

DECISION MAKING & "CHRISTIAN DIVINATION"

How does God lead us and speak to us today?

Problem: We all have decisions we need to make and we want to decide in ways that please God.

- Examples: Marriage. Jobs. Where we live. Ministry. Missions.

Solution: We seek God's leading in direct, personal, and specific ways. Examples:

- Promptings, Impressions, Insights, Feelings, Dreams. The "peace of God" or the lack thereof.
- "God told me..."; "God said..."; "God called me to..."; "I just know God wants me to..."

Key Question: Today, in our dispensation (the Church Age), does God reveal himself, his will, his truth, and his direction for our lives apart from the Bible?

- Many Christians will SAY one thing in answer to the question.
- And yet in their PRACTICE, they reveal that they really BELIEVE something else.
- I was a pastor for 20 years, 15 of which I pastored as a missionary on the "foreign field." Did God "call" me to the pastorate? Did God "call" me to the mission field? How did I know God wanted me there?
- I am now a police officer (no longer a pastor). Did God "un-call" me from the pastorate? Am I in disobedience because "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance"? How do we know...?

I. Is Scripture Sufficient or Primary?

A. *Sola Scriptura* means Only Scripture: refers to Scripture alone being sufficient.

B. *Prima Scriptura* means Scripture is primary, but not the only source of revelation and divine authority.

C. Which is true? What does the Bible say...?

1. (Rom 8.29 cf. Luke 6.40) God's ultimate goal (our predetermined destination) is to be conformed to the image of Christ, to be made like Him, our Master.
 - (Eph 4.11-13) God states clearly that he wants to *perfect* us (the saints) until we are all made like the "perfect man," Jesus Christ.
2. (2Tim 3.16-17) God's chosen instrument to carry out that work is... Scripture. Alone.
 - (2Pet 1.3) *Everything* that has to do with *life* (our daily lives in Christ in this world) and *godliness* (becoming godly, Christ-like) if found in the *knowledge* of God, the Bible.
3. If Scripture is sufficient to make us like Christ, the perfect man, and to give us everything we need for this life... what more do we need? Scripture, according to the Bible, is *sufficient*, not primary.

D. Which is true in your life? Don't pay attention to what you *say*. Pay attention to what you *do*.

1. We *say* Scripture is sufficient.
2. What we *do* says Scripture is primary: When we have a decision to make we go to the Bible AND...
 - a) We pray, "God please tell me what to do... show me your will... give me a sign... speak to me!"
 - b) Do you know what that is called? It's called *divination*...

II. God's Will, Mysticism, and Divination

A. **Mysticism:** [def.] The immediate spiritual intuition of truths; direct, intimate union with God.

1. Mysticism is the belief that spiritual reality is perceived apart from the human intellect and natural senses.
2. Mysticism looks for truth *internally*, weighing *feelings*, *intuition*, and other internal sensations more heavily than objective, observable, external data.
3. Mysticism ultimately derives its *authority* from *one's self*, from spontaneous feeling rather than objective fact.

B. Divination: [def.] The practice of discovering hidden knowledge by supernatural means.

1. The "Christian Ouija Board"
 - Do you know what a Ouija Board is? It's a board with letters and a pointer. You ask a question and let the pointer move around the board to show you the answer.
2. This is the exact same thing we do as Christians:
 - a) We have a question:
 - (1) God, do you want me to marry so-and-so?
 - (2) God, do you want me to be a police officer, a pastor, a doctor, a lawyer...?
 - (3) God, do you want me to go to the mission field?
 - (4) God, do you want me to [fill in the blank]?
 - b) And then we pray and "listen"... and wait... for a voice... a sign... a prompting... an impression... a feeling... the "peace of God"... a "still small voice in my heart of hearts"...
3. That's called "divination" and it's a pagan practice, not a Christian practice (and certainly not a biblical practice).
 - a) You are seeking some perceived "hidden knowledge" that God has.
 - b) And you are trying to get a revelation of what that knowledge is by extra-biblical means.
4. And, in addition to being pagan divination, it's also a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture.
 - a) We believe in the Bible.
 - b) But, we also want direct, personal, specific revelation from God in answer to life's questions.
 - c) So, we say we believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, but in practice we believe in the primacy of Scripture (that Scripture is the primary source of divine revelation, but not the only source).

