have adopted many portions of a humanist worldview, and fail to see the Bible as relating to the real world, they restrict their religion to a personal experience. No longer is there any such thing for many Christians as a "thus sayeth the Lord" but rather now it is "what do I think the Lord is telling me?" And the average Christian is convinced that God can only say one thing to me, and something quite contrary to you, because they really do not believe in absolute truth.

Many, many sincere Christians believe that God speaks to them through their inner, subjective impressions and can become quite angry if you challenge them what "God is telling me to do." Repeatedly, as I have counseled people and tried to untangle the mess they have made of their lives, often, the initial cause that started the whole chain-reaction was a bad decision based on a subjective religious experience. I have even known fornicators, drunkards and homosexuals attempt to justify their sin by saying that they

"felt" sure God understood and approved of their deviant behaviour. Sin is no longer a sin, but an alternative "lifestyle." In fact, one of the CONSERVATIVE seminaries I attended actually forbade us to preach against any specific sins at any time lest we make such people uncomfortable!

Thus, when we need to be able to think Biblically about life decisions, this three-fold sociological dynamic works to undermine God's wisdom. Pluralization makes it hard to make a decision and stick with it. Secularization gives us the world's values and priorities so the decisions are often based on godless assumptions. Privatization leaves us in a subjective morass with no absolute truth, and therefore no godly standard to judge between alternatives.

In contrast to the above, Biblical decisions must be based on God's wisdom (Prov. 11:14; 1:20-23). Now as we have already noted, wisdom is a gift of God (James 1:5), obtained through diligent searching in the Scriptures (Prov. 2:1-22). Wisdom comes from God's Word (Deut 4:5-6); therefore, to obtain it we must saturate our minds with

Scripture (Deut 5:5-), meditate upon Scripture (Psalm 119:130), memorize Scripture (Psalm 119:9,11), as well as seek it from those who have already internalized it (Prov 15:22). But again, it is not just an academic understanding of Scripture, but rather the ability to relate specific principles revealed from God's Word to the world around us. The essence of wisdom is to be able to examine a situation from a Biblical, rather than humanist perspective, and determine from all the possible alternatives, the one that makes the best use of our limited time, energy and efforts for the glory of God.

Now this is significantly different from the way most sincere Christians today make decisions.

Many Christians will SAY they want to do the will of God; and therefore, in any given decision, they will say they are seeking for God's will. "Whom does God want me to marry?" "Where does God want me to go to school?" "Which job does God want me to take?" In fact, many Christians can drive themselves "crazy" trying to figure out what it is that God is trying to tell them to do.

Now let me get myself in real hot water here; the above questions are meaningless and the people who ask them are looking for the wrong thing. Wow, bet that one shocked you, didn't it? But please, let me explain! Only God, as the sovereign King of Creation knows everything. God has the hairs on your head numbered, as well as the days of your life. Does God have a wonderful plan for your life? Of course He does. He has known you and loved you from before the foundation of the world (cf. Eph 1:4,5,11, Rom 8:29, etc). But nowhere does God promise to tell you the specifics of what that plan for your life will be. Instead, His Word gives you specific commands that you are to follow; if you want to know God's will for your life, just read the Bible and do what God says. But if you want to know which person to marry, or whether an investment is a good one, you will not find the direct answer in Scripture, nor will you find a promise that somehow, He will "supernaturally" reveal those details to you in some other way.

In order to know God's will in all these other areas you would need direct, special revelation. Now, I understand that many Christians today believe that God talks to them and that He will give them specific instructions about various life decisions. I do not have time to argue this point with my brothers, but let me just mention this: when people

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talk about being given specific “guidance” what do they really mean? Almost universally, they admit that they do not hear a “voice,” but rather they have a subjective, inner impression that influences them one way or the other. However, as I have studied the Scriptures, I do not find God ANYWHERE promising to give us guidance through this means. In Scripture, when God gives special revelation, there is no doubt about it; it comes through a dream, a prophet, a theophany, even from casting lots! There is nothing subjective about it. And it is NEVER an inner impression. Furthermore, even in Scripture, special revelation is just that, SPECIAL! It is an unusual occurrence given to “special” people in “special” circumstances for “special” reasons.

Now am I denying that God guides His people? Not at all, He guides me every day. It is not the issue of whether God guides us in life, but rather HOW He guides us. Rather than looking to special revelation, instead, God repeatedly encourages, exhorts and commands His people to seek for wisdom, and to apply that wisdom to life decisions. He even inspired an entire book to be written about wisdom, Proverbs. Therefore, Christians need to start thinking Biblically about what God Himself said would be the normal source of His guidance - applying Scriptural principles to the situations before us.

But the problem is, most Christians today spend very little time in the Word; they do not know it, they do not understand it, and they do not apply it (which just may go to explain why the Church is in such terrible shape today). Furthermore, the most popular doctrine of decision-making based on subjective, inner impressions is often touted as being more spiritual than using reason, logic and Scripture! I cannot tell you the number of times that people have come to me, justifying some stupid course of action because “God told me so in His still small voice.” Universally, these people end up making dumb decisions that plague them throughout their lives, but instead of learning from their mistakes, they repeat them time, and time again. The Bible has a word for people who make life decisions this way: they are called “fools.”

Now, not for a moment am I minimizing the supernatural aspect of the Christian life. I believe with every fiber of my being that God’s providence surrounds every nanosecond of our existence and that He protects, guides and shapes every aspect of our lives. There is no doubt in my mind that at times, every one of us needs a supernatural revelation of God’s grace to guide us. All I am saying is that that grace will come in the form of wisdom; the ability to make good decisions based on an accurate understanding of God’s principles in Scripture, applied to real life situations, NOT through an “inner impression.”

Let me see if I can illustrate the above from the life of Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived (apart of course from the Lord Jesus). You remember the story of how God came to Solomon in a dream and promised to give him whatever he asked (1 Kings 2:3); Solomon did not ask for wealth, glory, victory over his enemies or even long life. He simply wanted, “wisdom to judge God’s people righteously.” God was pleased with Solomon’s request and granted him not only wisdom, but also wealth and power. He also promised Solomon long life, provided he obeyed His Law.

The very next incident recorded in Scripture is Solomon having to adjudicate a dispute between two harlots; one of whom had accidentally suffocated her baby, then switched the little corpse for the live baby of her roommate. Now Solomon had both mothers before him, both pleading for the baby, and neither having an independent witness to identify the real mother.

Everyone knows what happened next; Solomon asks for a sword, commands the living child to be cut in two and each mother to be given half. The real mother says, “NO!” and offers to give the baby to the other woman. The false mother says, “Sure!” Thus Solomon knew who the real mother really was.

Now, has anyone else ever had a problem with this story? Clearly, Scripture intends us to see this incident as the supreme example of the wisdom that God had promised to give to Solomon, but what really made it so wise? I mean, after all, what kind of solution is this? Wouldn’t even an ungodly woman be disgusted and shocked at the King ordering the murder of a child and try to prevent it? How can Solomon’s ruse be considered so wise because surely, BOTH women would have objected to his “solution?” How could he have known that one woman would be so evil as to consent to a baby’s brutal death?

Well, think with me for a moment, and maybe we can see just why this decision WAS so very wise. Wisdom is the ability to apply Biblical principles to real world situations. Solomon knew what the Bible has to say about coveting and envy, two of the most destructive sins anyone can fall into. Furthermore, Solomon understood the real importance of this child. In ancient Israel, a woman on her own had few economic options. She did not have the physical strength to work hard enough in the fields to provide for her needs; there were very few office jobs available three thousand years ago. She needed a husband to work to provide for her. A woman without a husband had few options, one of which was prostitution (Lev 19:29, Deut 23:17).

These two women fell into that category; they were harlots and sold their bodies to make a living. But prostitution is a short-term vocation; after a few years, your body grows old, and men do not want to pay you for the use of it anymore. Thus, as a woman increases in age, her economic opportunities decrease. Furthermore, since prostitution is immoral, she could not count on the charity of the covenant community when she got too old to “walk the streets” any more. Children in ancient cultures were your “social security.” When you got too old to work, your grown up children worked for you and took care of you, just as you had taken care of them when they were young. Thus, the concern for the babies born to these two harlots was not just for the pleasure of having a child, but rather the children were their lifelines in the future. Their babies would grow up to be men, who could work and support their aged mothers. Without these children, these women were literally doomed to starve to death.

