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May I? Shall I? Should I?

Making
decisions on
Questionable
Things



“May I? Shall I? Should I?”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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Introduction

It seems a pity that there is no available list of Christian do's and don'ts that would be acceptable for believers all over the world. Christian standards vary so widely from one country to another and from one culture to another that it would be impossible to set up a list of universal rules. Years ago, when I ventured to inquire how it was that my European interpreter could be sincerely interested in winning souls yet smoke constantly, he became very angry with me. "Don't talk to me about smoking!" he burst out. "Your American women come over here with lipstick and high heels, and everyone knows that's immoral!"

Yes, standards do vary, and the level of involvement with conscience seems to vary, but one thing is clear:

God has given us in His Word the principles by which we may decide upon a course of action, even though that action is not mentioned by name in Holy Writ.

This book, then, has been designed to point out the guiding principles which will help you to know, "May I? Shall I? Should I?" when faced with decisions about questionable practices.

Discover God's Guidelines

You will avoid untold indecision and heartache if you will go straight to the Word of God when faced with a dilemma. *"To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"* (Isaiah 8:20). The only way to modify conduct and character is to line it up with the Word of God. The psalmist said, *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse [modify or change] his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word"* (Psalm 119:9). The very motivation that will make you want to be different comes from the impact of God's Word on your heart. We read, *"So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17).

The Lord will never lead you to do anything that is contrary to His revealed will. Therefore, if the Bible says something is wrong, shun that thing. On the other hand, if the Bible mandates a certain action or lifestyle, obey it.

Honesty, for example, seems to be a vanishing virtue in today's culture. A judge presiding over the recent trial of a city official bemoaned the fact that there seemed to be no one in the group of witnesses brought by the prosecution who could tell the truth!

To a man, they all contradicted the testimony that had previously been given to the grand jury. I notice that even among believers there seems to be little concern about the truth. A young person, caught in an embarrassing situation, told a "whopper" of a lie, as did her three friends. When confronted with the fact that what they said could not possibly be true, they admitted to having lied. Asked why they did it, the reply was, "Well, we thought that if we all told the same story, it might help." Were these young people from the ghetto? No, they were all from fine Christian homes.

The Bible is certainly plain on the matter of honesty. Moses quoted God as saying, *"Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another"* (Leviticus 19:11). Paul the apostle pleaded, *"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds"* (Colossians 3:9). Rather, he said, we are to manifest *"the truth in love"* (Ephesians 4:15). There is a loving way to tell the truth about anything that needs to be told, but not everyone needs to be told everything. When you do speak, however, be sure that you are on the side of the truth.

Yes, the Bible will help you settle many of the questions over which people agonize, often with disastrous results. Like some potential suicide victim teetering on the edge of a windowsill, they come perilously close to the brink of compromise, while all the time the clear teaching of God's Word is available to direct and to motivate them. Here are some questions that God's Word will help you settle:

1. Can I have friends in the world and still be a Christian? We are told to be friendly to all, but to avoid running with the world's crowd (Proverbs 1:10). Years ago an old farmer said to me, "If you play with a skunk, you'll smell like a skunk!" Later on, I learned that every language has a similar saying. The Latins, for example, say, "He who runs with the wolves will learn to howl" Choose your friends-your close friends from among believers. You may think that by running with the unsaved crowd you can lift them to your level. The exact opposite will be true. You will adjust your standards to their level. The crowd outside Pilate's judgment hall stopped heckling Simon Peter only when he lowered himself to their level, denied the Lord Jesus Christ, and began to curse and swear (Matthew 26:74). The apostle Paul was eminently approachable, and said of himself that he became all things to all men that he might by all means win some (1 Corinthians 9:22). At the same time he was most emphatic about urging believers not to keep company with those whose lives are full of sin (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

2. Can I date, and ultimately marry, one who is not saved? Dating, as generally practiced in the Western World, is an arrangement that is used to facilitate the choice of one's life companion. To date someone, then to fall in love with that person, then to marry that person seems to be the way it works. This being so, God's direct command should be kept in mind in the very beginning of the process: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" (read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). God does not tell you, "Don't fall in love with an unsaved person." That's not the problem. The real problem is that there is no underlying foundation for true oneness between a saved and an unsaved person. Points of view are different, standards are different, motives are different, and loyalties are different. You end up by sharing everything in life except that which matters most - God.

If you want to ask an unsaved girl for a date, or if an unsaved boy asks you for a date, take that person to church! Make very clear from the outset that the price of developing a friendship with you is friendship with your Lord and Savior. Will you lose some possible dates that way? Of course you will. Far better, though, to lose a date with an unsaved person today than to carry a basket of heartache with you all the rest of your life.

3. Isn't it all right to "make out" a little, if you love the other person? The rule here is "Don't light the fuse unless you are prepared for the explosion!" Sex is beautiful and God-ordained within marriage, but the Bible specifically warns against extracurricular experimentation. Peter said that fleshly desires "*war against the soul*" (1 Peter 2:11), and Paul urged young Timothy to "*flee also youthful lusts*" (2 Timothy 2:22). As a matter of procedure, we are to abstain "*from all appearance of evil*" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). God's way is to fill and control every part of our nature, and to use it for His glory (v. 23).

4. *Do I have to report to the IRS my income that I know did not go into Uncle Sam's computer?* The key word here is "honest." We are to "provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17), and be careful always to maintain "a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). See how directly the Word of God speaks to the questions of everyday life!

The Bible is equally clear on dozens of other questions that arise in our lives. Instead of wasting time and effort mulling over the choices in a questionable matter, go straight to the Word of God, and base your action on "Thus saith the Lord!"

Develop a Christlike Outlook

The Christian life is not a theological position or a religious point of view. Rather, it is a continuing miracle presided over by Jesus Christ as He controls your life. Jesus is Lord. This is the key that unlocks the door of salvation by faith. The passage that ends with the words "thou shalt be saved" begins with the condition that you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9). God's special title bestowed upon the suffering, dying, resurrected, ascended Jesus is announced as being "a name which is above every name, ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). When you and I decide to agree with that statement, and when we translate its truth into our lives, something wonderful happens. The process of daily living turns out to be a divine miracle, and we begin to know the meaning of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). Philippians 2 points out that Christ is to be Lord of our feelings, our relations with others, our minds, our motives, and our entire lifestyle. Settle the lordship of Christ before you read further. Tell Him sincerely that you want Him to rule your life, and by His Holy Spirit to reduplicate in you all the beautiful attributes of the Savior. Make Him Lord!

Now learn how to appropriate this truth. Paul wrote, "As ye have, therefore, received Jesus Christ the Lord, so walk ye [live every day] in Him" (Colossians 2:6). How did you receive the Savior? By simple faith, did you not? Now, in the very same way, said Paul, by faith trust Him to live His divine life through you!

Don't forget that you are in a battle. "Be sober, be vigilant," warned the apostle Peter, "because your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Paul spoke of the snare of the devil, and the wiles of the devil, and the fiery darts of "the wicked one". Satan at times can approach you in the guise of an angel of light. What an enemy! Remember, however, that Satan is a defeated foe.

Our Lord Jesus won the victory over him at the cross. When His shout "It is finished" pro-

claimed that the battle was won and the price of our redemption was paid, Satan was forevermore a defeated foe. The procedure that will always work in facing the attacks of Satan is as follows:

(1) *Humble yourself before God.*

(2) *Cast all your care on Jesus, because He cares for you.*

(3) *Stay alert and watch out for Satan's attacks.*

(4) *When he comes at you, resist him, not in your own strength, but "steadfast in the faith."*

(See 1 Peter 5:6-9.) When you resist the devil by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are invincible!

The Christian life involves the whole person, beginning with the heart. *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life,"* said Solomon in Proverbs 4:23. What the world calls "the breaks" (good or bad) are determined by what we are prayed that the believer's body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord

We are to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1). Our thoughts -all of them - are to be brought into captivity to Christ (2 Corinthians 10: 5)

Our spirit to be under the control of God's Holy Spirit: "be filled with the Spirit" is His command. The who involved. You can readily see, how many of the so - called difficult decisions in your Christian life will be made clear and easy when our Lord Jesus has control of your total being.