C. God's Will:

1. In the Bible, according to the letters Paul wrote to the Church, there no no support whatsoever for the direct, personal, and specific communication from God that we so often ask for.
 - a) The Bible never teaches that God has a specific will or plan for the life of each and every believer, a plan that we must discover through extra-biblical means.
 - b) (Deut 29.29) If God does have a specific will and plan for every believer, it's hidden and not revealed. What is revealed is His general will and plan for everyone in the Scripture.
2. Sadly, most Christians today have fallen into the trap of mysticism and divination that is the result of the wide-spread apostasy of the last days of the Church.
 - a) Remember your dispensations: How does every dispensation end? FAILURE.
 - b) (2Tim 4.3-4) How does the Church Age end? APOSTASY (turing away from TRUTH, from the Scripture).
3. God does not expect you to live "fumbling around in the dark" trying to "divine the will of God" so you can fulfill the specific plan God has for your life.
 - a) (Jos 1.8) God expects you to learn the Bible and do what He said in the Bible.
 - b) (2Tim 3.15-4.4) God expects you learn the Bible and do what it says.
 - c) God never promised you additional revelation. He gave his full and finished specific revelation in the Bible, and once the Bible was finished... there will be no more specific revelation.

III. Examples of God's Will

A. **Marriage:** Whom you marry is a very important decision; it will affect you for the rest of your life.

1. What do we do?
 - a) "Oh, God! Should I marry her? Or should I marry someone else? Should I marry HIM??"
 - b) "Oh, God! I don't know what to do! Please tell me! Please give me a sign!"
 - c) That's "Christian divination." You might as well pull out your Ouija board and ask it.
2. What does the Bible say? What did Paul write to the Church about marriage? 1Corinthians 7...
 - a) Now, remember, the decision to marry and whom to marry is one of the *most* important decisions of your life because the New Testaments gives no grounds for divorce.
 - b) (1Cor 7.1, 7-9) Paul says the best thing to do is to *not* get married.
 - c) (1Cor 7.28) But, he also reminds us that even though it's *best* not to marry, marriage is not a sin. If you need to get married... if you want to get married... it's okay.
 - d) (1Cor 7.39b) Paul gives one prohibition: Don't marry someone who is not a Christian.
 - e) (1Cor 7.39a) Outside of that, Paul says, "***Do what you want***" (be married to whom you will).
 - (1) God is *not* going to tell you whom you should marry.
 - (2) God is *not* hiding his will and plan for you by not telling you or showing you whom you should marry.
 - (3) God gave you the Bible and in the Bible he told you what a good wife would look like (or a good husband; what character qualities to look for).
 - (4) And then God said, "Marry whomever you want."
3. Think about that!
 - a) Marriage is a *huge* decision. It can *ruin* your life and your ministry if you choose wrong.
 - b) And God said, "Do what you want."
 - c) (v38-39) Evaluate your options, choose within the parameters (can't marry an unbeliever), and then... do what you want.

B. **Job/Career:** This is another big decision (what do I study? what job do I prepare for?).

1. What do we do?
 - a) "Oh, God! Do you want me to be a doctor or a lawyer? Do you want me to be a Republican politician, a Democrat politician, or a Libertarian politician?"
 - b) "Oh, God! I don't know what to do! Please show me! Tell me what to do! What do you want?"
2. What does the Bible say?
 - a) First and foremost the Bible says, "Get a job": 1Timothy 5.8; 2Thessalonians 3.10-12.
 - b) Secondly, God says, "Do your job well": Ephesians 6.5-8; Colossians 3.22-24.
 - c) Outside of that... *do what you want* (within the limits of the Bible: prostitution, pornography, and murder for hire might not be in the will of God).
3. But, regardless of what the Bible says (and what we say we believe), what do we do?
 - a) We do the same thing with our jobs/careers sometimes that we do with marriage.
 - b) We wring our hands and pray and fret and worry about "what's the will of God."
 - c) And God is in heaven with his head in his hands, saying, "Just do what you want to do!"
 - d) Everybody is different and everybody is going to want to do something different. That's okay.