Therefore, there was a direct economic incentive to having the living baby. Never forget that having children survive infancy is a blessing of God that comes from faithful covenant living. Harlots by definition are outside of the covenant. Living children therefore would be rare, and a precious commodity. For more details, see Deut 28:11,18 for the blessings God promises to those who keep His cov-

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enant, and the curses to those who break it, especially regarding children.

Now Solomon, because he was wise, understood all this. This was more than a custody battle for the pleasures of raising a child; but rather a cold-hearted business deal with literally life or death implications for both parties. The woman who got the child had a chance of being taken care of in her old age. The woman without the child risked freezing or starving to death in the future.

Now, let us look at this decision from this perspective. One of these woman was a cold-hearted “gold-digger” whose only concern was for her own well-being. When her own child died because of her irresponsibility, she did not grieve, or in any way demonstrate a natural, motherly affection for the lost child. Instead, she calmly and coolly switched the babies, not caring at all for the actual little baby who had just died. Neither did she have any compassion for the effects it would have on the other woman. Hence, she cared nothing at all for the baby she had stolen. All she wanted was her “social security.”

A woman this cold, this calculating, this hardened is probably motivated by envy. Envy and coveting can be distinguished. Coveting is wanting what someone else has; envy is being angered and outraged that they have it and you do not. Envy means that you are willing to forgo the benefits of the “thing” itself, if you can deprive someone else of “it.” Solomon, knowing the kind of woman who could steal someone else’s baby without shedding a tear for her own dead one, shrewdly determined that envy was at core of this issue.

Therefore, he played on this envy by ordering the living baby cut in two so that neither mother would receive its future earnings. And sure enough, the true mother, placing love for her child above even her own welfare, was willing to give it away. She was willing to die herself to preserve the baby’s life. And the wicked mother, so motivated by envy that she was willing to see them both go without the blessings if she couldn’t have the baby herself, was willing to see the baby die.

And so, Solomon made the “right” decision. Notice, that God did not whisper the answer into his ear. No prophet came to give Solomon special revelation from God. Solomon did not follow some inner, subjective impression. He analyzed the character of the two women involved. He understood what the Law said about coveting and envy. He carefully considered the motivations behind this action. And he came up with a plan that exposed the real culprit.

As I studied this incident in our family worship, I literally had to fall on my knees at the wisdom and grace of God. Far from this being some ancient cliché, it does in fact illustrate all the relevant principles and how they relate to real-world situations. While Solomon was unique in that no other man ever had the same degree of wisdom, we are given his Proverbs to study that teach us the same thing. And that is how we need to make decisions.

THE BIBLICAL METHOD OF DECISION MAKING

Ok, now, we all agree that wisdom is the means of making wise decisions, but how do we actually apply this in a practical way? Our basic premise is that the Bible is sufficient to guide us in all of life’s decisions even in areas that the Bible may not specifically address. What we must

be able to do is go from general principles to specific applications; what we have noted elsewhere as the distinction between case law and statute law (1 Cor 9:9, 1 Tim 5:17-18, Josh 1:8, Deut 6:5).

Since wisdom is a gift from a gracious God, wise decision-making is thus a result of spiritual growth and cannot be separated from spiritual maturity (Rom 12:1-2, Heb 5:14). This is why young men are admonished repeatedly to “search for wisdom.” It is also, why we are to revere older men and respect them; presumably, they will have learned much about life as they themselves applied wisdom to various situations.

We can summarize the process in the following steps; first, we need to *prepare our hearts*. Psalm 66:18 says, “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*” Sin separates us from God and from one another. If God is withholding wisdom from us, it may well be that there is sin in our life that may be causing the problem. Perhaps we are self-oriented, or have bitterness and anger towards

another; maybe we are seeking our own glory, rather than God’s. The simple fact is that Christians often make foolish decisions because their heart attitude in any number of places is wrong, and until we get it right, God is not going to bless us.

Therefore, we need to search our hearts before God and ask Him to grant us repentance. We then need to confess that sin (1 John 1:9) and receive from His hand the forgiveness God has granted us in Christ Jesus. Since God’s providence governs every area of our life, and since His highest goal for our life is to conform us to the image of His Son Jesus (Rom 8:29), it just might be that the real cause of our financial problems is that God wants

us to get certain things in order. As an old friend and mentor likes to say, “God is more concerned about your character, than your comfort.” God will use whatever is necessary to bring us to a point of humility before Him and dependence upon Him. Thus, making sure that we are right with God is the first step to receiving the blessings of God.

Next, we need to bathe the decision in prayer (Eph 6:18). Most Christians will pray about an important decision, but what exactly is it that they are praying for? I would argue that we pray, as an acknowledgment before God, and a reminder to ourselves, that we are His servants, and that our goal is to glorify His name. Yes, we are asking for wisdom, but prayer is also a time to haul out our heart before God and have Him expose what is really inside.

There is something remarkable and yes, “supernatural” that happens when we get down on our knees before our Holy Father and get serious about communicating with God. Things suddenly take on a new perspective that you might never have seen before. Ideas you never would have thought start popping up. Nuances you might otherwise have missed suddenly become “crystal” clear. Prayer is real communication with the living God. It is not a perfunctory ritual, but rather vital communication and if we take the time and make the effort, God will often graciously give us wisdom, insight and understanding that we could never have achieved on our own.

Secondly, as we pray and think about whatever decision we have to make, we do so in the context of determining basic Biblical objectives for your life. No decision is made in isolation; there are always implications to every other area of our life. In order to make the best use out of

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limited time, money and opportunities, we must relate THIS decision to the overall vision for what we think God wants to do with us.

What does God want to do with your life? Our ultimate goal ALWAYS is to glorify God (John 17:3, Jer 31:33-). It is not to win the accolades of the world, it is not to impress our family or friends, and it is not to seek our own ends or to live a life of ease and comfort. Our goal must be to serve the gracious, wondrous and loving God who created us, sustains us and redeems us. Everything else in life MUST flow from this basic orientation. Knowing that you are here to serve God, and not for God to serve you is the source of your strength and endurance in hard times. Commitment to the glory of God is what allows you to find and fulfill your calling in God's great plan. A commitment to God's glory orients every other decision that we make in life.

Then, in light of the above, we have to understand that God has gifted each man in a special way that makes a unique contribution to the spread of His Kingdom, and therefore the revelation of His glory. Now, discussing "spiritual gifts" always causes controversy (1 Pet 4:10), especially those that we would consider "supernatural." Let me chicken out here by saying I'd rather not get off on that particular rabbit trail.

Instead, regardless of what you understand a "spiritual gift" to be, let me use the term "calling;" a perfectly good word used by our ancestors to talk about the life work that God gave each man to do. Today we commonly restrict the word "calling" to the ministry; i.e. a man is called to the pastorate, or the mission field, or even to a specific church. But our fathers in the faith believed that the ministry was only ONE of many "callings." Some men were called to the ministry, but others to being farmers. Some men were called to run a shop, others to work as craftsmen. In other words, according to the providence of God, He so arranged the particulars of the world, that each man was especially gifted and prepared by Him to have some meaningful work to do. Every man had his "place" with contentment, and prosperity resulting from men finding that "place" (or calling) and working diligently at it.

Now for the glory of God our basic task is to bring every area of life into submission to His will. (Matt 28:19-20). And in order to subdue every area of life, men must therefore understand where they can most efficiently use their limited time and labor in order to see the greatest return. To do this, you must be able to accurately evaluate your individual and unique strengths and weaknesses. Romans 12:3 says that each man ought, "...not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment..." To find our calling, we need to have a sober and reasonable assessment of who and what we really are. God's gifts differ men differently! And a wise man is one who can take a good, hard, honest look at himself; analyze what he is good at, and more importantly, what he is NOT good at and determine how he can best use what God has given him.