Learn to see the world, and your part of it, sees it. See your world as a mission field. Your reaction to many questions or temptations will be settled if you ask, "How will this affect my ability to win others to Christ in this setting?" Say, for instance, that a fellow employee sees you cheating a bit on your job, loafing, or perhaps just "borrowing" some tools or materials that will never be missed. How is your co-worker going to react if you start talking with him about the Lord? Inevitably, his knowledge of your conduct will destroy any effective witness you might otherwise have. Or suppose a gentleman has a lady friend whom he wants to win for Christ, but she remembers that on one occasion he was overly friendly-not to say aggressive. How will she respond to his words about trusting Christ as Savior?

Conscience is involved, but it turns out to be the conscience of your fellow human beings that is most important. *"Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other,"* said Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:29. *"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:12).*

An awesome thought! The nature of the Christian life is that Jesus is living in me, and that it is my responsibility how my life affects those around me!

The Christian life is very demanding. It is often called “the separated life.” Paul urged us not to be jammed into the world’s matrix, but to be transformed. The purpose of this transformed life, he said in Romans 12:2, is to prove a point: *“That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* Satan’s big lie, uttered in the Garden of Eden, was that God was holding something desirable from Adam and Eve, and that they could better themselves by disobeying Him. Satan’s logic, then as now, is that the will of God is not the ultimate “good,” nor is it “acceptable” (pleasant to take), nor is it “perfect” (the best possible arrangement). The same concept is taught today in many public schools, secular colleges, and state universities. We have called it secular humanism. The idea is that you do not need God, and that you can do better for yourself, by yourself, than you ever could with God. It is this huge, devilish lie that the Christian life is intended to refute! We are to prove by our lives that God’s will is good, acceptable, and perfect.

The only reason in the world for you to give any thought whatever to questions about your conduct as a Christian is this: “How will this help to prove that God’s will is ‘good’ (basically right), ‘acceptable’ (easy to take), and ‘perfect’ (the best possible deal in life)?” The only reason for being different from the crowd is not to prove that you are so spiritual but to prove that God is right!

Remember that the Christian life is a life with other Christians. You are part of a Christian community, and you would do well to conform gladly to the standards of your group of Christians. In that way you can keep in fellowship with them and avoid grieving the Holy Spirit through dissension that your independent action might cause. After all, when the “I, me, and mine” factors are eliminated, there is very little in the average group of New Testament believers with which you could not gladly cooperate.

One further word before we leave this chapter. You will be more- successful in confronting temptation and decisions about your lifestyle if you are aware of other ways your enemy, the devil, works. Here are some more of his methods:

1. He casts doubt on the authority of the Word of God.

“Yea, hath God said?” was his approach in the Garden of Eden; and he has not varied his ploy since that time. Satan’s suggestion, “Ye shall not surely die,” implied that God did not really mean what He said, and that His absolute command is open to a liberalized interpretation. Sound familiar?

2. He presents compromise as a better way:

“Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). You can better yourself by disobeying God, says the tempter. Never believe it. Long ago, Solomon remarked sadly, *“There is a*

way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12;16:25).

3. *The devil introduces godless concepts little by little.* In the case of the Israelites, for instance, there was first the "mixed multitude," then the decision not to eliminate all of God's enemies but to allow them to remain, then the intermarrying with heathen tribes, then the adoption of heathen religions. Religious and moral collapse does not happen overnight. Satan introduces compromise a little bit at a time.

4. *He seeks to make you the victim of "the end justifies the means" fallacy.*

Paul lashed out against this philosophy: "Let us do evil, that good may come" (Romans 3:8). He said their condemnation is just. It is never right to do something wrong in order to gain a good objective.

5. *Satan holds up as a possible objective a dual allegiance - loyalty both to God and to the world.* God's ancient people "Feared the Lord, and at the same time served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from there" (2 Kings 17:33) Our Lord Jesus was most emphatic in saying, "No man can serve two masters. . . ye cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Ultimately, it is either all the way with God or all the way with the devil. You cannot face in two directions at the same time.

Principles for Decision-Making

The questions you face in life will not always be specifically answered in the Bible. However, you will do well to turn to the Word of God each time you wonder what to do. The Bible speaks plainly to those who have a heart to listen. You will often find that even though a specific action is not mentioned by name in the Word, the Holy Spirit will gently reveal to you God's will in the matter while you read His Word. So, first turn to the Bible for help.

Second, because the Holy Spirit dwells within you if you are a born-again Christian, you can depend upon your first reactions in a situation requiring your personal commitment. What was your "gut feeling" when you first considered it? Were you aware of the warmth of God's blessing, or were you vaguely troubled and uncertain? Paul said, "*The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit*" (Romans 8:16). The apostle John remarked that "*ye have an unction from the Holy One*" and "*ye need not that any man teach you*". (1 John 2:20,27)

Frankly, you can, if you are really honest with God, depend upon His faithful Holy Spirit to guide you. "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the son of God*" (Romans 8:14). Our Savior promised that the Holy Spirit would "*teach you all things, and bring all things to*

your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). Watch that first reaction: If it’s doubtful, don’t touch it!”

Another thing you can do is ask yourself how this proposed action lines up with the standards and commitments you have made previously. God will rarely, if ever, ask you to violate commitments you have made to Him and to His will as you understand it. Fourth, ask yourself whether this proposed action will improve your spiritual life-or will it damage and dull it? “Will I enjoy God’s Word more, or will I enjoy it less if I do this? Will my prayer life be more effective or less effective? Will I be motivated to witness more for my Lord, or less? Will I love God more, or less? Will I hate sin more, or less? These are some of the factors that will help you place any questionable decision in proper perspective.

As you continue searching for direction, ask yourself how you feel about the action after you have prayed honestly about it. We are often slow to pray frankly about a matter because we are afraid God will tell us not to do it! A teenage girl was being reprovved by her mother because she went on a field trip with her high school class without letting Mom know she was going. “Why didn’t you tell me?” her mother asked. “What would have happened if we had needed to get in touch with you about something, or if there had been an accident of some kind?” “Well,” the daughter replied, “I was afraid if I asked you you’d say no.” How like children we all are! We want our own way so much that we put off praying about a decision, for fear that God will tell us we can’t do what we desire! Believer, you trust God to give you the best. Jesus said so (Read Matthew 7:7-11)

A sixth point to consider is the “domino effect” this proposed ‘action will have. Business has learnt to what so - called “the decision tree.” If a new course of corporate action is planned or a new product proposed, the ramifications of that action are projected- along with attendant costs and related circumstances. In other words, if we do this, then certain things will result from it, involving certain costs and profits. This is known as “the decision tree.” You and I may use the same reasoning in our decisions concerning questionable actions. If you knock over one domino many others will follow? and with what result will be surprised at the insight you gain by this simple query.

Seventh, you might ask what effect the proposed action will have on your body and on your personality. Smoking, for example, has been proven harmful and may lead to a fatal involvement with cancer. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Do you feel it is right to grieve the Holy Spirit by placing poison in His dwelling place? The same goes for drinking, the use of hallucinogenic drugs and narcotics, the use of “uppers” and “downers,” and all the rest. No, the Bible doesn’t mention “pot,” but it does say, “The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:17). Give careful thought to keeping your body fit for His presence!

The next point to consider is the effect of your proposed action on those who may be influenced by you. As a believer, you are always “on stage” -there is never a time when you can say, “It doesn’t matter what I do now.” Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:9, “We are made a spectacle [like being in an amphitheater] unto the world, and to angels, and to men.” The unsaved are watching you and evaluating Jesus Christ by what they see in your life. The spirit world is watching you, and the battle with “the principalities and powers” may go one way or the other, depending upon your faithfulness to our Lord. Every pastor has wept over a sinner who has rejected Christ because a professing Christian had said or done something that contradicted their Christian witness. One of the most powerful deterrents to compromise and sin is the question, “What will this do to my influence on others for Christ?”

