

The Role of the Bible in Daily Life

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Summary

This text is a discussion about the role of the Bible in the daily life of Christians, especially in the process of making decisions. It offers answers to the question: Why is it necessary for a Christian to know God's Word and to do God's will? It also looks at the central role of the Bible, not only as the direct Word of God, but also as a historical guide that effectively and powerfully presents the history of the decisions made by individuals and nations regarding God's will. In the central part of the discussion, along with a biblical explanation of the power of God's Word and its necessity for Christian living, answers are offered regarding the question as to what God's will is, shortly explaining what it means to do God's will in our daily lives, especially in the process of making decisions. In the third part, several steps are suggested regarding the application of the Bible in the process of making decisions.

Key words: Bible, God, God's will, relationships, Word of God, decision making, application, Scripture, life

Introduction

It is a known fact that the Bible is the most widely distributed book of all time and the best-selling book of the year . . . every year.¹ The Bible is still the

1 About the translations, the distribution and the sale of the Bible in Croatia, see Stanko Jam-

most printed, the most translated and most read book in the world (Henry, 1992, 26-27). Daniel Radosh, in his article "The Good Book Business: Why Publishers Love the Bible," published in *The New Yorker* (December 18, 2006, 54-59), gives a conservative estimation according to which about 25 million Bibles were sold in the USA in 2005.² Most of the Bibles that were sold, around 60 percent, were given as a valuable gift, presented to beloved people who most likely placed it in an inaccessible and shadowy place in their home. Many Christians think of the Bible as a basically valuable book out of which they use, as with other books, messages and information they like at a certain moment. They believe the Bible to be a book just like any other book, not the Word of God, the book above all books. It is good to have it at home, notes Hagner, as a talisman for protection, security and happiness (2008, 9).

Referring to the research of the Barna group, Radosh (2006) points out that about forty-seven percent of Americans read the Bible every week. According to other research, ninety-one percent of American households own at least one Bible, while an average household owns four Bibles, meaning that, as Radosh concludes, every year Bible publishers manage to sell twenty-five million copies of a book that almost everybody already has.

Donald A. Hagner highlights the fact that the Bible is the best-selling book of all time, *and* perhaps the poorest understood and least heeded book of all time. Therefore, he rightly argues that it is hard to explain how it is possible that such a large percentage of Americans can describe themselves as "born again" or as "evangelicals," and be counted as active Bible readers when the country, the culture, and even the church give such little evidence of actual obedience to the Bible (Hagner, 2008, 8). If we focus on Croatia, we may ask the same question: How is it possible for a country with more than 80 percent of confessing Christians, to have so little fruit of obedience to the Word of God in their lives, in their marriages and families, in daily conduct and education, in the church, in culture and in society in general? Can we ask, along with Hagner, if the Bible has any connection with a person's daily life? Does God have any connection with those who call themselves Christians, followers of Jesus Christ?

People make daily decisions. In the daily decision making process, the number of decisions can pile up to a hundred, to several hundred, and even to several

brek, "The Bible Among the Croatian People: Translation, printing and spreading the Bible in the context of proclaiming the Gospel." *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology*, 1, 2007, pp. 47-79.

2 It is worth noting that, in the same year, double the amount of copies of the Bible were sold than the most popular book about Harry Potter (Radosh, 2006).

thousand important or less important decisions each day.³ How these decisions are made, along with satisfying the basic human needs, is influenced by a range of factors. Some of them include a desire to satisfy ourselves, a desire to avoid the unpleasant, a desire to fulfill our goals and a response to the immediate requirements of others. If Christians, especially those who love to call themselves Evangelical Christians, consider the Holy Scriptures (the Bible) to be the Word of God, inspired by God in its original form, as the true and only book that is fundamental for faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ – the Son of God and the Holy Spirit, as well as a guide for life (Jambreč, 2003:192), then some justified questions can be asked: What role does the Bible play in the daily life of Christians? What is the role of the Bible in the process of making decisions?