Repeatedly, when I have seen men consistently make bad decisions in life, it often comes back to a failure to make just this kind of sound, self-evaluation. Never underestimate the human capacity for self-deception. I have known men who couldn't put two sentences together coher-

ently insist that God had "called" them to preach. I have known men who believed they were geniuses at making money repeatedly bankrupt their families. I have known men who thought they were great managers who couldn't organize anything, except a disaster. In all these cases, pride got in the way of making an honest assessment. Some men just cannot accept the fact that they are lousy at whatever it is that they do. Rather than take the next step, thinking about what they CAN do, they refuse to humble themselves and learn. It is as if they see life as some sort of great competition, with them having to measure themselves by others. But God made you, YOU, for a good reason. In some way, the unique gifts, talents, abilities, personality and life-experiences God has given you, serve a purpose in God's great plan (1 Cor 12:1). You are not competing with your brother, and it is no good wishing you had his strengths or gifts. Nor does it do you any good to complain because you are not taller, brighter, prettier, more athletic, etc. You are going to be held responsible on the Day of Judgment for what you did with what God gave YOU; not what He gave someone else (see Matt 25:14).

Therefore, to have wisdom in making a life decision requires us to have accurate information. If we have a good idea of what God has called us to do, and if we have been working diligently at that calling, it will be far easier to evaluate future situations and make optimal decisions. In one sense, wise-decision making is a process of eliminating options. Every day, there are thousands of decisions that you must make from the mundane (what colour shirt will I wear?) to the profound (how do I deal with this problem?). Wisdom helps you to eliminate many possibilities and narrow the options.

If we know why we are here (for the glory of God), and what we are supposed to do (work diligently at the calling God has given us), we can therefore eliminate many options that would just not be wise. Let's look at some examples. Say a young man, otherwise quite bright, does not do well in mathematics. Oh, if he studies hard enough, he can pass the courses, but he will never do much better than a C- (or a B+ with Grade inflation). Now when this kid is considering his future, it is unlikely that he is going to have a glorious career in nuclear physics, engineering or any other calling that requires good, intuitive mathematical skills. Yet, say he WANTS to be an engineer. Well, he just might make it through college and get his degree, and he might find a job somewhere, but really, is he any good at what he does? Probably not, and therefore he is unlikely to progress very far in that field, unless he gets some kind of lateral "promotion" where he is able to work at something he is good at (for example; maybe he ends up managing the office, ordering supplies or even becomes a salesman).

Now true, someone with mediocre ability, but an outstanding work ethic can often achieve astounding things. Any man who applies himself diligently and conscientiously to whatever task God sets before him will be blessed in the long term. But surely, a man ought to carefully consider what he is good at BEFORE he makes a major life decision, such as his calling, and then invests years (and money) in training and education. Many men suffer financially today just because they are working at things for which they were not called to do. If possible,

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they ought to consider changing vocations.

Yet, most men today do not think in terms of calling, but simply of jobs. Their greatest and highest goal is their own sense of self-fulfillment. They mess along for years trying this and trying that, until reality hits, and they need a job, any job, so they can pay the bills. Sometimes, God in His sovereignty gives grace and they end up working at something they are gifted at. Other times, men find themselves in a dead end job, with no upward mobility and working at something they find unchallenging and unrewarding.

If you know your calling, you can invest your time and your money wisely getting the best out of both. You therefore can make better decisions about what education is required, and which are the best schools, in your price range, that you should attend. In short, simply knowing your calling automatically reduces thousands of options, and therefore makes wise decision making all that much easier.

How do you find your calling? Well, there are a number of different ways. There are tests today that compare your personality, temperament and skill set with people who are successful in various fields. The idea is that to the degree that you share the same qualities, you should be able to do as well as they did in the same vocations. Parents ought to consider giving their teenage children these kind of tests because they might help to clarify and quantify some things that you intuitively know, but cannot necessarily articulate.

A better way is to look successful people in various jobs and spend some time with them. Ask them about their education and training. Find out what they do on a daily basis and what skills they need to do their job well. If possible, young men especially might want to spend part of a summer working for such men in some capacity so they can get first hand experience at what it takes to work in that calling. If say at fourteen, a boy can spend the next three summers working part time, as an intern, he could conceivably investigate six different careers before he had to make up his mind about his own education. If you combine this with the various occupational tests mentioned earlier, a young man could have a pretty good handle on his calling, BEFORE he ever took one single college class. Thus, when he did get to college, he could make the best investment of his time and money, to get the best education possible that would help him the rest of his life.

Thirdly, if we want to make wise decisions, we need to establish the Biblical parameters for the specific issue. By parameters, I mean the boundaries of what Scripture itself requires. Obviously, no matter what gifts or talents you may have, God does NOT intend you to have a rewarding and glorious career in international drug running, or as a "high class" call girl. God simply forbids some things, and therefore you can rule them out ahead of time. And yet, God specifically commands you to do certain other things, and if your decision-making is an attempt to do an end run around God's revealed will, you WILL NOT be blessed.

For example, God commands us to work hard (2 Thes 3:10) so any decisions we make about life that are attempts to avoid work are inherently sinful. If a job opportunity came up where you know that you would not be working at your calling, but where the money was easy and the work light, you ought to know that this will not be blessed. Do these kinds of opportunities come available very often?

Well, no, but some men THINK that they can find such jobs and are discontent with their present ones because they have to work! Many men invest a lot of time and money in "get rich quick schemes" that promise a life of ease. I have been to seminars, watched them park their expensive cars outside to incite greed and covetousness amongst the "recruits." The idea is that if you buy into "my" plan, you can be rich too. Such men talk a lot about their boats, expensive vacations, and all the accouterments of wealth, but seldom about one's calling, or the value of hard, diligent work. To the contrary, they despise work and are proud of it; "Don't work harder, work smarter!"

Another parameter of Scripture is that we are commanded to care for our families (1 Tim 5:8), so therefore, if your "calling" cannot provide for your family, then you have not found wisdom. Any decision that undermines, impoverishes or puts our family on hold, is not wise and is to be avoided (working while their family is asleep and sleeping when their family is awake, or working a long way

from home and only coming home a couple of times a year). Many men in "the ministry" need to get a clue and a real job. Many men trying to "build their dream" by working for themselves need to wise up and start taking care of their families. I will get myself into trouble here by saying this, but I really do wonder if the lack of blessing on our missionary work has to do with the way that traditionally we have treated missionary families (or perhaps because the message was being taken to the wrong people? CIM). Most often,

the children were sent away to boarding schools while Mom and Dad "ministered" someplace else. In effect, they delegated the responsibility of raising their children to a school. For nine months of the year, strangers raised their kids and no matter how sincere the teachers, they are NOT substitutes for the parents. Anyone else see a possible connection here between the typical MK's reputation and the decisions their parents made?

Scripture also provides us a parameter for making life decisions in that we are not to go into debt (Rom 13:8). Now an argument can be made that there is a difference between consumer debt and business loans. A business loan is an investment that someone makes in your business. It is a covenant; you promise to do everything you can to make the business successful and the bank (or some other investor) puts up the operating capital. You then work on building your business, and the bank receives a portion of your profits via interest payments. I would not say that these kinds of loans are necessarily sinful, but they are dangerous. Both you and the bank are taking a risk; and generally speaking, usually, the bank wins the bet.

I do though have a real problem with what are called "consumer" loans. A consumer loan results from someone wanting something now, but cannot pay for it. Since they do not have the money for their car, TV, furniture, clothes, vacation; etc., they borrow the money, either formally through the bank, or informally through a credit card. However, satisfying that whim is expensive (as we note elsewhere) and most Christians at the end of their financial rope got there by spending themselves into the poor house (to mix a metaphor or two). Those interest rates will kill you every time. Borrowing money for consumer items is just plain stupid!

And God says, "don't do it." A borrower becomes the slave of the lender (Prov 22:7) and we are called to be slaves of Christ, and no one else (1 Cor 7:22). The only

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debt we ought to owe is the debt of love (Rom 13:8). Therefore, if we cannot pay cash for something, then we have no right to “own” it and ought to forego it until we can pay for it. Thus, many decisions in life can be greatly simplified by asking, “Can I pay for it?” If you can’t, then it is not wise to pursue that course of action.

Fourthly, if we have our goals in line with God’s, understand and are working at our calling, and follow the general provisions of God’s commandments, we can then approach every situation by deciding things properly and in order (1 Cor 14:40). God is not a God of chaos or confusion. He governs His creation with wisdom, according to reason and logic. Jesus Himself is called the “Logos” as one of His titles. If we examine a decision rationally, it is NOT pitting our limited brains against the sovereignty of God, but rather seeking in submission to His will, to use a tool of dominion He gave us for His glory.