One final thought. Give yourself time to mull over the matter and to seek God about it. All my mistakes have been made in a hurry. “Wait on the Lord,” the psalmist urged. There is a sense in which your mind needs time to let an idea “ripen” in your consciousness. What seems very attractive today may not be so alluring tomorrow after you have prayed and thought about it. Be sure of this: Anything that is definitely God’s will for you will grow more intense, more demanding, more attractive, as you think and pray about it. “I thought on my ways,” said the psalmist, “and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies” (Psalm 119:59). I thought-and turned. Good idea!

Depend on the Holy Spirit

When you commit your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19). He imparts the divine nature to your humanity and reveals Christ in you and through you. (See Romans 8:11.) He can be depended upon to lead you in the decisions of daily life (v. 14), to implant within you the assurance of belonging to God-the child’s cry to his father, Abba, Father (v. 15,16), and to pray through you according to God’s perfect will (v. 26).

Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples that the Holy Spirit’s ministry in the believer would be to teach and to bring to their memory those things that Christ had said (John 14:26). Furthermore, He would guide the believer into all truth and demonstrate the life of Christ through the one in whom He dwells, thus effectively glorifying the Lord (John 16:13,14). In addition to all of the above, our Lord said that when the Holy

Spirit was given to believers, to dwell in them, His function would be to convict the world (unsaved people) of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11). Dr. William Culbertson used to emphasize the phrase, “unto you.” “I will send Him,” said our Lord, “unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world ... ” (v. 8,9). The work of convincing unsaved people all

around us is done by the Holy Spirit who dwells within believers!

The Holy Spirit is the only one who can create Christian character within you and produce an effective witness for Christ through you. In Galatians 5:22 and 23, Paul said that the result of the Holy Spirit's control of your life will be love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. These are the marks of truly Christian character-spontaneous goodness produced by an indwelling Person who is in control. It is impossible to produce this kind of character apart from God's work in one's heart. Anything else turns out to be a glittering and ultimately boring and disappointing counterfeit.

The Christian's witness is linked by our Lord to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He said, "But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me ... unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1 :8). The Christian's witness has to be the result of the Holy Spirit's enablement, or else it turns out to be a weary kind of proselytizing that bores and offends the hearer. I have a friend who says he was "scared to death" of calling on people as a part of his church visitation program. He would fervently hope that no one was home when he rang the doorbell, and he would sigh with relief when he did not have to confront a stranger with his word of witness for Christ. Then the realization came to him that he could depend upon the blessed Holy Spirit to fill him and to live through him. He said that when this concept took hold of his heart it became a joyous experience to speak to others about the Savior and to share his faith. The Holy Spirit is the One who speaks through you (Matthew 10:20). Do not be satisfied with anything less.

Now, all of the foregoing is given as a foundation for the statement that you can depend upon the Spirit to guide you in matters where the Bible does not specifically say what to do. He dwells within you, and His function is to produce the life of Christ in you, teach the truth of Christ to you, and reveal the message of life in Christ through you.

Two keys that will help you put these truths to work in your life are (1) praying and (2) learning to live by faith.

1. Learn to pray throughout each day. You will never fall under the pressure of temptation when you are praying, "Lord Jesus, help me just now!" Pray when you wake up, and let your first thoughts be of your Lord. A friend of mine always says, "Good morning, Lord!" when the alarm goes off. The first thoughts and impressions in the morning have a way of lasting through the entire day.

Pray before your first contact with friends and family in the day. We frequently lose the effectiveness of our testimony by just being our old carnal selves in the privacy of our homes, rather than allowing Christ to control us and make us a breakfast-table blessing. Pray before

you answer the telephone. You don't know whether it is someone to bless you, or to chew you out! Pray before you open a letter. It could be a bill or a check, and you know there is a difference between the two. Pray before you go on a date, before you hire, before you fire, before you sign a contract, before you call on a prospect. Pray about whether to spank Junior or hug him, and in which order. Pray when you are so irritated that blowing up seems inevitable. Pray when some temptation comes unexpectedly. You aren't braced for it, and collapse seems unavoidable. Just whisper a prayer, and our Lord will not fail you.

Pray about nonreligious matters. You are not required to be pious all day long-in fact, it is impossible. You can, however, be an effective Christian in every relationship of life if you will just look heavenward and seek God's blessing and guidance.

2. Learn to live by faith. Living by faith in this instance does not mean getting rid of all your possessions and going about as a mendicant, expecting God to supply your needs through the gifts of others. While this kind of ministry may be His will for some, the idea of living by faith is quite different, and it is applicable to every child of God.

"The just shall live by His faith" (Habakkuk 2:4) is an Old Testament concept that is quoted three times in the New Testament (Romans 1: 17; Galatians 3: 11; Hebrews 10:38). The Holy Spirit never repeats anything unless it is for emphasis. Evidently, this truth is very important from God's point of view.

Living by faith can be paraphrased as "just believing God, step by step." In Romans 10: 17 we read that *"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* So, scriptural faith turns out to be simply believing the promises of God, and risking the situation on Him!

Trusting God is a matter of the heart, not merely a mental attitude. There is something about the Word of God that makes your heart willing to risk the outcome of a situation on God rather than on your own desires or efforts. A friend of mine attended a predawn prayer meeting in Korea. At 4 a.m. the auditorium was already filled, although the prayer meeting was not scheduled to begin for another hour. My friend asked someone why they were all there so early. "Oh," came the reply, "we are here looking up precious promises we can throw up to heaven as we pray!" And pray they did, with an intensity and earnestness rarely matched in our Western World, all the while reminding God of his promises: "Lord, remember, you promised in Your Word"

Suppose you have a financial need. Are you going to scheme your way through or around it? At this point it might be well to remember what my friend Lloyd Cory calls "Finagle's Law": He who finagles gets finagled. Far better to get down on your knees before your Lord, open

His Word, and stay in His presence until your heart really believes the promise, *"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:19). It's that little "what if?" factor, the fear of praying and nothing happening as a result, that constitutes what Jesus called unbelief. Powerless disciples asked, crestfallen, *"Why could not we cast him [the demon] out?"* (Matthew 17: 19). The Savior's answer was, *"Because of your unbelief"* (v. 20). This then is the process. God gives His Word, which is forever established in heaven. You and I wait before Him until in our hearts we really believe what He has said, and we commit ourselves and the situation to Him on that basis. That, dear friend, is called "living by faith." Never make a decision on questionable matters on the "what if?" basis! What if I turn down a date with this unsaved person-will I ever get another? What if I refuse this job offer which has in it elements of compromise for my Christian testimony-will I ever have another chance to better myself? What if I take my stand as a Christian on the job-will I be passed over for promotion when merit-rating time comes around?

Far better to adopt the "but if not ..." approach that characterized the three Hebrews mentioned in the book of Daniel, chapter 3. *"Our God ... is able to deliver us ... and He will deliver us But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image"* (v.17,18)

It is never God who wavers or fails. The wavering and the failure are in our commitment to His Word. When one is completely committed to the will of God in any given situation, he is unsinkable! Like the three Hebrews, you may go through the fire, but you'll come out without even the smell of smoke on you! And His precious presence will have been with you all the way! When you stop to think about it, this approach is perfectly consistent with the way the whole Christian life works. *"As ye have, therefore, received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye [live all of every day] in Him,"* said the apostle Paul in Colossians 2 :6. How did you receive the Lord Jesus Christ? By faith, of course. You did not promise, or pay, or produce anything. You simply committed yourself to the Savior on the basis of His Word. Paul defined for us the phrase "as ye received Christ" in his statement in Romans 10:8-10. The word of faith, he said, is that if you will confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that He is alive from the dead and thus available to you, you will be saved. With the heart, Paul said, a person believes; it is a heart commitment. And that same commitment is what you need to get you through the pressures of every day, dear friend.