C. **Ministry:** Here's a biggie... Pastor? Missionary? Missionary-Pastor? Leader of a ministry in church?

1. What do we do?

- a) ***We expect God to "call" us into ministry!***
- b) **Question:** Where in the writings of Paul do you see instructions about God "calling" us to a specific ministry?
 - (1) What a minute! We say it in this church. We hear it in the church. Where is it in the Bible?
 - (2) And I say "we" because I've said it before. I wanted to be "called"...
 - (a) I wanted to be called to the mission field back in 1995.
 - (b) I wanted to be called to start a church on the east side of San Jose, Costa Rica.
 - (c) I wanted to be called to start a church in southern Johnson County when we got home.
 - (d) I still would like God to tell me what he wants me to do in the ministry!
- c) So, then... how do you know if your "called" to the ministry.
 - (1) Easy: YOU'RE NOT. No one is.
 - (2) There is no specific, personal revelation of God to a man or woman "calling" him or her to a specific ministry.
 - (3) Every "call" in the Pauline Corpus that refers to the saints is a general call common to everyone (call to salvation, call to sanctification, call to service, etc.).
- d) And yet, even though we call ourselves Bible believers and we say we believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, what do we do?
 - (1) We place decisive authority on a personal, specific, extra-biblical revelation/calling from God.
 - (2) And in doing so we elevate the individual above authority of Scripture.
 - (a) The young man says, "God has called me to be a pastor."
 - (b) The church says, "I don't think so."
 - (c) The young man says, "It is better to obey God than man! Out of my way!"
 - (3) Or we make this mystical personal "calling" some sort of requirement for ministry.
 - (a) The mission board says, "Tell us about your calling. When did God call you to this field."
 - (b) The young missionary says, "Well, I was at summer camp and I felt the Lord..."
 - (4) Problem: That's not in the Bible.

2. What does the Bible say?

- a) Think about the letters our Apostle (Paul) wrote to the church. Which letters give specific instructions to men in "pastoral level" ministry? Which epistles might be "pastoral" in nature?
- b) The Pastoral Epistles:
 - (1) **1 Timothy & 2 Timothy:** Timothy was the senior pastor of the local church at Ephesus.
 - (2) **Titus:** Titus was a missionary to the general region of Crete, ministering to multiple churches in the region, laboring to raise up local leadership.
 - (3) **Philemon:** Philemon was a general, garden-variety leader of ministry in the local church that met in his house.
 - (4) Does Paul even once in all of the pastoral epistles speak of the "call" to ministry? No.

c) What do we find in the pastoral epistles about who God wants in pastor-level ministry (either as a pastor, or a missionary, or a leader of ministry in a local church)?

(1) FIRST and FOREMOST: (1Tim 3.1) Desire.

(a) Do you want to be a pastor? missionary? or ministry leader?

(b) Some people would rather not to that kind of work. *And that's okay!* You are not some second-hand, second-class Christian because God didn't "call" you to ministry.

i) Be faithful in what God has give you to do!

ii) Your job. Your marriage. Your children/parents. Evangelism. Be faithful.

(2) SECOND: (1Tim 3.2a) Character.

(a) If you want to be a pastor or missionary, you should be a man of character, blameless.

(b) If you steal from a church and have multiple affairs with women in your church, I'd venture to say you really don't have the blameless kind of character the Bible says God requires of pastors and missionaries.

i) But, hey! Who cares what the Bible says, right!?!?!?

ii) "I'm CALLED to be a pastor! YOU can't tell me otherwise! GOD called me!"

iii) And we use this mystical calling to exert our authority of that of the Bible.

(3) THIRD: (1Tim 3.2ff) Ability.

(a) A man ought to have the gifts, talents, skills, etc. required by the office he desires.

(b) One ability should be sought above all others: "apt to teach."

i) (1Tim 5.17-18) Elders that rule well (the "bishops," the "overseers"; what we consider commonly as a "pastor") are worthy of double honor (a double salary).

ii) But God says, especially those elders who labour in the word and doctrine (who labor in study to teach God's people sound doctrine).

iii) John Newton said: *"If a man is not gifted to teach the Word, he should not consider the ministry."*

iv) God's people might not value that, but the Bible says God does.

(c) Regardless, a person who desires to go into ministry as a pastor, a missionary, or a local church ministry leader... he or she needs to have the ability to do what is required.