Granted, “*the mind of a man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.*” However, this is NOT an attack against using good thinking skills, but rather an acknowledgment that God ultimately controls everything that happens. We have many plans in this life that are good, sound and rational, but for whatever reasons seem good to God, He does not bless (and we would have to BE God in order to understand why He does the things He does). But the fact is, that this Proverb does not condemn men for making plans, in fact to the contrary, it assumes it. It simply reminds is who is boss!

Therefore, we need to have a goal, a plan to reach that goal, and then do our homework to examine every side of an issue before we commit ourselves to a decision. Simply sitting down and thinking through a situation will often eliminate certain options, and place other options in a better light. You can even compare the various pros and cons against each other to see whether the benefits outweigh the deficits. And as you think, and pray, and consider, God will give you the wisdom and insight.

Now, there are some men who are so good at looking at all sides of something that they end up “paralyzed” and cannot make ANY decision; sometimes this is called “paralysis by analysis.” When you can see all sides of an issue, it can be hard to choose between them. However, to make NO decision, is in effect to let someone or something else make the decision for you. Therefore, you do the best you can, make a decision, and then stick with it.

Without planning, you cannot organize, or allocate resources wisely (Luke 12:43-2, 1 Cor 4:2, 1 Pet 4:10) or get the best returns for your efforts. Therefore, we need to learn how to make decisions based on life goals, not circumstances. Again, God is sovereign and though we may think we want one thing in life, He may well decide (for whatever reasons are good to Him) to prevent us from achieving that particular end. But how will we know what God does not want us to do, unless we first try something? Therefore, every man, regularly in life ought to sit down before God and set realistic goals. Your life is only about seventy years long. And though that might seem like an eternity when you are twenty, trust me, the time will literally fly by before you know it. One day soon, you will wake up, look into a mirror, and wonder, “who is that old geezer staring back at me?”

But if you set a life-goal, you can then begin to care-

fully plan how to get from where you are, to where you want to be. God may certainly direct your paths other than what you intended, but at the same time you cannot steer a ship at rest, only when it’s moving. If more Christian men did this, set a goal and then planned the intermediate steps required to reach that goal, we could transform our families in just one generation.

Granted, the goal must be realistic. Fantasies about being a great athlete and winning international acclaim for our skills are self-deception if we do not have what it takes. No “power of positive thinking” will give you the ability to fly like Superman; you have to have been born on Krypton for that! Setting a realistic goal is based upon the world as it really is, not the way you might like it to be (in a perfect world I would be two inches taller, 40 pounds lighter, 30 IQ points brighter and eating Twinkies or Ho-Ho’s would be a sacrament!). But once we DO have something of an accurate understanding of the world, and see how we fit into it, we can and should then set goals. Once we know where we

are supposed to be going, we can then start planning how to get there.

Christians therefore ought to set long and short-term goals. When we stand before God on the great and glorious Day of Judgment and look back over what we have accomplished for His glory, what would we like to see? **What contribution will we have made to advance His Kingdom?!** What legacy will we have left behind for our children and grandchildren to follow? Now, if we know THAT, what do we need to do today that will bring us closer to that goal?

Thus, many options can be ruled out because though they may

well be good in and of themselves, they would not help us reach that goal. rather than just waiting for “good things” to happen to us (which may or may NOT happen, according to God’s providence) we are actually working at MAKING those things happen. And yet, many Christians seem to live their lives passively, waiting for God to do something “supernatural” to get us out of the hole we have dug for ourselves. Yes, we believe in miracles; our gracious God does do remarkable and wondrous things. But God also commands us to actually DO something as the means by which He will bless us.

Does this sound “fleshly” or “unspiritual”? Maybe it does, but think about this; when you are hungry, and you pray and ask God for food, do you then wait for a bag of “good things” to miraculously appear on your doorstep (as in fictional Christmas stories)? Of course not! You know full well that normally speaking, the way that God is going to feed you is by giving you a job, that pays money, that allows you to go to the store and buy food to eat. Furthermore, it is the grace of God, that within certain limits, you can buy what you want, and enjoy the food you like. When you were a baby, your parents had to spoon-feed you; but as an adult, you now take responsibility to do those things for yourself. It is really not all that different with setting a life goal; you pray for God’s wisdom, you seek FIRST His Kingdom and righteousness, and then you get off your can, go to work, and rightfully expect that God is going to bless you.

Sadly, many Christians do not seem to “get it.” They want God’s blessings, they pray for God’s blessings, they “claim” God’s blessings, but they never do what He tells them to do to receive His blessings. And one of those

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“things” is wisely using what is available today, to bring about what we desire for tomorrow. Instead, we often find ourselves in a rut, doing the same things over and over again hoping that God will step in and supernaturally make things different. In some respects, we are little different from those statistically challenged fools who really do place all their hope in winning the lottery. Sure, some people DO win the lottery, but hundreds of millions of others have to play and lose for the jackpot to be worth winning.

Your life COULD be radically different in ten years time, IF you just get realistic goals, figure out a plan, and then start working diligently and conscientiously at meeting that goal day by day. A decade may seem like an awfully long time right now; but I assure you, it will come much quicker than you think.

But how do we find the right goal? The answer is really quite simple: seek godly counsel, always (Prov 15:22). God gives wisdom, not just through our own individual prayers and petitions, and not only through our own efforts in Bible study. The myth of the sturdy individualist doing it all on his own is a humanist fallacy. God created you to live within various Covenant Communities: Family Church and State (and as the latter no longer qualifies as “Covenant Community” - you should look for other families, or a Covenant church group). You need your parents, your brothers and sisters in Christ, your elders and their wisdom because God has placed them in your life. You can learn from their mistakes, not have to duplicate their disasters, and see better, more effective ways to reach your goals through their wisdom and insight. Even a midget can see further than a giant, if he stands on the giant’s shoulders.

Proverbs 13:20 addresses the same issue from a slightly different perspective; “*He who walks with a wise man will be wise but the companion of fools will suffer harm.*” If you want to be wise, hang out with wise people! The Apostle Paul put it slightly differently, “*Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals.*” The people with whom we associate, says something about who and what we are, inside (even people at work can be a bad influence!). Furthermore, who we are, will be greatly influenced by the company we keep. One of the reasons why God created the various covenant communities is so that His Law would be reinforced in all these areas of life. Therefore, if you want wisdom, go to wise people! But of course, that is the problem; so often we do not want wisdom, we want justification, we want people to agree with what we have already decided to do anyway. We do not want to receive any criticism. And this again, is acting like a fool.

We need to seek counsel from wise people; i.e. those who have not only an academic understanding of the Bible, but have demonstrated wisdom through their ability to make it work in practical ways. This is not just asking for advice, but rather going to another and asking them to give you a real objective evaluation of who you are, and what you can do. Ask them to evaluate the factors that went into your decision, and see if you overlooked something. What principles have you neglected, what concepts did you not properly apply?

Yet rather than seeking the wisdom of others, most of us keep people at an arm’s distance; it requires humility to listen to what others may really think of us. We prefer igno-

rant bliss to real wisdom. The fact is, most people will only tell you what they think you want to hear, because they fear offending you. Many of us have become so good at insulating ourselves from any kind of criticism that it takes a disaster in our lives before we will wake up. Therefore, you have to convince them that you are serious, that you really want their considered opinion and that you will not get angry if they tell you something you do not want to hear.

This is not just wise, but actually commanded. God requires us to respect age and life experience and listen humbly to the wisdom our elders in various spheres have gleaned over the years (e.g. 1 Pet 5:5). Will they always get it right? No, sadly, even the wisest Christian elders will make many mistakes. Even sadder, some of them never learned from their mistakes. The worst church I ever pastored, with the most ungodly people ever to call themselves “Christians” in my experience was composed of people over the age of seventy. But I learned more about what NOT to do from them, than from any other church in my professional career. twenty years later and I am still using that church as a bad example, NOT to be followed.

Finally, in applying wisdom to life situations, submit your decisions to the sovereign will of God (James 4:14). We plan, but God directs. Therefore, always give God the opportunity to change your direction. As you work at reaching your goal or plan) to bring it into conformity with the “real” world. Because of that wisdom, you may have to occasionally change direction. The goal remains the same, but the way to reach that goal may vary. But be comforted, if you are generally seeking His glory, God will keep you from making a mistake. His providence DOES control every part of your life and He will not allow you to make some disastrous mistake that will ruin you.