Conscious dependence upon the indwelling Holy Spirit is consistent with the experience of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts. When Peter responded to the pressure of hostile cross-examination, he was *"filled with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 4:8), When Ananias deceived Peter about the nature of the offering he was bringing, Peter asked, *"Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?"* (Acts 5:3).

What Ananias did was equivalent to lying to the Holy Spirit! When Paul rebuked Elymas for his opposition to the gospel, he consciously depended on the Holy Spirit while pronouncing judgment on the sorcerer (Acts 13:8-11). Divine guidance through the Spirit is implied in the case of Barnabas (Acts 11:24,25), and it is specifically referred to in the case of Paul's call to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).

Yes, the people in the early church knew and consciously depended upon the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide them in what they said and in what they decided to do. Their entire lives, as a matter of fact, were filled with His presence. Paul spoke of praying in the Spirit, singing in the Spirit, and living in the Spirit. The Christian norm is that all of life should be suffused with His presence!

You too can know this divine direction. Count on the faithfulness of God's Spirit when you are perplexed about a decision. He will never fail you. Add to this concept the axiom found in *Proverbs 3:6*, "*In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.*" This I take to mean that if you really want God's will and ask Him for it, He will see to it that you get it!

Form the habit of dependence on the Holy Spirit.

When you are under pressure, breathe a positive prayer of worship and praise and trust: "Spirit of God, I thank You that You dwell within me, and that You are guiding and controlling me this moment!" When called upon to witness, whether in private conversation or in giving a public defense of your faith, just whisper a prayer and remind the Spirit that you are depending on Him to speak through you. "For it is not ye that speak," said our Lord, "but the Spirit of your Father who speaketh in you" (Matthew 10:20). Years later, when the apostles and other members of the early church were gathered in Jerusalem, they wrote to the church at Antioch, saying, "*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden ...*" (Acts 15:28).

Living by faith means depending on God the Holy Spirit to perform the continuing miracle of revealing Christ through you. Trust Him!

Commit Your Thoughts and Time to God

Years ago, someone said to me, "If you will say a verse over once a day for 7 weeks, you will have the verse and it will have you!" Intrigued by this concept, I embarked upon a program of Bible memorization and review. Many of the passages were familiar to me because I had learned them as a child. Others, however, were new in the sense that I had to work to memorize them.

About this same time, several other things began to happen. I became aware of a new confidence as I approached my duties as a pastor. The people in the congregation seemed to enjoy my preaching instead of enduring it. Finally one of my deacons came up at the close of a morning service and said, "Pastor, you're preaching different!" As I stood there, shocked and not knowing what might be coming next, he continued, "Whatever it is, I like it-keep it up!" The Word of God was working in my life!

The Bible is the key to success (Joshua 1 :8), the source of joy (Jeremiah 15:16), the clarifier of motives (Hebrews 4:12), the food that strengthens our souls (1 Peter 2:2), the modifier of character and conduct (Psalm 119:9), the built-in protection from sin (Psalm 119:11), the source of cleansing (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26), the weapon that defeats Satan (Ephesians 6:17), and the source of fruitfulness, stability (Psalm 1), and answered prayer (John 15:7).

You will often be confronted by questions that have no specific answer in Scripture. But you will find that when your heart and mind is filled with God's Word, the totality of His truth creates an atmosphere from within, which enables you to make decisions that are in line with His will. Those decisions will be right on target, so to speak, and no one will have to tell you to "do this" or "don't do that." God's Word in your heart becomes the compass that keeps you heading for harbor, even in stormy waters.

Let me offer a few helpful thoughts on the subject of filling your mind\with God's Word. Select a definite time each day when you will concentrate on the Word of God. If you leave it to chance, or to convenience, the devil will see to it that you are far too busy to spare the time. I have often told students, "Make your morning quiet time with the Lord a part of your personal grooming. You wouldn't go out to greet the world with a dirty face, would you?"

Why not then make sure that the cleansing 'water of the Word' has washed the face of your soul?" During this definite time you have set aside for God, make sure you really think about some portion of His Word. Write the Scripture verse on a 3 x 5 index card, putting the reference on the other side. Then look at the reference and see whether you can quote the verse; or having quoted the verse, see whether you can remember where it is found. Quoting reference and verse together helps you to remember. It helps your mind to file the verse away for future use, so to speak.

The process by which God's Word becomes useful to you might be described like this:

Read
Memorize Meditate
Share

First, read the passage several times until you are familiar with it. Then, memorize the words so they are implanted in your conscious memory. Next, meditate on the passage by turning it over and thinking about it from every possible point of view. Perhaps at this point you will want to compare the verse with other passages in the Word of God which have a similar message, or which help to explain its meaning. Meditation may also involve praying over the passage, as you ask God for enlightenment, and as you praise Him for what He is saying to you through His Word.

After you have memorized the passage and meditated upon it, then share it with someone as you minister to hungry hearts around you. You will be surprised even amazed-at what this process of absorbing and sharing the Word will do in the decision-making moments of life! Nothing can equal the wholesomeness and confidence that is born of being filled with the Word of God. You will have a sense of God-given authority as you minister to others. You will also be protected from the world's temptations, because you are so obviously His. My friend David Morken, who has memorized many books of the Bible, went to Japan shortly after the close of World War II. One of the first times he spoke to a large crowd in Tokyo, he decided not to preach but just to quote the gospel of John. Starting with chapter 15, he continued on through the story of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, His burial, and His resurrection. He concluded with the verse that says, " ... these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31). While he was speaking, the tears started to fall from the people's eyes, and the Spirit of God began to work in many hungry hearts. At the close of this simple recital of Scripture, hundreds remained to receive help from the counselors who were there. The Word of God, plus the Spirit of God filling a man, can produce miracle results!

It is important also to fill your time with doing God's will. When Paul remarked, " ... ye are not your own ... for ye are bought with a price," he obviously meant body, soul, spirit, time, talents-everything! The hymn writer Isaac Watts wrote, "For Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." This truth would seem to be axiomatic: If you are busy for the Lord, you will not have time for compromise, worldliness, and self-indulgence.

Establish priorities for your time. By this I mean, line up the things you have to do on any given day and list them in the order of their importance - the most important first, the next most important second, and so on.

The most important task often turns out to be the most difficult, and one which you would

ordinarily keep putting off because it is so hard. Now, however, you are committed to doing it, and suddenly you are aware of a feeling of accomplishment and release. You have been unconsciously worrying about tackling that hard task, and now it is finished! You are ready for the next most important job. Before the day is over, although you may not have exhausted your list of things to do, you will have gotten the important things done, and you will feel great about it!

Learn to conserve your time. Adopt the rifle-shot method instead of the shotgun blast in your approach to the many details of responsibility that are yours. If you have telephoning to do, cluster your phone calls so that you are spending a solid block of time in getting the calls out of the way. If you have correspondence to handle, set aside enough time to dictate or write a number of letters, rather than doing one letter, then making a phone call, then going for coffee, then sorting the contents of your "in box" to see whether there is anything interesting. If you are a pastor or a salesman and have calls to make in the community, cluster your calls in one geographical area at a time to save yourself needless retracing of your steps. Learn to say no, kindly and courteously, to the requests and opportunities that only serve to dissipate your time and strength. One time I made a survey of my own program, and I found several things that did not contribute to my development as a person nor to my ministry. No one seemed to complain when I cut those activities out, and the work went better as a result.

Connect your use of time with your purpose in life. A professor friend of mine was commenting on the apparent lack of purpose shown in so many college and university students' lives. "Come on now, Prof," I chided him, "remember when you were 21. You were probably doing some shifting back and forth yourself, weren't you?" He smiled while he looked me tight in the eye and said, "When I was 21, I was nearly through an accelerated program that got me through college in 3 years! No time to drift!"

It might be a very good thing for you, whatever your age or station in life, to review your purposes and goals. If you just keep going the way you are, where will you finish? What will you have accomplished? Is there an overriding purpose that controls your life?

