

7 C's of Decision Making

We would like to introduce you to the 7 C's of Decision Making. They are Communication, Conviction, Common Sense, Composition, Counsel, Circumstance, and Choice. Please listen to the opening commentary before we begin our lesson.

Isaiah 30:21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

The term "seven seas" is used to describe all the waters or oceans of the world. To say that a person has sailed the seven seas means literally that the person has navigated all the seas of planet earth. Many times, however, the term is used figuratively to refer to a person who has traveled widely and has a wealth of experience. The term "seven C's" has no connection whatsoever with the term "seven seas." It is only a play on words and a mnemonic device to help us remember the means God uses to guide us when we make decisions in life. If we extend this figure of speech a little, we could say that just as a person who has sailed the seven seas knows how to navigate the oceans of the world, so the Christian who has used the "Seven C's of biblical decision-making" knows how to navigate the Sea of Life.

Navigating the Sea of Life should not be viewed as a "hit or miss" decision-making adventure for the Christian. While the Christian life can be very adventuresome and exciting, it should not be a "hope-for-the-best, luck-of-the-draw, or shot-in-the-dark" string of decisions. Every decision can be made with the confidence that God is in control of the ship. Although every person's life consists of the sum total of innumerable big and little decisions (think about it!), Christians can be confident that God will help them make the right decisions. (See James 1:5-6.) Although some bad decisions will be made along the way (and some may be very bad!), let's not get the idea that mistakes will cause us to be permanently cast adrift on the Sea of Life. When we realize and acknowledge our mistakes, and look to God, He will provide us with navigational aids so that proper course corrections for our lives can be attained.

Isaiah 30:21 is just one of many promises of navigational help that God has given us in His Word. This verse assures us that when we come to decisions concerning compass headings on the Sea of Life, the Lord will tell us which way to go: "This is the way; walk in it." In the context of Isaiah 30, this promise is specifically directed to the nation of Israel who will return in faith and devotion to the Lord, but it can certainly be applied to Christians today. The Holy Spirit lives in us, and we have the promise that God will "never leave us nor forsake us" (Hebrews 13:5), so we can be assured that the Lord will guide us whether to "turn left or turn right" when it comes to decision-making! We may not literally hear the voice of the Lord speaking behind us, but we can be sure that God will not leave us "up for grabs" when it comes to the decisions we must make on the Sea of Life.

The "Seven C's" are the means God uses to show us which way to turn in the decision-making process. Maybe we could call them navigational helps or aids for plotting our course and making course corrections on the Sea of Life. There is no "sacred sequence" to the Seven C's. They are all important and we could start with any one of them in our description just as we may start with any one of them in the decision-making process.

COMMUNICATION

However, Communication is by far the most important of the seven C's. The primary way in which God communicates with us is through His Word and the way we communicate with God is through prayer. Scripture not only contains the navigational charts, it also guards and supports the other "C's." When it comes to making decisions, most of what we need to know is quite obvious from black and white Scripture. Questions like whether or not to lie on a job application and whether or not to marry a Christian and whether or not to care for our aging parents and whether or not to have family devotions, shouldn't require an in-depth, decision-making process because the answers are easy to find--right on the surface of Scripture. When it comes to decisions about which job applications we should fill out, or who is the right Christian for us to marry, or what is the most efficient and compassionate way to care for our aging parents or how do we have the most effective family devotions, the Bible continues to help us by giving us guidelines. While the answer may not be in black and white Scripture, the numerous biblical guidelines, many of which can be found even in the narrative portions (or "Bible stories") of Scripture, will home us in to the right decisions. For example, the biblical guidelines found in Deuteronomy 6:7 and Hebrews 10:24-25 would clearly indicate that you should not apply for a job which would prevent you from fulfilling your family and church responsibilities. If you are single and have a strong conviction that God wants you to serve Him as a missionary in another land, a potential spouse that does not share your burden for foreign missions should not be "high on the list," if you consider the guideline of Genesis 2:18 and Amos 3:3. The amount of the inheritance that will be left for you to spend should not be a major factor in the decision-making process concerning the quality of care for grandma in her final years, if Mark 7:8-13 and Ephesians 6:2 are used as guidelines. And a decision to gear your family devotions only for your own adult interests and not to meet the needs of your children would not be made if the guidelines in Ephesians 6:4 and Deuteronomy 4:9 are followed. The more biblical guidelines for making decisions you know and put into practice, the more obvious will be your course of action.

Needless to say, prayer, the other side of communication, is also vital for making decisions. In 1 Peter 5:7 we are told to "cast all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you." Does this anxiety include concern about making the right decisions? Of course it does. If God has promised us over and over again in Scripture that He cares about our well-being, certainly He will answer our prayer requests for help in making decisions about such things as jobs, colleges, careers, homes, churches, marriages, families, ministries, finances and whatever else demands our decisions. But He wants us to pray! Even though God knows all about us and the decisions we should make, He still wants us to communicate our thoughts and feelings to Him and our dependence upon Him for making these decisions. Good parents know what's best for a particular child, but they still want their child to communicate his or her desires and need for help. God wants us to communicate with Him in about our decisions.