After six years as an enlisted man in the Air Force, I went to college and then seminary. For a number of reasons I resisted my calling as a pastor, and sought to go back into the Air Force as an officer. To be honest my reasons were good ones; when I looked at what a pastor did, and how he spent his time, I firmly believed I could have a more effective ministry as a layman, in the military, than the average pastor does being paid to work in a church. So, I went to the recruiter and took all the tests to be an officer. And, if you will forgive my lack of modesty, I did quite well in the examinations and interviews. I was practically guaranteed a slot as an officer candidate but as in all decisions, I bathed this in prayer and asked God to keep me from making a mistake. What happened next was a comedy of errors, literally. Everything that could possibly go wrong did go wrong, from the recruiter filling out the wrong paperwork, to losing my files and sending them to the wrong agency. All of these things were completely beyond my control. Eventually, the captain in charge offered me a shot if I could go in two weeks. I agreed and all I had to do was take one little eye test, which I failed. It seems that I have a problem with my left eye, one that I was born with, and that problem kept me from qualifying as a navigator, the only position open!

Now do you see the beauty here of what God did here? God wanted me to be a pastor, but I misunderstood and was searching to do something else (and if you knew me, and my sense of direction, the very idea of my ever navigating an airplane is really hilarious! I got lost on my way to the

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bathroom). So, God KEPT me from making a poor decision, and was very gracious in doing so. From the time of being in my mother's womb, God formed me in such a way, that I would be prevented from making a foolish choice.

Now, to put the above story in context; I also believe that if you really pester God about something, He just might give it to you. I have known men who wanted to marry certain women. And though counseled against it, insisted that this was what they really wanted. And in time, they prayed, fasted, and whined before God, they did marry the woman of their "dreams." But later on, the "having" was not so satisfying as the "wanting." I have seen the same dynamic operate with people seeking jobs, ministries, education, etc. God did in fact give the people what they wanted; but after they got it, decided they didn't really like it very much after all. In short, trust God; if He closes a door, think carefully before you start pounding on it again. God may open that door, but you may not really like what is behind it.

Yet, having said the above, if you are committed to the glory of God, and if you do have a sober self-evaluation, and if you have sought godly counsel; then if your heart desires something, go for it (Ecc 11:9). God is not a cosmic killjoy. Every good gift comes from Him (James 1:17). Do not worry that if you give yourself over to God you will have to marry an ugly girl with glasses and become a missionary to the pygmies or something. A man who wants the glory of God, who seeks to advance His Kingdom, will find work that is rewarding, personally significant, AND economically profitable because he already has found his place in the world. And because God already has your heart, He can then entrust you with all the other blessings that come from a sanctified life; work that is meaningful, fulfilling relationships, and prosperity that you can enjoy.

Now, when times get tough, when adverse circumstances arise you can be comforted that they are either examples of not finding wisdom in a given situation or as opportunities for growth, character development, and further service (James 1:2). If you are seeking wisdom, and made a bad decision, you can learn from the mistake and not duplicate it again in the future. God in His wisdom does allow us at times to make mistakes as a teaching exercise; just as we let our kids make some mistakes to reinforce some important principle. Furthermore, sometimes God allows bad things to happen because He is working on our character. If God allows you to be afflicted in some way, but you did make the "right" decision, then you can rejoice that you share "the sufferings of Christ."

Remember, the real issue in decision-making is never, "What does the Lord want me to do?" for this has already been settled in the Bible. The real question is, "Am I willing to do what is necessary to discover God's commandments, statutes and principles and then change my life accordingly?" Answer that one correctly my friend, and God will unleash His storehouse, and prosper your labours.

Conclusion: *Wise decision-making is crucial to our prosperity. Wealth does not just "fall from above" but results from maximizing our resources through optimal decisions - and by acknowledging that all gifts come from God, by returning the Tithe to Him.*

Proverbs for Further Consideration:

15:22 *"Without consultation, plans are frustrated but with many counsellors they succeed."*

14:15 *"The naive believes everything but the prudent man considers his steps."*

16:18 *"Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling."*

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THE APOSTLES WERE LAYMEN

Extracts by Philip Lancaster

The world and the church agree about how you should address me. My proper name and title, by unanimous consent, is: The Reverend Mister Philip H. Lancaster.

I am one of the elite cadre of persons who has the right to be addressed as "Reverend" ("Worthy of reverence, revered. A member of the clergy.") This distinction is mine because I successfully completed a three-year graduate program in theology (I'm also a "Master of Divinity") and passed a theological exam before a body of ministers and elders. Upon passing that examination I was ordained and granted the privilege of being addressed as Reverend. This distinction also entitled me to be the pastor of a church: its preacher, the one who oversees the church ordinances, and the one privileged to "pronounce the benediction."

According to the church and the world, I am one set apart. I am a member of the clergy, and my title distinguishes me as such. Sounds

pretty good, huh?

Yes, it sounds good to modern ears. But there is a little problem: the title and what it implies is an affront to Jesus Christ and an insult to every other man in the church. As an expression of my submission to my Lord I renounce the title and resist its implications.

jesus said: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers" (Matt 23). Our Lord goes on to forbid other honorific titles among his people, the church, and then concludes, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (vs 12).

Jesus explicitly forbade setting any man apart in the church by means of a special title - and yet the church has done it since not long after the apostolic age. Why is such a practice such an affront to Christ? Because he alone is Head and Master of His church.

The concept of a professional clergy, which corrupted the church within a few centuries of the apostles, was a direct expression of worldly concepts of leadership and power. Whereas Jesus had adorned himself with a towel and became a servant to his followers (John 13), "clergy-men" began to adorn themselves with special robes and collars and assumed a place of superiority over the congregation of the church. Although later the Reformation removed some of the worst abuses of this clerical system, it retained the distinction between the "clergy" and the "laity," a distinction which survives to this day.

Do we see any evidence of a clergy/laity distinction in the New Testament? None whatsoever. We see quite the opposite: the church leaders were ordinary men who humbly served the flock and who neither sought nor accepted any special status, title or dress that set them apart from the rest of the brothers.

Unschooling, Ordinary Men.



Consider the Apostles. These men were hand-picked by Jesus Himself to be the foundation of his ecclesia, the human agents through whom He would establish the household of God on earth (Eph 2:20). These were the very agents of divine revelation, the human authorities by which the ecclesia received its order and direction. Certainly the Apostles were the most important leaders the ecclesia has ever had. Surely if any men deserved special title, position and rank it was these men. But were the Apostles clergymen?

To the contrary, we find clear evidence that the Apostles, though exercising their leadership role and its attendant authority, were not a special class among Christians, a professional spiritual elite. Let's look at just some of the evidence.

In Acts 4:13 we read of the reaction of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish clergy) to Peter and John: *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."* What distinguished the Apostles was not their training and credentials; it was that they had spiritual power because they had been with Jesus and He was with them still by the spirit.

My interlinear Greek-English New Testament suggests these words for those translated "unschooled" and "ordinary" above: "unlettered" and "laymen." The Apostles were perceived by the clergy of their day as "uneducated laymen"! How could these men count for anything? Who could take them seriously? The Lord Jesus could, and did; and He built his ecclesia on the work of these ordinary men.

Nor do we find the Apostles claiming any special rank and recognition for themselves. Paul called himself the "least of all God's people" (Eph 3: and refused even the honor to which he was due by virtue of his role (1 Cor 9:12). Peter, when addressing the church leaders, referred to himself simply as "a fellow elder" (1 Pet 5:1). When the Apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem for a critical doctrinal debate, the Apostles submitted to one another, and the letter which the council sent to the churches went out in the name of "the apostles and elders, your brothers" (Acts 15:23).

A Brotherhood

The church is a brotherhood, a family, in which there are no classes of people... The New Testament prescription for leadership in the local church is a body of elders, a plurality of leaders who function as brothers, submitting to one another, with no man in a superior position to another. (You can study these passages and meditate on their implications in regard to leadership structure: Acts 14:23; 20:17-31; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4).

The clergy system is a direct attack upon the very nature of the body of Christ. It introduces a false concept of a special spiritual class, with the accompanying temptation to pride and abuse of power that comes when one man is exalted positionally over others. It also leads to passivity on the part of those who are, by implication at least, "second class" in the church. Members of the body do not use their gifts to carry on ministry since the professional "minister" is doing the work.