(4) FOURTH: Opportunity.

(a) God provides opportunities when He sees fit.

(b) You may think you're the bee's knees when it comes to being a pastor-teacher, but if you don't have anyone to pastor and teach... ??

3. So, what are we going to do...?

a) What are we going to do the next time we hear someone say, "God called me to Africa"?

b) What are we going to do when we hear, "God is calling me to be a pastor"?

4. And, what would be a better way to express what we call a "call to ministry"?
- a) Something more biblical would be: "*I want to be a pastor*" or "*I desire to be a missionary.*"
 - (1) Do you know why I went to Latin America as a missionary?
 - (a) Did God "call" me? No. I wish he would have! It would have saved me a LOT of headaches.
 - (b) It would also have been nice if someone had taught me sound doctrine about "callings" to ministry before I left, too. It would have saved me a lot of heart-ache.
 - (c) Suzy and I moved from Raytown, MO, to Bogota, Colombia, to be missionaries because we wanted to and the opportunity presented itself.
 - (2) Do you know why I started Eastside Church in Costa Rica?
 - (a) Did I hear a voice? dream a dream? see a vision? receive the holy prompting?
 - (b) Did God tell me to start the church? Did God call me to start the church?
 - (c) Nope. I wanted to. So I did it.
 - b) So, first and foremost, if someone feels like they want to be a pastor, missionary, or ministry leader... just say so! "*I think I'd like to do that.*"
 - Don't blame it on God! Just be honest! "*I want to be a pastor / missionary.*"
 - c) Then the pastor, leaders, and local church can bear out the other "tests" (character and ability).
 - d) When God provides an opportunity, if the man has a desire and has proven his character and ability, have at it! If you want... do it.
 - e) But, there is no specific, personal, extra-biblical, mystical "call to ministry." ***That is a fable.***

IV. God's Will and the Freedom to Choose

- A. In Christ, God has given us the freedom to choose. God expects us to make decision according to his will as it is revealed in the Scripture. But, at the end of the day, He expects us to choose.
- B. According to the New Testament, this is how God expects us to evaluate and make decisions:
 1. Start with the Bible, always.
 - a) If we would just start with the Bible, we'd avoid 99% of the problems Christians fall into.
 - b) The Bible contains:
 - (1) Precepts: God's direct commands to DO something (preach the gospel to every creature).
 - (2) Prohibitions: God's direct commands to NOT do something (fornication, murder).
 - (3) Principles: When there is no precept or prohibition, look for a general principle to follow (like how much to put in the offering plate: 10% is a pretty good principle to follow).
 - (4) Patterns: If there is no precept, prohibition, or principle, look for a pattern (an example) to follow. (What did Paul do?)
 - c) Read the Bible. Study it. Learn it. Then, apply it. Do it. Live it. Base your choices on it.
 2. (Jam 1.5-8) Pray for wisdom.
 - a) Remember what wisdom is:

(knowledge + understanding) + application = wisdom
 - b) It's not some mystical mojo juice God pours in your brain from heaven!
 - c) Wisdom is insight into what the Bible says and how it applies to your life in practical ways.
 - d) Remember: God is not going to make decisions for you. He is not going to "tell" you what to do.