The apostle Paul was pretty clear about his purposes in life. He spoke of having been called by God's grace "to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles" (Galatians 1:16). Paul said he wanted to preach the gospel in the regions beyond, and not to boast of another's work (1 Corinthians 10:16). He said he welcomed the trials and infirmities so that the power of Christ might rest upon him (1 Corinthians 12:9). "I am made all things to all men," he said, "that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul's goals were all in order: to preach to the nations, to pioneer the gospel, to know the power of the risen Christ in his life, and to be perfectly adaptable in his methods so that he could reach as many as possible.

Take a moment right now to review your purposes and goals. If you are embarrassed about the shortness or vagueness of your list, all the more reason why you should spend time in prayer and meditation until you know exactly what it is you and the Lord want to accomplish. Learn the difference between spending time and investing time. Once you have determined your goal in life, make every moment count in some way toward the attainment of that goal.

Don't be a specialist in trivia! "This one thing I do," said Paul (Philippians 3:13). Far better that you do fewer things, join fewer clubs, attend fewer meetings, look at fewer TV programs, that will enable you to focus on the God-given purpose of your life.

Frankly, many of the "Can I do this and still be a Christian?" questions would turn out to be completely unnecessary and irrelevant if we would simply get busy doing God's will as the first priority of every day-all day!

What to Do About Peer Pressure

Peer pressure may be defined as the influence exerted on us by people of equal age or social status. It often results in a change of attitude or behavior. The desire to be accepted and liked by others is one of the strongest motivating forces we know. That's why the experience of being "included out," as the saying goes, is painful indeed. To avoid this, we often modify our standards, then our attitudes, and then our conduct, in the hope of being accepted.

In the back of one's mind, there are always these fears:

- a. The fear of missing something you might otherwise have enjoyed.*
- b. The fear of being rejected because you didn't go along with the crowd.*
- c. The fear of being sidelined on the job - passed over at promotion time - because your Christian standards made you stand out from the rest. The reason given for non advancement may be the old "not innovative enough" excuse, but you know it is ,because you were too good a Christian ... at least, you think you know.*

For young people, sexual drives and other hungers are strongest just when God, the church, and significant segments of society are saying, "Wait." For those in their teens and twenties, the sheer force of peer pressure is almost unmanageable. An awful feeling of malaise is experienced when one dares to go against the crowd on any subject.

Peer pressure often conspires with our own natural cravings to defeat us. God-given desires, good and beautiful in their place, can be distorted and misused. The desire for love, security, approval of others, success, and just plain fun and enjoyment can be misdirected, producing disastrous results. It's extremely hard to be philosophical when your whole being is crying out

for the gratification of some very human need.

The average adult feels it's very important not to be classified as an "old fogey." This factor makes many a person give tacit approval of, or even participate in, things that ordinarily would be abhorrent to him.

The appeal of peer pressure always seems to be reasonable, even though it is actually illogical and fallacious. Here are a few examples of the arguments that are used to encourage participation in questionable things:

Everybody's doing it. The reasoning goes like this:

If enough people do a certain thing, that makes it right. But nothing could be further from the truth! Some time ago a solitary whale swam through the shallows and beached itself on the shore of Cape Cod. Soon 64 others followed the first one. Because they all did the same thing, did that make it right? No. It just made them die. It may seem that "everyone" in your neighborhood or school is experimenting with drugs, alcohol, sex, or crime. But the fact that many of your acquaintances are "into" this sort of lifestyle does not make it right, nor does it prove that you should try it. All they are doing is committing suicide, slowly and surely!

Even so, the pressure is there. A recent survey among young people who drink revealed that they began drinking, not because they liked it but because of social pressure from others in their crowd. A college coed went to the school psychologist for counsel. Her question was: "I'm the only one I know who is still a virgin-is there something wrong with me?" A recent national survey revealed that a high percentage of college students considered cheating on exams as "okay because everybody does it, and it's the only way to get through." All of these viewpoints seem reasonable, but they turn out to be tragically wrong.

Don't be an odd-ball.

The underlying premise here is that it's somehow wrong to be different from the crowd. This is a pressure that never quits-as long as you are in the human race.

A powerful instinct makes human beings who belong to a certain culture or subculture insist that all members of the group conform to a certain standard of looks or conduct. The odd-ball, the "ugly duckling," has to pay a high price for being different. Yet, "being different" may actually be the best thing one could do! Vaccination for smallpox, when it was first introduced, was something different indeed-but it saved thousands of lives. The simple procedure of scrubbing up before entering surgery was thought at one time to be entirely unnecessary, until someone proved otherwise!

Something terrible may happen to you. If you don't go along with the crowd, everybody will turn against you. This kind of personal threat is often used in situations where the individual is in disagreement with family tradition or religious custom. The same approach is found in cultures all over the world. If a person becomes a Christian, dire predictions of impending trouble are generally the rule. And anything that comes to him by way of misfortune or illness is interpreted as being a result of his decision.

What's wrong with having fun? The answer, of course, is that for the Christian nothing is wrong with having fun and enjoying one's self, providing that it is in the will of God. Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). The result of letting your life be controlled by the Holy Spirit is joy! (See Galatians 5:22.) No enjoyment is as free and delicious as knowing you are in the center of the will of God and doing exactly what He wants at any given moment. This goes for all of life, mind you, not just for the religious segments of your program. When God is in control of the ordinaries of life, joy is produced. You don't have to go outside of the will of God to enjoy yourself.

You will better yourself by compromising. This is the devil's ancient lie all over again. It works so well that he has not had to change it since he first used it in the Garden of Eden. There he said to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4,5). Satan's reasoning, then and now, is this: You can better yourself by disobeying God, because He is keeping something from you that you could otherwise be enjoying! See what compromise and disobedience brought to Adam and Eve? Opened eyes, to be sure, and added knowledge - but also shame, separation from God, and death. Not a good bargain!

Don't be chicken. People are often pressured into participating in an act that is against their moral code by a statement like this: "What's the matter-are you too scared to try it?" This question has led many to a tragic plunge into drugs, despair, and death. Thousands of young people are subjected to this kind of pressure every day. The challenge of confronting the unknown without flinching is an important part of initiation into adolescent life. Colleges and fraternities have their initiation ceremonies, and society has its similar initiation rites-many of which are wrong, injurious, and quite possibly fatal. The answer to this kind of fallacy is simple: Never be afraid to be "chicken" about something that is wrong! Paul said to Timothy, "Flee also youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2 :22). There is a right time to run away, and a wise person knows when that is!

Don't you want to be modern and up-to-date? This type of pressure comes particularly to young adults who are striving to make a place for themselves on the job and in the community. Social drinking is now becoming popular in many so-called evangelical groups. The reasoning used is this: "The Bible doesn't teach total abstinence; it only warns against excess and drunkenness.

So why not take a little wine with meals?" The answer to this would seem to be that the Bible pronounces woe upon the person who gives his neighbor drink (Habakkuk 2:15). It also warns repeatedly of the evils that can come to a person through using alcohol (Proverbs 23: 29-35).

In a day when literally thousands of people are killed by drunk drivers each year, when millions of Americans are chronic alcoholics, and when alcohol accounts for literally billions of dollars of loss to industry annually, it sounds strange for Christians to be championing the cause of social drinking. Add to this the fact that when you (assuming you are completely able to control your appetite for alcohol) partake of a social drink, the person across the table from you may be struggling against taking even one sip of wine, which would get him hooked and place him back in the depths of despair. Do you want that on your conscience? I think not!

The Word of God does not leave us defenseless before the arguments of those who would have us join them in breaking God's commandments. Here's some biblical ammunition for fighting peer pressure.

1. You do have the right to be a nonconformist.

Sometimes, in fact, it pleases God for you to be one. Paul wrote, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). The phrase "be not conformed" can well be rendered, "don't let the world jam you into its mold." The main reason for being different from the crowd is to prove that God's will is the best possible deal in life.