Perhaps the worst result of the clergy system is that it stifles the spiritual development of the men of the congrega-

tion. God's plan is that ordinary, unschooled men can become elders, overseers and shepherds (pastors) of God's flock. They can grow in grace, can learn their Bibles, can develop leadership in their families - to the point that they can be recognized and set apart to pastor the church as a part of the body of elders. They do not have to go to Bible college or seminary. They can strive through on-the-job training to be leaders in the congregation. However, the clergy system removes this possibility from most men and smothers the godly ambition to servant-leadership. So men are unchallenged, and the congregation is weakened - not to mention its families whose leaders are given no practical incentive for spiritual growth.

Can you see how all this fits with a return to what we have called "the family-based church"? We must get away from the single pastor model in which he inevitably becomes a program manager, an executive in a bureaucracy. We must return to the concept of brotherhood where the church is seen as a family and no one man has a position by which he dominates others. we must abandon the model that burns out one man and leaves the rest unchallenged.

Starting A Church

Now here is what encourages me about all this. This non-clerical, family-based model of the church is one that can be reproduced by the hundreds and thousands around the nation (and the world). Any group of godly men who are committed to each other as brothers, who share the same scriptural understanding of the ecclesia, who are prepared to submit themselves to one another in the Lord—any such handful of men can constitute themselves a 'church' -

ecclesia and begin this adventure of seeing a family-based 'church' in their COMMUNITY.

You see, they do not need "a pastor" (meaning a clergy-type professional preacher) to start a church. Better that they do not have such a man, unless he is willing to function by the brotherhood model endorsed by the Apostles.

"You man you can just start a church with a few families?" - Yes, you can

The critical ingredient for successfully shaping a biblical ecclesia is the attitude of the men of the group. They must be absolutely committed to the Lord Jesus and His Word, ready to submit their own minds and wills to Scripture. They must also be committed to one another, ready to yield to one another in love. They must not seek a place of prominence over the others. They must cultivate an attitude of sacrifice and service on behalf of the whole group.

The men of the forming church can meet regularly to discuss the spiritual and physical needs of the member families, to study the Bible, pray, and oversee and shepherd the little flock of God. In time they will need to recognize elders from among themselves, and appoint deacons to assist the elders. If several men are able to so devote themselves to the Lord and to one another, there is no reason they cannot see a solid church established in their midst.

Forget the "Reverend" business. The Lord chooses ordinary, working men and makes them extraordinary. That could be you!

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 by Brooks Alden (using much of the wording of a 1966 Ambassador article).

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One of the many disappointments and discouragements that come to the sincere Christian Israelite is the difficulty in winning others around us to accept our message of the Kingdom of God and the Israel Truth. We are always being urged to spread the message and we are always failing. We just do not seem to be able to "get our man," as the saying goes.

Now there must be a reason for our lack of success. Do we ever give sufficient careful thought as to why we are failing to convince others? Perhaps we adopt the wrong tactics altogether? We are so convinced of the message ourselves, in fact, so sure of ourselves, that we just go enthusiastically for people in a straight-out way! Yet, where is this getting us? How many people have we enlightened and attracted to our organizations? Few if any and so, we see our numbers dwindling. I suppose like many other things in life there is an ART to WINNING PEOPLE to our movement. And we have to keep trying, particularly in the precious few years before Christ returns. Remember, being Christians, as well as awakened Israelites, places on our shoulders a greater responsibility than those who have not been awakened. I don't believe God took our blinders off for nothing, so each of us have to examine our personal ministries to ensure we are adopting the right approach to getting the message across.

When we were younger, most of us remember reading the fable out the sun and the wind. They quarreled about which was the stronger and the wind said: "I'll prove I am. See that old man down there with a coat? I bet I can make him take his coat off quicker than you can."

So the sun went behind a cloud and the wind blew until it was almost a tornado, but the harder it blew the tighter the old man wrapped his coat around him. Finally the wind calmed down and gave up; then the sun came out from behind the cloud and smiled kindly upon the old man. Presently he mopped his brow and pulled off his coat. The sun then told the wind that gentleness and friendliness were always stronger than fury and force.

Can we apply this in our lives and overcome the fear our brethren have in accepting a message, or even consider it for fear of offending those who captured the name of Israel? Still, it is a dual message and of more importance is spreading news of the Gospel of the Kingdom, although the Israel Truth is remarkably intertwined. Can we be most effective employing the gentleness of the "Sun" rather than the smugness of the "Wind." Probably! And we have a wonderful pattern for this approach.

Study Jesus' method in John 4. Note how gentle He was with the [Israelite] woman at the well. He wasn't smug, or pushy. And HE WON THE WOMAN and she started a REVIVAL.

I've often thought there should almost be a script outlining the most effective way to get the message across to our brethren. Each of us have our own little canned approach but since the numbers are dwindling, they aren't working.

Would that some came up with ideas that collectively we could develop a more surefire way to convey our two-pronged message.

Courtesy TKC - Box 1478 Ferndale WA 98248 USA

CAN "FACTS" EVER BE TONGUE IN CHEEK?

by **Arnold Kennedy**

When talking to a Waiheke identity in the public library, I was asked, "Arnold, I hope those articles you write in 'The Waihekean' are tongue in cheek." "Well," I replied, "They are designed to make people think but they are not all tongue in cheek." This produced a reply on the value of racial mixing and the equality of all races together

with an alleged lack of meaningful genetic differences between them. In reply I pointed out two things. Firstly a November article in the N.Z. Herald "**Genes Carry Indelible Imprint of Social Rank**" where research showed there are distinctive genetic profiles between the Hindu castes in India. Secondly I pointed out the matter of race-specific diseases and how racial intermarriage could cause offspring to be liable to a greater range of diseases. [also in this regard, it is interesting to note that the milk which is least problematical as to allergies, etc. is the A2 milk which comes from pure-bred Friesian cattle. And, the cross-breeding of wheat has produced a product which many Saxons now cannot handle - containing gluten! It seems there is a growing number of Saxons who suffer from Coeliac disease, and cannot eat wheat or barley, etc. products. CIM] This was not received; it seemed as if he was saying that *science* offended his religion, although I do not think he would class himself as a religious person. Perhaps he was confusing values with facts, values being a religious non-scientific activity. But what he probably had in mind were matters of worth in the good sense that people in one restricted gene pool should not be treated differently than another, and this made him blind to biological differences, even if everyone who thinks about it knows visible features, such as eye shape are because of biological differences.

What bothers me is the attitude of some people who will not believe something regardless of the evidence, and this is what I want to talk about. In the Western world, *values* are considered matters of personal choice and things we should keep an open mind about. But *values* cannot rightly over-ride *facts*, and those who promote the ideas that *values* should over-ride *facts* arrogantly seek to impose their beliefs upon others in a religious manner. People today tend to place *facts* within the scope of science whereas they say *beliefs* belong to the realm of religion. A person who will not accept scientific *fact* is essentially religious.

It is true that coherent thought demands that we must take some things as being defined, so we must always be explicit about all suppositions. Most of us take for granted the assumptions of our society without thinking too much about it. Because of this we tend to go along with a rotten financial system and self-serving secret-agenda politicians. Why do we tend to disbelieve something we have not fully examined or tried, that is, why do we not separate values from facts when they differ? Of course there is a good and bad side to examination and testing. I remember at High School reading in a chemistry book that there was a lead salt which tasted very sweet and yet was deadly poisonous in small quantities - I wondered what happened to the taster! This shows we should not ignore experience. Experience here is in the nature of *science*.

When something is proved as being fact by a witness of integrity, is it ignorant or arrogant for him to make a confident statement about it? Not wanting to know about "**Genes Carry Indelible Imprint of Social Rank**" is not going to make it any less of a fact, even if it is not 'politically correct' or personally pleasing to some peoples' *values* to accept it. What I am saying is that we do not have to live without *facts* in a twilight zone where all cats are grey! Black and white is better, but a strong wide dash of colour is even better! In our society, there is actually less freedom to follow *facts* than there is to follow *values*, because the law of the land supports *values* rather than *facts*.

