

Jan 11: Decision-Making (pt2)

Everything ties in together. For those of you who have been in this class since we started last January, hopefully you are connecting and have connected the dots. Last Spring we laid the foundation for what it means to adopt a biblical worldview, then last Fall we used this information to unpack a series of topics to see whether or not our worldview is aligned with what God says or what the world says. We are continuing this the first part of the Spring semester. Hopefully some things are sounding familiar, but if you are new to this class, or perhaps you missed chunks, again, I would highly encourage you to check out the notes, particularly from last Spring, where we took a deep dive into God's glory, character, the existence of evil, and what the Bible reveals about humanity and the solution to all our problems. This morning will be a refresher for many of you as we connect those dots.

Last week, we spent our time exploring how our culture approaches decision-making from a secular point of view, meaning from the wisdom of the world rather than the wisdom of God. We talked about autonomy, following your heart, personal values, emotional alignment, and outcomes. We talked about various philosophical influences that have shaped how our society approaches decisions, including rationalism, utilitarianism, and existentialism. Within existentialism we explored a sub-stream called expressive individualism, a worldview that operates under the assurance, not hope, but assurance that our hearts are good and can be trusted. We discussed how these approaches have essentially coalesced into our modern thinking when it comes to decision-making. In our modern world:

You are encouraged to:

- Think rationally (Enlightenment)
- Aim for beneficial outcomes (utilitarianism)
- Choose authentically (existentialism)
- Express your true inner self (expressive individualism)

The result is that:

You are expected to:

- Know yourself
- Trust yourself
- Define your values
- Live consistently with them
- Accept the outcomes

Decision-making, then, becomes an act of self-expression. Going against your inner desires or feelings is seen as harmful or even dishonest because being yourself is the highest moral value, which means feelings are elevated to the status of supreme authority. This philosophy explains why modern advice often emphasizes listening to yourself, trusting your instincts, and honoring your truth.

This also explains why disagreement and conflict is often internalized and interpreted as invalidation—because to challenge a decision is to challenge someone’s identity, challenge their authentic self, and I promise you this applies to people of all ages, not just “young people” today. This is not just a generational issue because these philosophies have been permeating our culture for almost two centuries. You disagreeing with me, my decisions, values, and even talents equals you invalidating me as a person, so you’d better either agree with me or shut up. It’s a worldview that appeal to emotions.

People who have embraced this decision-making matrix, this philosophy, do not have the tools, emotional wherewithal, or foundational capacity to be okay when someone disagrees with their choices. Authenticity, being authentic to your heart and feelings, is not just encouraged; it is moralized into being your identity. They are often disparaged as “snowflakes,” but the truth is far darker because they have fully succumbed to narcissism, to the worship of self. And folks, this mindset has radically impacted the big “C” Church for one very simple reason: a lack of discipleship. We need to get back to discipleship that radically returns to examining all parts of our worldview, challenging all our core assumptions, to ensure they are biblically aligned because all of our heart, soul, and mind have been tainted by sin and are in need of God’s transforming power.

Decision-making, from a secular worldview, begins and ends with self. Even what might be considered altruism, the “values” we champion for the good of others, ultimately break down because values are formed from beliefs, and beliefs are formed by the reality we embrace by faith.

It’s time to shift gears and see what God’s Word has to say about decision-making. We’re not just adding Bible verses onto a secular framework. We’re asking a deeper question: Does Scripture paint a different reality when it comes to decision-making? And the answer is yes. The Bible doesn’t simply give us better advice for making choices. It offers us a true understanding of who we are, who God is, and what decisions are actually for and why.

If we are going to have any hope of grasping a biblical view of decision-making, we need to first clarify what it means to decide and where that comes from. The world ignorantly declares that decision-making is an expression of self-empowerment. People who don’t make decisions for themselves are considered weak, marginalized, or oppressed, because deciding for yourself is the ultimate expression of autonomy, strength, and freedom. Why? Because in a secular world, liberty is considered the greatest virtue. Consider for a moment how this thought forms the backbone of our society. Now go bigger. It’s a defining characteristic for what it means to be a fallen human, a human impacted by sin at the heart level.