- e) If you ask, He will give you insight into what the Bible says and how that applies to your specific situation.
 - f) Example:
 - (1) "Oh, God, should I be a missionary? Please give me wisdom!"
 - (2) What does the Bible say?
 - (a) First: The Bible tells all Christians to GO to other nations. So, you don't have to ask God what his will and plan for your life is. He already said he wanted you to be a cross-cultural missionary.
 - (b) Second: Do you want to?
 - i) If you don't, then don't go.
 - ii) If you do, get trained up and go.
 - 3. (Prov 15.22; 20.18) Seek out wise counsel from godly men and women.
 - a) Do NOT go "shopping" for someone who agrees with you.
 - b) Find someone who knows the Bible and lives accordingly, and talk with him or her.
 - 4. Evaluate your circumstances and opportunities.
 - a) I want to move to Medellin, Colombia, preach on the streets and teach the Bible with Fernando Garrido in his church.
 - (1) What's the Bible say? The Bible says, "GO!" Okay. Do I want to?
 - (2) Do I want to (desire)? Yep. Do I qualify? Probably. Am I able? I think so.
 - (3) Can I? Nope. It would tear my family apart. It's not the "right time" (and probably never will be).
 - b) But remember!!! Circumstances and opportunities ("open doors") are NOT "divine mandates."
 - (1) Just because you have the opportunity to do something does NOT mean you SHOULD.
 - (2) You have to evaluate EVERYthing, not just an "open door."
 - 5. Desire.
 - a) At the end of the day, what do you WANT to do? and what do NOT want to do?
 - b) Right now, I do NOT want to be a "bi-vocational pastor." I tried it and I don't know how to do it, let alone do it well. I don't WANT to be an accountant or a claims adjuster. So... I won't.
 - c) Always pay attention to your godly, biblical desires. Do you WANT to get married. What job/career do you WANT to do. What do you WANT to do in ministry.
 - (1) Example: If someone wants to street preach, shut up and encourage him!
 - (2) Philippians 1.18
 - (3) Just because YOU might not want to do it does not mean it's not biblical.
 - (4) I'd venture to say open-air preaching is the MOST biblical method of evangelism there is. So, for Christians to oppose the preaching of the gospel on the streets (calling these men "Jerks for Jesus" or "Street Hollerers") is very wrong.
- C. God has given us the freedom to choose.
- 1. (1Cor 10.31) And God expects us to choose those things (make those decisions) that will please and glorify him.
 - 2. Don't sit around waiting for the "spiritual coconut" to drop from heaven and BONK you on the head with a note from God saying, "You need to marry Bertha and make many babies with her!"

3. God gave you the Bible, and the Bible is sufficient to accomplish everything God wants to accomplish in and through you.
4. God gave you the freedom to choose.
5. So, use your brain, read the Bible... and make decisions that glorify God. Be faithful.

V. God's Will and the Parable of the Ten Pounds for the Ten Servants: Luke 19.12-27

- A. (v12) The parable speaks of Christ and the time between His ascension and the Rapture.
 1. The nobleman is a picture of Christ.
 2. Going into a far country is a picture of His ascension to the third heaven in Acts 1.
 3. He received the Kingdom ("All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth").
 4. He will return one day (to Rapture out the unfaithful steward, the Church; then: 2nd Coming).
- B. (v13a) The nobleman gives ten pounds to ten servants, each servant receives the same thing: one pound.
 1. (v14) These servants are not the citizens of the nation the nobleman pertains to. The "citizens" are a picture of the Jews who rejected Christ.
 2. The ten servants, then, are those who are not Jews (not citizens of Israel): Gentiles (us).
 3. Each servant receives the same thing: one pound.
 - a) I got three things from God, just like you: the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the local church.
 - b) In Christ, we are all the same. We have received the same thing.
- C. (v13b) KEY: "Occupy till I come."
 1. We have all received the same charge (responsibility), the same stewardship: "occupy till I come."
 2. (1Cor 4.1-2) What God requires of stewards (of each and every one of us): BE FAITHFUL.
 - a) Be faithful with what the Lord has given you and do with it what the Lord wants you to.
 - b) What have you done with what the Lord has given you? THAT is the issue.
 - c) Most Christians have taken the time, talents, and treasure that the Lord gave them, and they are using those resource in the world, for themselves, investing in temporal things...
 - d) ...instead of using what the Lord gave them to invest in eternal things.
 3. DON'T MISS THIS: (v13-15)
 - a) Between the time the nobleman charged his servants to "occupy till I come" and his return, the nobleman had no more direct, personal communication with his servants.
 - b) He gave them resources (each received a pound).
 - c) He gave them a responsibility (he charged each to "occupy till I come").
 - d) Then he left and didn't talk to them again until he came back and judged them for what they did with what he gave them.
 - e) THIS IS A PICTURE OF THE CHURCH AGE.
 - (1) God gave us the Bible. He sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in us so we can understand the Bible. And he provided the local church with its leaders who teach and model the Bible.
 - (2) He went away in Acts 1 and there has been no more direct, personal communication between the Lord and his servants (us) since (since the Bible was finished).
 - (3) The next direct, personal communication between us and the Lord will be when he returns and raptures us out of this world to take us to the Judgment Seat of Christ.