CONVICTIONS

Besides the "big C" of communication, God uses the rest of the Seven C's to give us further navigational help on the Sea of Life. In fact, the other C's are vitally necessary, because any one C by itself, including the Scriptures, can be misused. Because of our sinful natures, we are very adept at making the Bible confirm just about any decision we want to make! However, when the other C's are taken into account, our misuse of the Bible is held in check. The same is true when

the other C's are mishandled. For example, the inner Convictions of the Holy Spirit, another important "C" of decision-making, must be closely examined. Every Christian will have these convictions because the Holy Spirit lives in every believer. The convictions from the Holy Spirit will always be in line with God's perfect will for us and are therefore crucial when it comes to making right decisions. (See John 14:26, 16:13 and 1 John 2:27.) The problem, of course, is confusing the convictions of the Holy Spirit with the cravings of our sinful natures. We are amazingly adept at convincing ourselves that God is leading us to make certain decisions when in reality our "exercises of heart" are nothing more than our self-made "stamps of divine approval." How many times has the expression "The Lord told me" been used to mask the reality of "I told the Lord!" Convictions of the Holy Spirit must always be carefully examined in the light of all the Seven C's to insure against subtle self-delusion.

COMMON SENSE

Common Sense is a "C" that we generally take for granted, and yet it is definitely a means that God has given us to make decisions. In fact, most decisions in life are "small" and are made primarily by using common sense. God does not require Christians to kiss their brains goodbye upon conversion! Does He expect us to use up a lot of time and spiritual energy praying about what particular pair of shoes to wear or whether to brush our teeth? Of course not! Use your common sense! Of course these little decisions matter to an omniscient God. After all, the turn of major events sometimes hinges on the tiniest decisions in life. But God has all the data and knows all of the factors and variables. He expects us to use the common sense that He's given us concerning shoes and teeth and let Him fit these small decisions into the overall pattern of our lives. God has blessed us with common sense and it's our responsibility, as much as possible, to use it for wise decision-making about the common, everyday matters of life. "Sanctified common sense" is part of the navigational system that God has given us!

COMPOSITION

"How God made us" is what the "C" of Composition is all about. The way in which God sovereignty put us together as to likes and dislikes, looks and brains, abilities and spiritual gifts is actually a means that God uses to guide us. For example, would the Lord be guiding your decision to become a singer or a pianist for His glory if He hasn't blessed you with natural singing or musical ability? Probably not! (Read Psalm 33:3, and notice the word "skillfully"!) By the same token, however, God may be guiding you to say "yes" to an opportunity to be involved in a youth ministry if you like kids and have the natural ability to relate to and communicate with children or teenagers. 1 Peter 4:10 tells us that we should use "whatever gift we have received to serve others, administering God's grace in its various forms." On the Sea of Life, God can best use His tugboats, yachts, oil tankers, fishing boats or aircraft carriers when they're willing to do the job they were designed to do!

CIRCUMSTANCES

Circumstances are obviously another one of the Seven C's of God's guidance system. If you believe that God is sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful and everywhere at the same time, is there any circumstance that escapes His notice or is out of His control? Of course not! There is nothing that

happens by mere chance, and that includes every last detail of our lives. If our all-wise and loving heavenly Father is completely sovereign, can He not control circumstances in such a way so as to lead us to make right decisions? Of course He can! God knows those special and particular niches in every area of life that are just right for every one of us, and He can send just the right winds across the Sea of Life to nudge our ship into the anchorage that is best for each one of us! Those proverbial "open doors" and "closed doors" that believers talk about really do exist! They are not just a naive "Christian view" of circumstances, but rather a working definition of one of the C's that God has given to help us on the Sea of Life. But here again we must be very careful about making decisions based only on circumstances. What looks at first like a closed door may actually be a door waiting to be knocked on and opened. (See Matthew 7:7.) And an apparently open door may not really be open. A job offer with a higher salary does not necessarily mean that God is directing us to pick up and move to a new location--we may have forced our own interpretation on that circumstance! It's even possible for Satan to manipulate certain circumstances--this would certainly be part of his scheming strategy to blow us off course. (See 2 Corinthians 2:11 and 11:14.) But let's not let these danger signals make us afraid to prayerfully analyze the circumstances around us. God definitely uses circumstances in His navigational system. The proper use of the other C's will safeguard us from reading too much or too little into the "C" of circumstances.

CHOICE

Finally, God gives us a Choice in the decision-making. In some situations there is no question that God is indicating what decision He wants us to make. A model train operator normally monitors the movement of the model trains by remote controls. He can make a choice to stop or start the train, adjust the speed, the operator can reach into the layout and move or straighten out a boxcar or an engine with "hands on" control. In the same way, God sometimes reaches in and helps us make the right choices. In the normal decision-making process, for example, a good offer on our house may or may not be an indication that God wants us to move. But if we truly hear from God as Abram did in Genesis 12 when God said "Get the out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." Abram followed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness. it is probably a good indication that God is guiding us by choice. To whom are we going to yield our lives - God or the world. Sometimes God steps in and helps us make the right decision because some of the other C's seem to be pointing us in a certain direction, but God wants us to go in a different direction. For example, God used the "C" of Choice in the life of the apostle Paul in Acts 16:6-10. At others times God influences our decision because He knows of some impending danger, or a future unlikely turn of events that a common sense decision-making approach would miss completely. God uses the "C" of Choice to deliver us from the dilemma of doubt in the decision-making process.

The Sea of Life can be very troubled at times and there are always hazards to avoid. Knowing and using God's navigational system of the "Seven C's" helps the growing Christian in making good decisions--decisions that avoid disaster and head us in the direction of following God's will for our lives.