Let’s take a walk back to the Garden of Eden, where the first humans were formed and given a spectacularly powerful gift from Creator God: the gift of choice. Decision-making isn’t an expression of self-empowerment; it’s a present from Creator God to His image-

bearers. This gift of choice separates into two distinct categories: non-moral choices, meaning preference, and moral choices, meaning right and wrong. Scripture reveals this clearly.

Genesis 2:15-16

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden...”

You may surely eat of every tree, says the Creator. I mean it. Eve restates this in her conversation with the serpent in the next chapter:

Genesis 3:2

And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden...”

As humans, we have this amazing capacity, this first gift, to have preferences and choose accordingly. Picture this vast, beautiful, plentiful, perfect garden filled with every variety of fruit tree imaginable. A veritable smorgasbord for whatever you're in the mood for. My childhood was spent almost entirely in Southeast Asia, and the thing I miss the most is the fruit, things that have no comparable alternative here. But when I was a child in Indonesia, you know what I missed about America? The fruit. Strawberries, cherries, blueberries, grapes. Imagine having the best of both worlds, but not just the best of both worlds, but the best of the best of both worlds. Perfection, and you have the freedom to choose. What a gift! Don't miss the magnitude of this because it's a picture of both the gift and the Gift-giver. God offers plentiful goodness because what He offers is an extension of His character.

And then humanity was given a second gift, a second choice capacity, and this was to trust God or not. Back to Genesis 2:

Genesis 2:17

¹⁷ “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Eve restates this as well, only she added to God's Word with some of her own. To the serpent she says:

Genesis 3:3

³ “but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”

What did Satan offer Eve with his deception? What was the lie he fed her, and all of humanity to this day? Not that you can become like God for the sake of becoming like God, but to become like God so you can be free from constraints. Autonomy. Empowerment. He

offered her liberation because God was withholding, despite all the evidence to the contrary in the first gift of choice. What God offered wasn't enough, but God says who He is and what He offers is sufficient. Do you trust His Word that this is true?

If we are going to have any chance of understanding God's character and therefore God's design for us, we need to view His commandments as an invitation to trust Him rather than rules we have to follow in order to be made right with Him. The Pharisees in Jesus's time were solidly trapped in the lie that God requires performance when in reality He desires faith, and trust is an expression, a tangible demonstration of faith. That trap still exists today. When God says trust me and do it my way, do we respond in faith, cling to this belief, shape our values accordingly, and then live out this reality in our behavior? When we do things God's way, when we respond to life and circumstances God's way, we declare, as a testimony, "God, I trust you."

This second choice becomes a moral issue because this gift comes from the moral Lawgiver, which means authority which we will get to in a moment. Moral freedom, moral choice, includes consequences, both positive and negative consequences. If you trust God, you will live; if you don't trust God, you shall die. Again, don't get hung up on the idea that it's the performance that matters because Jesus profoundly refutes this in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

The "work" of lawlessness is the heart, not just the behavior, but the heart that refuses to trust God's word. What is the Father's will? That you respond to His revealed character with faith and trust in your heart and then respond, with your choices, accordingly.

Humans possess the freedom to choose preferences when there is no moral standard, and humans possess the freedom to choose to accept God's word or reject God's word.

So why do decisions exist?

In a secular framework, decisions exist so we can practice self-empowerment in order to acquire happiness and fulfillment. Remember that poll I shared last week? A record high percentage of American adults reported feeling unhappy and unfulfilled in 2025. In secular thinking, your freedom to choose means your goals can and should include:

- Increasing happiness
- Reducing discomfort
- Preserving personal freedom
- Achieving self-actualization

A good decision is one that “works for me” and helps me accomplish these goals, and yet all this autonomy and personal freedom has driven our society at-large to experiencing less of all of these.

Scripture offers a very different goal. A biblical framework for decision-making embraces the fact that decisions exist to demonstrate trust in God and glorify Him. If you embrace this reality, then your motivations, your goals, will be radically transformed.