(4) And what does he expect us to do in the meantime?

(a) Does he expect us to sit around wringing our hands, fretting and worrying about "should I do this or that... should I marry her and her... should I... should I...?"

(b) No. He expects us to take what he has give us and "occupy till I come."

(c) YOU make decision based on what YOU have been given. YOU make decisions to INVEST what the Lord gave you (your "pound") so that you might please him when he returns and judges you.

D. (v15) Picture: The Judgment Seat of Christ.

- (2Cor 5.10) The Lord will judge you for what YOU decided to do with what he gave you.

E. (v16-17) What is it that the Lord rewards?

1. "FAITHFUL": The Lord rewarded the servant for being FAITHFUL in his stewardship.
2. He gave his resources (a pound) and a responsibility ("occupy till I come"). And the servant did just that. He took the pound and worked it and invested it so that there was FRUIT when the Lord returned.
3. Be faithful to do what the Lord wants you to do with what he gave you. Don't expect more specific, personal revelation. Just "occupy till I come." Use what you've been give to make more.

F. (v18-19) The guy in the middle (less fruit that the first, but more than the third)...

1. Key Word: (v19) "likewise" (you should circle that word and draw a line connecting it with "faithful" in v17).
2. He was likewise faithful to invest what the Lord gave him. And the Lord rewarded him accordingly.
3. IMPORTANT: The quantity of your works is not as important to the Lord as simply doing something with what he gave you. Do something! Do something! Do something!

G. (v20-24) What upsets the Lord (and results in great loss for the servant) is doing nothing with what you've been given.

1. (v23) The Lord will reward you "likewise" as a "good and faithful servant" if you do even the LEAST of all things.
2. How much energy and effort does it take to put money in the bank and earn interest (and it doesn't matter how much interest!)? It takes virtually NO effort.
3. Do you know why I encourage people to pass out tracts?
 - a) I even designed POSTCARD tracts that people in my church could MAIL out to whomever.
 - b) I designed attractive tracts that are fairly easy to give you.
 - c) Why? BECAUSE IT'S EASY and it's the LEAST we can do to sow the seed of the gospel.
 - d) If we would do this... just this! (pass out tracts) ...we'd hear those words we so long to hear: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."
4. But, at the end of the day... it's your choice.
 - a) God won't tell you to do it.
 - b) God certainly won't call you do it.
 - c) God gave you the ability to do it, the freedom of choice, and then said, "Occupy till I come."

Conclusion:

Problem: We all have decisions we need to make and we want to decide in ways that please God.

- Examples: Marriage. Jobs. Where we live. Ministry. Missions.

Wrong Solution: We seek God's leading in direct, personal, and specific ways. Examples:

- Promptings, Impressions, Insights, Feelings, Dreams. The "peace of God" or the lack thereof.
- "God told me..."; "God said..."; "God called me to..."; "I just know God wants me to..."

Key Question (we tried to answer): Today, in our dispensation (the Church Age), does God reveal himself, his will, his truth, and his direction for our lives apart from the Bible?

- No. He does not.
- There is no more specific, personal, extra-biblical revelation.
- God's specific revelation is found in Scripture and in Scripture alone. Scripture is sufficient.
- (Deut 29.29) Don't wring your hands and fret and worry about the things that God has hidden.
 - ✓ There is a LOT he hasn't revealed to us.
 - ✓ Just concern yourself with those things he HAS revealed to us. These things are the things in his "law," the Scripture. And he has give us this revelation so that we might DO IT.
- Don't follow the "fable" of "God told me..." or "Call called me..." It's a fable. It's apostasy.
- Learn the Bible. Do what the Bible says. Make wise decisions based on Scripture. And you'll be okay.
 - ✓ Sadly, most people today are lazy.
 - ✓ They are not willing to do the diligent, disciplined work necessary to accurately study the Scripture.
 - ✓ Instead of investing in a wide-margin Bible, a concordance, a good set of pens, and a good set of commentaries... most Christians prefer that God just simple "tell them" what to do.
 - ✓ The Lord does not call for shortcuts. The Lord calls for diligently searching the Scriptures daily.
 - ✓ YOU WILL FIND THE WILL OF GOD FOR WHATEVER DECISION YOU ARE FACING... IN THE CAREFUL STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.