2. The crowd is not always right. Following the crowd is usually a big mistake! Only three dared to remain standing when the signal was given to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image—three against the king and all his subjects. Yet they were proved right, and the others were clearly shown to be mistaken (Daniel 3:1-30).

If you had been standing on the edge of the crowd one day in Jerusalem and heard the cry "Crucify Him!" you might have asked, "Who is He?" The answer may well have come from those who were agitating the mob, "Jesus of Nazareth, and He deserves to die!" (See Matthew 27:20-22.) Think how tragic might have been your error if you had taken up the chant of the mob, "Crucify, crucify!" Always test your crowd-generated impulses by the Word of God and the powerful inner voice of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

3. The temporary advantage gained through compromising your standards ends with permanent loss. Esau was terribly hungry one day and sold his birthright (the right to the patriarchal blessing reserved for the eldest son) for a generous helping of Jacob's homemade stew (Genesis 25:29-34). The spiritual and enduring blessing was sacrificed to satisfy the desire of the moment. A poor bargain, to say the least.

Abraham's nephew Lot chose the fertile plains near Sodom and Gomorrah for his base of operations because the land was rich, water was abundant, and the cities provided a ready market. *"But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly"* (Genesis 13: 13). It wasn't long before Lot moved to Sodom and ran successfully for public office. Then he discovered that not only had he gotten into Sodom but, Sodom had gotten into him! Compromise never pays! *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12,16,25).

4. *Find your close friends among believers.* Their influence will be helpful and Christ-honoring (Proverbs 1:10-16). Sinners have a way of enticing you to do wrong by telling you that you'll gain in the process. A faithful Christian friend may disagree with you, or even reprove you at times, but his advice will benefit you greatly in the end (Proverbs 17:17;27:6,9,10).

5. *Be wary of any decision about which you are pressured by the crowd.* Anything that has to be done right now merits a second look. "I didn't stop to think" is the excuse given by many whose lives have been ruined by a hasty decision. Take time to think through and pray about decisions that are urged upon you through peer pressure. Things have a way of looking different after you have prayed over them and slept on them. Solomon spoke of the foolish young man who yields to temptation suddenly, much as a steer rushes into the chute at the slaughterhouse (Proverbs 7:22). If something is important enough to affect your life, it is important enough to be handled with time and prayer.

How important are your friends to you? Do they have a great influence on your decisions? Is there someone right now who is influencing you more than he or she should? If so, read this chapter carefully again. Then, submitting to the Holy Spirit, do what you know Christ would have you do. You can resist peer pressure.

Victory Over the Flesh

The Bible does not speak of smoking marijuana, and the apostle Paul probably would not have recognized a dry martini if he were served one. The fact remains, however, that many of the things we do affect our bodies, and that these actions bear directly on our spiritual life and our fellowship with other believers. What we need, therefore, is a set of guiding principles that will help us steer a straight course through the many decisions that confront us every day.

1. *God planned and created your body.* "In Thy book," wrote the psalmist, *"all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them"* (Psalm 139: 13-16). The scientist tells us of the wonders of DNA, the genetic code that determines how a physical body will develop. Long before that code was discovered,

God was at work planning the exact kinds of persons we and millions of others would become. As a result, you are a very special individual-unique as a snowflake. You have qualities and capabilities that no one else possesses in exactly the same way. And it is safe to say that if that potential is not realized, or 'if it is marred, no one else will ever quite duplicate it. How important, therefore, that you do everything with God's plan in mind!

2. Christ has redeemed you, and with that redemption He purchased the right to your body.

"... ye are not your own," said Paul, "for ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). This concept goes contrary to all our natural inclinations.

The body in which one lives certainly is his own, some say, and what he does with it is his own business. Not so with the believer. Your body, Christian, belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, and what you do with it is His business.

3. The Holy Spirit indwells your body. Thoughtless, willful actions can grieve Him and hinder His working in your life (Ephesians 4:30-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). What grieves Him? Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, malice, unforgiveness, immorality these are just a few of the things mentioned in Ephesians 4.

You can always depend upon the Holy Spirit to guide you in ways that honor the Lord Jesus Christ and that are in line with the written Word of God. Here are two effective tests for any questionable action: Does it honor the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it leave the Holy Spirit free to use my body for God's glory?

4. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you. He will help you decide about the many choices in life that are not specifically spelled out in Scripture. A simple, honest question will give you your answer: "How," for example, "would the use of narcotic and hallucinogenic drugs affect my body as the temple of the Holy Spirit? What about smoking, drinking, overeating, or overwork? And what about the effect on my soul when I look at things that dishonor God-violent scenes in movies, TV, pornographic literature, and the like? And what about extracurricular sex-what does that do to the temple of the Holy Spirit?" You can see immediately that simple honesty in these matters will provide you with clear guidance even on subjects not specifically discussed in the Bible.

5. Put the emphasis on the positive rather than the negative. The question is not, "How much can I do and still be a Christian?" but rather, "How much and how clearly can I glorify my Lord?" Paul said that whatever we do is to be done as for Him and not for ourselves (Colossians 3:17,23). The Christian life is a commitment of love between you and the Savior.

If your heart is truly His, you will want Him to control all of your life-not just those portions that are easy to let Him have.

6. Remember that you express your faith in Christ through your body. Some people will learn of

Christ only through what they observe in you. Therefore, an important guide in matters of questionable decisions is to ask, "What will this action do to my effectiveness as a Christian witness? How will it affect my friends who are watching to see whether Christ lives in me?" Long ago, the wise church father Jerome said this: "Do not let your deeds belie your words, lest when you speak in church someone may say to himself, 'Why do you not practice what you preach?'"

How Your Decisions Affect Your Family

Your family is something uniquely yours. It is your place to be. It is the group to which you belong. And it is a responsibility which cannot be evaded. Your family is your number one mission field, and your decisions will affect their relationship to Christ.

Whether we realize it or not, a special God-given responsibility is connected with being a parent. God said of Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Genesis 18:19). Of Eli the priest, God said, "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Samuel 3:13). Paul's description of the leaders of the church includes these words: "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Timothy 3:4,5)

Christian parents are instructed to bring up their children "*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). Family decisions, therefore, are to be viewed in the light of this God-given task.

You are under constant observation by the other members of the family. They interpret what you say by what they see in your attitudes, actions, and reactions. Even while experiencing intense pressure and frustrations, you still have a direct influence. Unfortunately, we are often aware of the pressure and frustrations while forgetting the influence we have upon our loved ones.

This factor shows up sometimes in the lives of those who are brought up in professing Christian homes, but who turned their backs on their faith. The reason for this rejection of Christ turns out to be the inconsistency in the lives of parents and other family members. They said they were Christians, but they failed to live like Christians at home.

Faithful, consistent family living for God's glory will always affect the family members positively. John G. Paton, renowned missionary, told of his boyhood home as follows: "Our home consisted of a 'but' and a 'ben' and a mid - room or chamber, called 'the closet.' The one end was my mother's domain, and served all the purposes of dining room and kitchen and

parlor The other end was my father's workshop, filled with five or six 'stocking frames,' whirring with constant action, and producing right genuine hosiery for the merchants at Hawick and Dumfries. The 'closet' was a very small apartment betwixt the other two. This was the sanctuary of that cottage home. Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally, after each meal, we saw our father retire, and shut to the door; and we children got to understand. By a sort of spiritual instinct that prayers were being poured out for us there.

We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice pleading as if for life, and we learned to slip out and in past that door on tiptoe, not to disturb the holy colloquy... There were eleven of us brought up in a home like that ... and in this world, or in any world, all their children will rise up at mention of their names and call them blessed!"

How important it is, then, that we walk closely with our Lord in everyday matters at home! Home decisions include such things as keeping one's promises, either for reward or discipline; whether to have family worship when the boss is coming to dinner; whether to give the Lord His tithe or spend a little of it on other things "that we need more." Family members learn exactly how serious we are about our commitments to the Lord by observing the point at which we compromise with worldly pressures from outside, or with our own desires from within. Carl Gustav Jung said, "If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves" (The Integration of the Personality).