A decision-making conflict arose in the church in Corinth regarding the eating of meat that had been sacrificed in the pagan temples. This meat was often cheaper because the pagan priests took what they wanted and gave the leftovers to the market butchers, so it wasn't choice meat and it wasn't necessarily the freshest. A division grew within the believers as to whether or not it was sinful to eat this meat, and Paul unpacks the behavior of eating this meat by poking at the worldview heart behind it. He concludes this lengthy poke with:

1 Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Choices, even non-moral ones, are not first and foremost about your agenda, feelings, or autonomy. They are not merely personal; they are theological because they reveal in whom you have placed your trust: either yourself, meaning human wisdom, or God, meaning divine wisdom. Decisions are to be God-centered and need to be viewed as opportunities and acts of worship. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This means decisions are not about inventing a life path, but walking faithfully in one God has already prepared. Decision-making exists because we were created with this powerful gift called choice, and this gift, like all of God's gifts, are meant to be used to worship Him and bring Him glory, otherwise the “good” we receive from these gifts will be distorted by our own selfish sinful hearts. Don't take my word for it, check out James chapter 1:

James 1:13-17

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived (meaning worshiped, when it replaces God as the central devotion of your heart) gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift (job, house, talents, money, family, relationships, sexual pleasure, all gifts, mind you, anything good is from God) is from

above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Meaning regardless of how much or how little of His gifts you receive, He gives what He gives so that we would glorify Him. When we worship the gift rather than the Gift-giver, our desires, even the good desires, will become sinful. God says so. If God's glory does not radically impact and transform your view of decision-making, of your choices, of the gifts He has given, then your worldview is misaligned from Scripture because His gifts are not first and foremost about you. None of this existence is. It's about God and His glory.

Colossian 1:15-16

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

God created your gift of choice; it belongs to Him and His glory. We hit this point hard last January. Check out the notes. If you embrace a reality that does not foundational rest upon the fact that everything exists for the glory of God, then your decision-making will not be biblical.

The next question we need to answer is one of authority: Who gets the final word? In a secular decision-making framework, the individual has the final word and sits at the center.

- I determine what is right.
- I decide what leads to fulfillment.
- I weigh the risks and rewards.
- Authority rests with me.

Scripture begins somewhere else entirely. A biblical framework for decision-making acknowledges and submits to God as the ultimate authority. Not feelings. Not liberty. Not independence. Our human propensity to buck authority reveals a heart that lusts after control. We want to be in control. The decisions. The outcomes. The consequences. How everyone responds. But Scripture reveals a different reality:

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Notice what Scripture reveals:

- Our understanding is limited
- God's wisdom is trustworthy
- Guidance flows from submission, not self-reliance, not self-empowerment

Biblical decision-making does not ask first, What do I want? It asks first, Who is the Lord?

The Lord is the one in control. The Lord is the one with total authority. The Lord is the one who determines tomorrow.

James 4:13-17

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Consider with me for a moment how this passage ends. Whoever knows the right thing to do, in this instance submit your gift of choice to God, and fails to do this and arrogantly lives life as though he or she has it all figured out, has the control, that’s sin. Following God’s way requires total submission, and total submission requires humility. Jesus makes this explicit:

Luke 9:23

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Deny self-autonomy. Deny self-empowerment. Deny self-fulfillment. “Follow me.” Follow my way. Follow my path. Follow my direction. Follow my will. That is not a call to self-expression. It is a call to self-surrender. To whom? To the Creator God who has all authority. So what about the heart.

What role does the heart play in decision-making? What about our believing, desiring, choosing heart? The secular framework tells you to trust it. Culturally, we are taught:

- The heart reveals truth
- Desire is trustworthy
- Authenticity equals moral goodness

“Follow your heart” sounds courageous and liberating, but the goal is to enslave you to the lie of self-empowerment. Why is it a lie? Because it leads to hell. Not just a lack of fulfillment. Not just hard times in this life. Destruction, death, hell.

A biblical framework for decision-making reveals that the heart needs redemption and transformation. Scripture is pretty blunt when it comes to trusting yourself.

Genesis 6:5

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Jeremiah 17:5-6

Thus says the Lord: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. ⁶ He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.”

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Proverbs 16:25

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Proverbs 28:26

Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

Matthew 15:19

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

The biblical solution is not to follow the heart, but to have the heart transformed. This does not mean emotions, feelings, are meaningless—but they are not authoritative. Biblical decision-making flows from a redeemed and reshaped heart, not an unquestioned one.

Ezekiel 36:26

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.

We already read it, but Proverbs 3:5 makes it clear that trusting in our own understanding, trusting in the “follow your heart” mantra, leads to destruction, to slavery to sin, death, and Satan. The alternative is to train your heart to respond by trusting God and His ways with all your decision-making and regularly questioning your deceived and desperately sick heart. How do we do that? By pursuing wisdom.