But what should the law and our lives be based upon? Should it not be upon fact? It cannot be based upon superstition or supposition. *Science* does not operate outside of laws which are inviolate. Scientific laws are also laws of God as Designer; buck them and you have to take what is coming. We just cannot argue! If we find genetic laws and



facts about them, are we unwise not to accept them? Can personal abhorrence make them cease to exist? Is there any wisdom in ignoring undeniable *facts*? Society and government are paying a heavy price for denying *facts* which are equally true for every person. The laws of *science* do not discriminate on the basis of race, minorities, the poor or the disabled. *Values* may discriminate and allow the strong to prevail over the weak. No matter how much we may try to legislate to try to change *values* into *facts*, and pass anti-discrimination laws, we cannot succeed. That is what we see in government; we see an assumption that it is more intellectually respectable to accept doubt above a creed and *facts*, placing *values* in their place. Scientific knowledge is a creed which allows no scope for pluralism. There is no scope for “*what is true for me may not be true for you*” in science. The so-called sciences of sociology and economics still operate on the myth of *values* and have no firm basis as science understands a basis; they absurdly operate in the “*values*” of personal choices, chance and cause. They provide a false lens to look through and view the world. For instance, we can all view the evil consequences of a money system based upon usury, a system which discriminates against the poor and the weak in society. Yet we join in with it as total hypocrites! This shows where *values* are placed, that is, they are placed above *facts*.

Science and faith have a lot in common. Science may produce a hypothesis and then seek to find out if it works in practice. Until it is proved, the hypothesis is on the level of a value. Now I have to admit that I cannot supply one small fact to prove that God exists. The only way I can change such a *value* to a *fact for myself* is by experience. For instance, if I have positive and negative leads on a fully charged car battery, it is not until I have the practical faith to bring the two leads together that I can establish as fact that such a short will produce a large spark. It is not until I see that spark that I can say that I am a believer who has moved beyond *values*.

So much religion is on the level of *values* with one set of values competing with another. To find out whether many Church-goers really “believe,” find out how most of their members vote in elections. I have found their vote is for what they think will give them the best financial advantage, rather than for what they profess to believe. What many forget is that the Bible is an intensely scientific book. People tend to forget the matter of *intelligent design*, a subject we cannot deny even if it is ignored and is dismissed as being a fancy new name for creationism. We do not tolerate physics teachers who deny the view that the earth is a sphere or doubt whether its motion is around the sun. We do not tolerate chemistry teachers who think that the periodic table is irrelevant to chemistry. To put the teaching of evolutionary theory in a *science* basket is not valid because at best evolution is still only a theory. It is because our teachers and leaders want to avoid the implications of believing *intelligent design* that they cling to a theory as being a *fact* when it is only a *values* theory. Evolution then is properly in the field of religion and we should not tolerate biology teachers or others who would place evolution in the field of science. There is no intellectual honesty when this is done. Some may have noted the front-page ‘Time Magazine’ headlines in 1998, “*Evolution is dead.*”

Evolutionary theory is failing as an alleged matter of science; its day of reckoning is arriving! Its appeal is to the non-purposive, undirected natural processes. But can we in truth explain the origin and development of life by natural causes? Can we really view intelligent causes as a by-product of natural causes? Intelligent causes must come from intelligence to produce the obvious *intelligent design* we can see in science. The laws of science prove *intelligent*

design. The only universally valid form of inner knowledge of truth is *science* coupled with experience. This is in a different division to music, literature, philosophy and in the arts. It is in these where emotion may allow one thing to be true for one person but not for another.

To affirm *intelligent design* would demand responsibility, a responsibility that most refuse to shoulder, simply because of a *values* preference to please the natural in-born love of self-pleasing. When we look at the world and the features that show *intelligent design*, this shows that there must be more of worth than an un-designed mixture of conflicting *values*. *Intelligent causation* is more than a religious-*values* belief.

Evolutionary theory cannot account for the complexity of life where the removal of one component in a system causes malfunction. Whole branches of science such as anthropology, archeology and forensic science display unequivocal marks of *intelligent causation* that are not necessarily human or earthbound. These are scientific *facts* and thus show that *intelligent design* is properly scientific and as such it should be taught in our schools as science, [provided that we do not allow religion to masquerade as science such as happens when evolution is taught].

When a person refuses to accept scientific facts in favour of values, we find him doing more than just refusing to accept his responsibilities. We find such people actively pursuing an agenda to bolster up what effectively is their religion; they seek to establish the dominance of naturalism within the scientific community, because most in Government share the irresponsible position, they have the power to group together and support each-other. Their problems with the origin of the genetic code, the origin of sexuality, the gaps in the fossil records, the development of complex organic systems, and the development of irreducible complex molecules are not going to go away, but are problems which are going to grow worse with time. The time will come when they will no longer be able to artificially constrict the playing field by allowing *tolerance* to deny the free flow of *fact*, that is, if these moths in the fabric of civilization do not destroy that society first.

Intelligent design and *science* are windows into reality and it comes as a shock when one realises just how much they have in common. Few people realise the common design relationship that exists between the Bible and *science* but not between religion and science. The Bible in Hebrew and Greek and *science* share the same language of numbers and other peculiarities that do not feature in any other holy book of other faiths. This determines that the Bible and *science* are not separate having different designers and that both belong to the one seamless robe of Truth.

So, going back to the pride of people not believing something regardless of the evidence, their mere preferences and opinions as *values* hold greater weight to them than *facts*, and those supporting *values*, especially Human Rights *values*, pursue these *values* with a religious fervour, demanding so-called rights to their *values*, completely ignoring the matter of *intelligent design*, a denial that has contributed to the fall of past civilizations.

When individual liberty expressed as *values* becomes the only arbitrator of right and wrong, community disintegrates, because government then becomes nothing more than the referee between and less competing claims for “rights.” Unlimited liberty demands that there is no objective good and so all life-styles and convictions become merely subjective tastes and preferences. Could we possibly give all of these the same protection under law without having a corrosive effect? Could *facts* ever be subordinated to the requirements of a person’s “liberty”? Is good really only what the individual personally prefers? Is justice to be



based upon a person's *right* to act upon his preferences? The extreme of *values* of course is total permissiveness and therefore total chaos and anarchy. Without community beliefs and a public moral basis there can be no community. But the morals associated with *intelligent design* are creative and not destructive. To come to be a "believer" is a choice! This is what "seek and you will find" is all about!

TOY GUNS

Rev. Brian M. Abshire

As I write this, it is just a few days before Christmas. Last night, my wife laid out the presents she had bought for the kids. There were some clothes, a few games and several items that each of the children had put on their wish list. As I looked over the various gifts, I noticed that something was missing: NO toy guns!

Now I realize that we give presents in remembrance of the magi's gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (symbolic of the Messiah's kingly reign and suffering death). [not that we agree with Christmas or gift giving, CIM] And yes, technically speaking, guns as Christmas toys may seem incongruous for celebrating the birth of the Prince of Peace. But still, every year when I was a kid, Momma always made sure we boys always had our own little arsenal on Christmas morning.

My best memories of childhood growing up in a small village in rural Maine was playing "guns" with the other kids, re-enacting great battles from American history (or at least those aspects of American history we gleaned from John Wayne movies). And throughout the year, those toy guns were used to save Davey Crockett at the Alamo (a little revisionism granted, but we were kids after all!), hold off the Indians until the Cavalry arrived, storm the beaches at Normandy, or fight the wily Japanese on un-named Pacific Islands. For us, those toy guns were a symbol of brave men, fighting against incredible odds, to resist tyranny, preserve freedom, protect their families, and make America a great nation.

But my wife explained that she couldn't BUT any toy guns, there simply weren't any in the toy stores. Not that I didn't believe her or anything (but after all she IS British and doesn't have quite the same emotional attachment to toy guns as we Americans do), but I did go on-line to do an exhaustive search for "toy guns." No luck. If there is a company out there somewhere who still makes and markets toy guns I couldn't find it. Now granted, there have been several horror stories about kids pointing realistic toy guns at police officers and getting shot (that's why they started putting those ugly orange caps on the ends), and of course, some kids have used REAL guns to shoot themselves and others. Maybe toy manufacturers are concerned about liability or something?

But the reality is that guns today, both real ones and toy ones, are politically incorrect. The Powers that Be have determined that children shouldn't play with toy guns. Play is an important part of a child's development. Psychologists call this "modelling" wherein children learn to adopt the attitudes, behaviours and values of their peers and parents through play. Obviously then, "playing" with toy guns must be bad, because guns kill people!