Make your decisions, then, with the realization that you are the example, the human definition of verbalized truth. Family members define what you really mean by observing what you do. You can be sure your decisions will meet you again in the conduct of spouse and children. Their actions will reflect what you are - not what you say in your parental lectures.

You may be the only source of spiritual teaching for your whole family. This is true not only in the case of one believer in the midst of an unsaved family; it is also true from time to time in families where all profess to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. By this I mean that you may be the one person who can show by your life that a certain truth is both real and very important!

A young woman became concerned about the spiritual condition of her parents and her brother. They were all good, church-going people, but there seemed to be no spiritual life in the family. She began to pray about the matter, and she became convinced that, for her at least, the observance of a daily quiet time would be the key to spiritual growth.

The family had only one alarm clock, and it was usually kept by the mother, who had to get the rest of the family up in the morning. This young lady asked for the use of the family alarm clock. In return for that privilege, she promised to waken the rest of the family on time each morning. This she did, while rising half an hour before the rest to have a quiet time of devotion

with her Lord. Strangely (perhaps not so strangely) the rest of the family began to show interest in things of eternity, began to pray, and having their own times of devotion. The family became more spiritually minded and both children are now active in Christian service.

Make your decisions with the knowledge that your family members long for you to be spiritually real - regardless of what they may say. They may not always agree with you, but they would far rather live with someone with whom they disagree than with a phony.

The best way to make sure God will speak through you to your family is to pray your way through the day. We all make hundreds of small decisions each day, many of them within the framework of family life. Why not make a habit of whispering a prayer before deciding some family matter? If your spouse and your children know you are praying about your decisions, they are far more likely to respect you and cooperate with you. This procedure need not be formal, or even audible. It takes only a few seconds to whisper deep in your heart, "Lord, guide me now" but praying like that invariably brings its answer and you are linked by faith with the eternal purpose of God.

Let me insert a word here to those who are alone in the world. For you the very word "family" brings a twinge of loneliness and pain. No one knows how alone you can feel. The rest of the family is gone, and you have no one who really belongs to you in this whole wide world. At these times you are apt to think bitterly, "It's all right for people to talk about families, but what am I to do?"

First of all, those of us who do have families and loved ones around us need to show our concern for those who are alone in the world. An extra telephone call, a box of goodies, a personal visit, and an expression of sincere concern can mean so much! If you are one of those who does not have a family, remember that you can reach out to someone else in the same position. When you do, you will belong to somebody again! You can create your own family-people who thank God for your love and concern and thoughtfulness! Everything depends on point of view. If you focus on your feelings, you will become increasingly solitary and miserable. If you reach out to help others, your life will be enriched by those to whom you belong in the bonds of Christian love and service.

Business Decisions: Index of Credibility

Does the Christian way of life basically contradict good, sound business practices?
At what point does one's Christian witness become blurred by coldly practical (or even ruthless) business decisions?

Let us agree at the outset that the only reason for talking about this subject at all is to con-

sider the impact business ethics has upon your proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ. If what you do in business has no impact upon those you are seeking to win to the Savior, then there is no reason to spend time thinking about the matter. If, however, your actions in the marketplace do have an effect upon the degree of openness your friends and clients may have to the gospel, then you should indeed be concerned.

Jesus our Lord said that there is a connection between one's ethics and the credibility of his faith (Matthew 23:14,23-25). He pointed out that some of the most religious people in His day were also characterized by routine foreclosures on widows' homes, by extortion, and by greed.

He called them hypocrites.

Jesus also taught that there is a connection between the good works of the believer, shining like a light in a dark place, and the response of the observer to glorify the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). The apostle Paul taught that the purpose of Christ's coming to earth and purchasing our redemption was to "redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people of His own, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). We are, said Paul, God's "workmanship (literally, His poem!) created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). It would seem clear, then, that there is a connection between Christian effectiveness and the credibility produced by a God-honoring lifestyle.

The classic definition of a Christian businessman is given in Romans 12:11, "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." Here are some guidelines for handling your business affairs 'in a manner that honors Christ.

1. We ought to avoid like the plague any suggestion of conduct that is the least bit shady! Why give Satan and his crowd a chance to laugh? Nathan the prophet said to King David, "*.. by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*" (2 Samuel 12:14).

If you make a promise, keep it. If you make a commitment, honor it-even at cost to yourself or the company. True, the world is full of businessmen who operate unscrupulously and get away with it. But, as a child of the King of kings, why lower yourself to the standards of those who will spend eternity in hell ?

Let your business methods line up with the teachings of the Word of God.

I know an executive who always had a copy of the Bible on top of his desk at the office. It had been specially bound and imprinted with the title, "Manual of Operations." You may be sure that his business dealings were often subjected to the yardstick of God's eternal truth. A Christian businessman should never have trouble with the tax authorities over

unreported income, imports, or exports. A Christian leader, said Paul, must have a good reputation among people outside the church (1 Timothy 3:7). And twice he urged believers to be completely honest in the sight of all men (Romans 12:17; 2 Corinthians 8:21). Obviously the reason for these cautions is found in the question, "What will they think of your Christ if your behavior (which He is supposed to inspire) is not above reproach?"

2. Business people today are well-acquainted with the term "affirmative action." The idea behind this term is that it is not enough merely to stay out of trouble with the letter of the law, but that one must take positive steps of action to ensure that the right things are being done. A de minimus position in relationship to the law is always risky. Far better to err on the side of that which is right than to squeak perilously past the edge of wrong!

For the believer, this means your business decisions will demonstrate positively that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. This does not mean, however, that you will give a little religious speech every time you make a business decision. Rather, it implies that the overall atmosphere of your life will be one that brings honor to your Lord.

A military man I know put this concept into practice in his duties as commanding officer of a base overseas. Recently converted, he was learning each day new lessons of trust and commitment to the Savior. On this particular morning he began thinking of what might happen if he prayed and submitted to God his duties as an officer before he performed them. The idea caught hold in his heart, and he determined as he walked to his office to put the plan into action. When he sat down at his desk, he bowed his head and prayed aloud, "Dear Jesus, please guide me in what I should do with these things before me." The first order of business that day was to sign a number of documents having to do with servicemen being court-martialed. His impulse after praying was to send for the man whose name was on the top document. Moments later the prisoner stood tight-lipped before him with fear and resentment in his eyes. The officer proceeded to tell him that Jesus Christ had paid the penalty for all his sins, and that he could then and there become a forgiven man in God's sight through faith in Jesus. The two of them, officer and prisoner, bowed in prayer, and the man received Christ. (Oh yes, the man served his sentence. But he did so as a redeemed child of God because an officer had brought Christ into his daily work!)

It may come as a surprise to you to learn that God is interested in the details of your daily work. As a matter of fact, He knows far more about it than you do! Dr. Walter Wilson used to say in his gentle way, "Do you know how many times you stood up or sat down today? God does!" (Psalm 139:2). The Creator's infinite capacity for detail extends not only to the light years of interstellar space and to the submicroscopic universe, but also to every small detail about your life. Jesus said that God has assigned an individual number to every hair follicle on your head! (Matthew 10:30). He certainly should be able, then, to guide you in making the right decisions in business.

Let me pause for a piece of advice: Don't expect God to do your homework for you. A red-hot prayer meeting is no substitute for thorough research into a business problem. A friend of mine prayed very earnestly after he had over expanded his business, pyramided his fixed costs, borrowed on his receivables, and defaulted on his obligations. God's answer was to let him lose the business. But suppose you have done your very best and used your keenest judgment and then things go against you? Be assured that God will bring you through, for His glory, and with a testimony to the world that Christ is indeed real. The witness of hundreds of Christian businessmen can be lined up to substantiate that statement.