Next question: How do we practice wisdom to choose the right path? How do we make good choices? The secular framework begins with analysis and emotional alignment. We talked about this last week when we discussed therapeutic approaches to decision-making. Wisdom begins with:

- Pros and cons lists
- Risk assessment
- Personal peace
- Advice from peers and people with influence over us

Wisdom is functional, pragmatic, and affirming because it works for me and my goals, my desires.

But what does the Bible say? A biblical framework for decision-making is rooted in the fear of the Lord and community discernment.

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

The birthplace, the starting point of wisdom begins not with personal clarity, but with reverence. Awe. The righteous, holy fear reserved for the Lord God Almighty. The fear that moves us to our knees in humility, then jerks us to our feet as we draw near to Him and enter into His throne room with boldness. The fear of the Lord brings us into right thinking, right attitude, right motivation, right worship for being in God's presence to then ask for wisdom. Here these words from Proverbs 2:

Proverbs 2:1-11

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, ² making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; ³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, ⁴ if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; ⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, ⁸ guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. ⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; ¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; ¹¹ discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you...

Back to James.

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach.

Wisdom is received, not manufactured. When our heart is filled with the awe and reverence due God and humbly submitted to His will accordingly, God does not, will not respond with, "Really? You can't figure this out? What are you even talking about?" No, he responds generously without reproach because your heart is saying, "God, I don't know what to do, but you do, and I trust you. Show me the way." We see this prayer in Scripture.

Psalms 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Test my motivations, Lord! Test my desires! Show me what needs to be transformed in my heart, and then lead me because I trust you and I know where you are leading me will be for your glory and my good.

And God's leading, His wisdom, is often communal. Why? Because, as we already read, trusting in what seems right to only you leads to destruction. We need other godly people helping us see our blind spots, reminding us of Scripture when we aren't certain or missed something. Scripture says so.

Proverbs 1:5

A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.

Proverbs 11:14

Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 13:20

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

Real wisdom happens in humility, submission, prayer, Scripture, and the counsel of God's people—not isolation, not secular, godless "wisdom," regardless of good intentions.

But what if things don't go well? In a secular framework, success confirms that the choice was the right one. In secular thinking:

- Good outcomes validate decisions
- Failure often leads to feeling invalidated as a person
- The burden of responsibility rests entirely on the individual

But a biblical framework for decision-making rests in God's sovereignty over outcomes, which means a different, and deeper sense of assurance, a sense of peace, because the responsibility for the results, which are outside your control, are firmly within God's hands and you trust Him, even when things don't turn out the way you want. Again, Scripture confirms this.

Proverbs 16:9

The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

Faithfulness matters more than predictability because that's outside our control.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? ¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

We don't get to see the results beforehand, otherwise decision-making wouldn't exist, we would just look ahead and pick according to our will, not His. Instead we cling to a promise. Paul reminds believers:

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.

This does not mean all decisions lead to ease. Quite the opposite, actually—but none are wasted in God's capable hands. This confidence, this conviction in our God's goodness and sovereignty is where we find true freedom.

What does it mean to be truly free? In a secular thinking freedom is self-determination, a freedom described as:

- Absence of constraint
- Ability to choose without limitation
- Self-rule

Yet a biblical framework for decision-making finds freedom as joyful obedience.

Jesus offers us a paradox. He says in Matthew 11:

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

How can a yoke be freedom? Scripture makes it clear you are a slave. The question is, to whom? Romans 6 declares that you are either a slave to sin, which leads to death, or a slave of obedience, which leads to righteousness and life. Folks, the freedom the world pursues is a complete myth. Because of Jesus, you have been set free from slavery to sin and the penalty of sin.

Romans 6:22-23

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Accepting that free gift is a choice you make.

John 8:32-33

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Equipping Hour: Jan 11

Notice the possession. You are my disciples. You are mine, and I am your God. You belong. Freedom is not found in autonomy, but in belonging to a wise and good Lord.

Let me close with this thought: If God is not merely a consultant in our decision-making—but the Lord—then decisions are no longer about control, but trust. Next week, we'll move from framework to practice and ask: How do Christians actually make decisions day-to-day in a complex world where Scripture doesn't give explicit answers to every choice?

That's where we're headed.