Now if a Quaker family (or some other pacifist group) was behind the unofficial ban on toy guns, I could understand it. In their view, ANY taking of human life under ANY circumstances is morally wrong. But most Americans are NOT pacifists so what is the problem?

In effect, we have adopted the pagan fallacy of animism; that evil lurks in things, rather than people. Therefore demonizing guns (even toy ones) gives self-righteous crusaders some feeling of power. Ban toy guns and presto/chango, you banish evil.

People today fear firearms of any sort because they rightly fear the consequences of living in a godless society. Modern Americans reject God and His law and then are horrified that their children grow up to become consistent with what has been hammered into them in twelve years at the State propaganda mills. They have been taught that there is no truth, no objective standard of justice, that they are just an evolved animal and therefore that there are no absolutes. Parents delegate the rearing of their children to the nanny state, the schools, the TV and video games and then wonder why some of them turn out to be killers. But no, it cannot be our lack of faith, our lack of personal morality, our lack of objective truth, our materialistic mentality or our adoption of ancient pagan heresies that causes the problem. It must be the toy guns!

There is no mystery about the origins of evil in human society; we have to look no further than the evil within our own hearts. God's Law restricts and restrains that evil and in the past, American social and cultural structures reflected this belief. Today of course, we know so much better, we are so much further advanced; we have such greater wisdom than our fanatical religious ancestors had. And today we ban toy guns, while children commit murder with real ones.....

Eventually, we did find some cheap, plastic pistols imported from China at the 99-cent store (nice trade, our President gives them nuclear weapons, and they give us toy guns!) so our boy's Christmas will not entirely be gun-free. But I fear the larger problem will not go away. We flee from shadows but invite demons into our homes, and then wonder why monsters walk among us. The problem is NOT the toys we buy, but the values we impart (or fail to impart). The evil is not in the toys, but in our own hearts. And isn't that why the Saviour came into the world in the first place?

Courtesy Highland Reformed Presbyterian Church, PO Box 279 Colbert WA 99005

BEING DIFFERENT

by John Notgrass

I've never been a big shopper. Going to the store was bearable if I could find a place to read or at least visit the electronics section. These days I don't even like to go to the store. Advertising shows things that should not be seen in public. The magazines in the checkout line flaunt their perversity, and real live human beings walk around like the Emperor in the story—they have nothing on!

We live in a culture intoxicated by the lust of the flesh. Skin is "in" and the promotion of sensual pleasures is all around us.. how can we as followers of Christ stand firm against this trend? We need to honor God with our bodies. We need to recognize that our choices have consequences. We need to think differently, to dress differently, and to act differently.

Many of these thoughts are taken from the book of 1 Corinthians. In that letter Paul is instructing believers in how they should conduct themselves in an immoral community. Sound familiar? His lessons are immediately applicable to us today. Let's learn together. If you have not read it recently, I encourage you to read Paul's entire letter. I can't improve on his message, but I'll highlight some ideas that stand out to me.

Think Differently

We humans have limits. We cannot be everywhere or see everything simultaneously. We cannot automatically follow each option before us to its ultimate conclusion (logical or not). God's wisdom is high above ours. Even His "foolishness" is wiser than we are. In His mercy, He has given us guidance to help us make decisions. We must set our minds on things above. If my mind is not set on things



above, it will necessarily be set on things below. If my mind is set on things below, I will much more easily fall into the sensual traps that wait all around me.

Though we have limits, we also have great capabilities. We can recognize sin and identify it as such. We can know right and wrong. We can make moral decisions. Our motivation in everything should be to glorify God. Our love for Him and our love for other people must modify our behaviour. It must compel us to be different from those who love only themselves.

People in the world are childish in their thinking, but they are experienced in evil. The Lord calls us to be mature in our thinking, but to be inexperienced “babes” in evil (1 Cor. 14:20). Because we are surrounded by immoral influences, and because we so often give in to them, we must make constant effort to unlearn bad habits and to learn good ones.

The events of the past are examples to us. Scripture records selected events for our instruction. temptations to immorality may seem hard to avoid today, but they have been common to man throughout history. With each one comes a way of escape so that we are not trapped in our selfish lusts. We must think differently from the world around us.

Dress Differently

At the homeschool conventions we attend, frequently the attire of the young women (and some of the older women) shocks me. If the Lord gives me a family, I intend to help my wife and daughters to present themselves to the world with becoming attire. We don't need complicated rules about clothing, but we need thoughtful consideration. One practical consequence of our different perspective on life should be a difference in the way we dress.

I want my wife to keep herself covered in public from her neck to her knees. I want her to reserve that part of her body for me. I'm not just being selfish. I don't want other men to be uncomfortable in my wife's presence, as I often am in the presence of other women. I also want each of my daughters to keep her body covered for her future husband. I want to protect the women in my family from drawing inappropriate attention to themselves.

Modesty is easily assessed by asking a few simple questions. Does this outfit expose parts of the body that should be covered? Do these clothes fit too tightly or hang too loosely (such as when a woman is bending over)? Do undergarments show through these clothes?

Modest dress applies to men, too. Stripping for exercise or work is not necessarily cooler, and it is often not becoming. Questions for me and my sons include these: Am I trying to show off my body with this choice of attire? Does my appearance come across as haughty or grungy? Our attire should not draw undue attention to us. It should be neither erotic nor exotic.

When the Bible speaks of nakedness, one of the primary reasons for it is poverty. Thus Paul says that he was hungry, thirsty, and “naked” as a servant of Christ (1 Cor 4:11), I have not yet gathered the courage to approach someone dressed immodestly and say, “I'm sorry you can't afford more clothes. Can I help you buy some?” Do you think such an approach would be effective?

May a daughter of God walk around in public wearing a tank top and short shorts? “All things are lawful,” but it is most certainly not profitable (except for the big-name clothing companies, who can charge twice as much for half the clothing). Some parts of the body need to be covered (1 Cor. 12:23-24). Our bodies belong to the Lord.

Does dress seem like an insignificant issue compared to sodomy and other perversions? It may seem so, but our dress, being the physical appearance we present to the

world, reflects the way we think, and it influences the way we act. Are we asking, “How far can we go or how little can we wear, and still be okay?” Or are we asking, “How can I honour God with my body and help those around me to think and act with purity?” I'm not calling for powdered wigs and leggings and corsets and hoop skirts. I am calling for decency.

Act Differently

Our fleshly lusts are not much different from the animals. We see, we want, we take. Unlike the animals, however, we can control our lusts through the Holy Spirit. God teaches us self-control. Such training is not easy. We must buffet our bodies, making them our slaves.

Our actions affect others. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, so we must clean out the old leaven. Judgment must begin with the household of God. We may not be able to change the fashions on Madison Avenue this year, but we can do something about Main Street Church.

The most important thing is not what we want. We are not called to seek our own good, but rather the good of our neighbour. We should do everything in love, giving no offense to anyone as far as it depends on us.

Cohabitation before marriage (and old-fashioned one-night-stands) are common. Adultery captures its prey among the high and low. States are granting same-gender partners special recognition, if not full marital rights. The U.S. Supreme Court in its *Lawrence vs. Texas* decision ruled against a Texas statute prohibiting sodomy. The Canadian House of Commons passed a bill to prohibit “hate speech” against people who have certain sensual orientations. This is what we are up against.

In addition to thinking and dressing differently we must also act differently. Fornication, adultery, and sodomy do not just happen. They are the final steps in a journey of compromise and corruption. Those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. We need to recognize sin and repent of it, not rejoice in it.

If we are in Christ, then Christ is in us. Our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit. We have been purchased with a price, and we must no longer act as if we belong to ourselves. We must flee immorality. How sad that our culture has denigrated innocence and purity and encouraged immorality and perversion—from the abuse scandals in the catholic Church to the campaign for special rights for sodomites and lesbians to commonplace cases of pedophilia and incest. Instead of fleeing immorality, many have welcomed it with open arms. God's people must be different. We must avoid even the appearance of evil.

Conclusion

Will we wade against the tide of indecency, or will we allow ourselves to be swept along with it? God wants us to do more than put on an extra fabric. God wants us to put on a new attitude. If we have a different attitude from the world, our actions will necessarily be different. Let us be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, and act like men and women of God.

Courtesy Home School Digest, PO Box 374, Covert MI 49043.

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