3. When you have to choose between cold business decisions and Christian compassion, it's best to err on the side of compassion; that is, if you want people to believe your testimony about Christ. This does not mean, however, that you are required to be an "easy mark" for lazy or unscrupulous people. The proper response to those who say "You should let me get by with this exception to the rules because I am a Christian" is a kind but firm "No." I had a friend who foreclosed on a man who owed close to a quarter of a million dollars on his opulent home because he was 6 months behind in his payments. Just to tease the lender a little, I said, "How could you foreclose on a person who is a Christian?" He looked at me for a moment, then said earnestly, "This man went against the advice of his friends when he took on something far too steep for him, and he has been spending money on other things instead of meeting his obligations. His Christianity is in need of repair!"

Whether or not you agree with this man's action, you surely can see that you must draw the line somewhere-and that line will probably be drawn at the point where someone asks for extra consideration because he or she professes faith in Christ. Ask God to give you compassion; then use it! But Christian compassion and soft-headedness are never synonymous! You will be a better witness if people know that you will always try to be honest and fair than if you are swayed by sentimental considerations.

4. Operate your business like your life: for God's glory. Although tithing is no longer mandatory under the grace of God, and believers are urged to give regularly, proportionately, and cheerfully, the fact remains that God has promised to bless the tither (Malachi 3:10; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7). Why not give a tithe of your profits to God's work? For that matter, why not set aside some portion of your business, your farm, or your law practice, and operate it for God, giving Him the income from that part of your work? The reason for raising this issue is that your financial decisions are far more likely to be clearly Christian and God-glorifying if your business is being operated for Him.

Always Avoid Reactionary Decisions

Let me complete this series of observations with the one with which we began: If you want your decisions to be correct, stick close to the Word of God. Even when the Bible is not specific, it does give principles that guide our thoughts and decisions. The Holy Spirit takes the totality of revealed truth and applies it to our lives so that we will glorify Christ.

There is never a good reason for deciding merely on the basis of how one feels about a given set of circumstances. Feelings vary with conditions and with the barometric pressure. Every song leader knows that he or she must work three times as hard to get a crowd to sing enthusiastically when the barometer is falling than he would if the weather were bright and clear. The saying goes, "Never ask the boss for a raise when the barometer is falling. If you do, he will throw you out without listening to your pleas. Rather, ask him for a raise when the barometer is rising. He will first listen carefully to your plea, and then he will throw you out!"

No doubt about it: changing conditions make our emotions change. Feelings are almost never a good basis for action on an important issue.

The following suggestions will help you make important decisions on the basis of sound principles rather than unreliable feelings.

1. Stick to the facts. I asked Dr. John Walvoord the secret of his administration of a large and growing seminary. He said, "Whenever there is a disagreement among our top management people, I always send them back for more facts. Every problem will yield to more facts." Good idea, wouldn't you say? Most church fights, and most family fights, are based upon lack of knowledge about, or understanding of, the facts. The first law of organization is to answer the question, "What is to be done?" Many of us get off into arguments about the how and the who before we have a clear idea of the what.

2. Keep personalities out of the decision-making process. You may like John Doakes or you may dislike him. That is never a good basis for a business decision. As a matter of fact, unpleasant people often serve a very good purpose in business life. In every situation someone has to say, "Now, just a minute here! Have you thought about how all of this is to be paid for?" Every committee needs an originator, an organizer, an implementer, and a skeptic who serves as evaluator. You and I may not like all the people with whom or for whom we work, but we can be sure that they have real value if their talents are properly used. A doctor does not have to have a charming bedside manner to be an excellent surgeon.

3. Avoid basing business decisions on something that has happened to you. "He did this, so I'll do that" is often the basis for decisions that may change people's lives. An emotional backlash has been responsible for many bad decisions. We are all acquainted with someone who

“married on the rebound” from a fractured love affair. And many traffic accidents can be traced to domestic quarrels that took place moments or hours before.

4. Make your decisions on the basis of what you want to accomplish. Someone has pointed out that people are either like thermometers or like thermostats. The thermometer can only react to the temperature; the thermostat controls it! So, do your planning and deciding on the basis of God’s revealed will, and on the basis of what you want to accomplish within the parameters of His will. Constructive, forward-looking decisions are more likely to be correct than choices based on reactions to past experiences.

5. Pray before making a decision. Pray when you awaken in the morning; pray before your first class or office conference; pray before you answer the phone; pray before you open a letter; pray before you decide to hire, fire, or transfer a person; pray before you respond either to praise or criticism; and, especially, pray before you say yes to any offer that may constitute a temptation. You will never go wrong when praying, “Jesus, help me now!”

The apostle Paul said it so well, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6,7). There you have it: Don’t worry about anything. Pray about everything. And don’t forget “with thanksgiving.” That’s the “Hallelujah anyway!” factor that brings perfect peace.

After All...

Although it is quite clear that there is no universally applicable list of do’s and don’ts apart from the specific instructions of God’s Word, it is equally important to remember that we are not called to win arguments, but to win and bless people. Our concern must always be for the effect of our attitudes and lifestyle on those around us. Consider these observations:

1. Priority will take care of many problems. A perfect illustration of this truth is found in John 4. The place was Sychar, a Samaritan village. The disciples had gone into town to buy food. The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman took place at Jacob’s ancient well just outside town. The woman trusted Christ as her Savior, making that commitment of faith just as the disciples arrived with the groceries.

Now, the question on their minds was this: “Why doesn’t He want anything to eat? Has someone else given Him lunch while we were gone? Here we walked all over town trying to find a shop that was open at noon, and finally found one, and now He doesn’t want to eat!” Jesus said, “*My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work*” (John 4:34). And immediately He seemed to change the subject. “*Say not ye, There are yet four months, and*

then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35). "Fellows," He seemed to be saying, "while you were in town, did you tell anyone about Me? Did you invite anyone to come out and meet their Savior? God's harvest is people. Look at them!" (At this point, He must have gestured toward the townspeople who were falling all over one another in their eagerness to see the Man who had transformed the town tramp into a lady!)

"I sent you to reap," He said. "There's your harvest. Why argue about who wants lunch when the harvest of people is ready and waiting?"

If you are busy doing what God wants you to do, you will have less trouble with fuzzy questions about permissible behavior.

2. Concern for others is important. While your basic commitment is to God and to His specifically revealed will in His infallible Word, your secondary commitment must always be to others rather than to your own convenience or desires.

Our relationship to other believers is summed up by the apostle Paul in Romans 14 and 15 as follows: Concerning a brother or sister with whom you may disagree on "permissible matters,"

- a. Don't argue with him -open your heart to him (14:1)
- b. Don't judge him-let God do that (14:3-8).
- c. Put the lordship of Christ first in every relationship (14:9).
- d. Be ready to stand before Christ the Judge (14:10-12).
- e. Accept your responsibility under God to live every day in a spirit of love (14: 15).
- f. Specialize in "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14: 1 7), and God will accept you while people approve you. What really counts is not "May I ... may I not?"
- g. Always choose behavior that will build up other believers in their relationship with Christ. This should be your overriding goal.

h. *Maintain a tender conscience.* Far better for you to deny yourself something you might legitimately claim than to offend, weaken, or misdirect some precious child of God (1 Corinthians 10:28,29). The effect of my conduct upon the other person's conscience must ultimately concern me. Are you going to argue about taking a drink, while pushing an alcoholic over the cliff into despair?

4. *Keep your commitments to the group with which you have fellowship.* Every group has a right to make its own operating rules under God. There are rules of church polity, church doctrine, personal conduct, and in some cases, personal apparel. If you find that you simply cannot live with one or more of these rules, seek a group where you are more comfortable. Don't make a fuss and split the church!

5. Always remember that if you really want to do God's will, He will see to it that you are guided. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths," said Solomon in Proverbs 3:6. James assured us, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). Truly born-from-above children of God, declared Paul, are led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:14). We cannot see the end of the journey, but we can, like Abraham's servant, make the commitment of faithfulness, then pray and take the step of faith. Do that, and you will say, as the servant did, "I being in the way, the Lord led me!" (Genesis 24:27)