As Christians, we clearly show our knowledge and understanding of God's Word by our way of life, and only we know how we live. Those close to us in our families know it partially, also our work colleagues, neighbors, relatives and the believers in the church where we gather know in part. Do we reflect Jesus Christ in our lives and activities? Do we live for the glory of God?

Contemporary Christians need the power of God's Word in order to live a holy and God-pleasing life. Jack R. Taylor asserts that *power* and *holiness* are the great needs of the contemporary church, and he adds, "Power without holiness is destructive, and holiness without power is dead. We must have both" (1993:4). Christians need *power* to be able to live *holy*, first before God and then before their loved ones. The source of this power is the Word of God. Christians' beliefs and relationship with God cannot be seen by the confession of what is learned, but through the adopted system of qualitative decision making based on the truths of the Word of God.

In this discussion, besides the explanation of the power of the Word of God and its necessity in the life of a Christian, we will briefly indicate what it means to do God's will in daily life, under every circumstance and in each life situations. In the conclusion, we suggest several steps for applying the Bible in the process of decision making.

The Bible is the Word of God

The Word of God is creative, and it is the greatest power in the world. It reflects the power of God and it fulfills his purposes. All is created by it; God spoke the

3 Research at Cornell University has shown that a person makes approximately more than two hundred decisions just about food on a daily basis. For more details, see: Wansink, Brian and Jeffery Sobal. "Mindless Eating: The 200 Daily Food Decisions we Overlook". *Environment and Behavior*, January 2007, 39:106-123.

Word and it happened as he said (Ge 1:1-31; Ps 33:6-9; Heb 11:3). The book of Genesis records that God created light, substance, energy, time and life by his Word. Everything that exists was created out of nothing, and he holds everything together by the same Word. The Word of God is the source of the power of the universe. When God speaks, it comes to being because he promised, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa 55:10-11). From the beginning to the end of the Bible, and in our own experience, we observe the power of the Word of God at work: it is living and active, "Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:12-13). Paul, Silas and Timothy proved that they noticed the efficiency of the Word of God in the Christians gathered in Thessalonica. They wrote, "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Th 2:13).

God's Word is living and active, reviving those who accept it. The Holy Spirit makes it alive. Holy Scripture is inspired by God and is intended for "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Ti 3:16-17).

Why it is Necessary to Know the Word of God and to do his Will

People have many needs in their everyday lives; some of them affect their quality of life more, some less. People's needs are different, and it seems that the effects are even more different. The most important functional needs of the human body are food, water and air, and for the human spirit – the Word of God. Jesus confirmed the teaching of the Old Testament: "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Mt 4:4).⁴

4 The syntagme, *word that comes from the mouth of God*, has a multiple meaning. The phrase "comes" expresses a continuous action: it implies that which happened in the past, is happening at the present and will continue to happen in the future. God speaks and reveals his will about all that is necessary for human life, simultaneously emphasizing humanity's dependence on God.

Knowing God's Word reveals his will to us, of which the Apostle Paul writes, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is" (Eph 5:17).

Is the necessity of the Word of God in the daily life of Christians truly vitally important, or is it only an allocution about the need imposed on Christians by the preachers of the Word of God? Do Christians really need the Word of God, or is it enough that someone else speaks to them about God and his Word?

In this part of the discussion, we will focus on the use of God's Word for understanding salvation and the will of God, and for maintaining a spiritual life, growth and the advancement of the Christian life.

The Bible is Necessary for Understanding Salvation

The Word of God is necessary for understanding salvation since the Bible is primarily a book about salvation, and thus it is more practical than theoretical. The Apostle Paul inexhaustibly reminded and encouraged the believers of the church in Corinth to keep the gospel that had been proclaimed to them, that which they had received, on which they had taken their stand, and by which they were saved (1 Co 15:1-2). Then he emphasized, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Co 15:3-4). It was extremely important for him to emphasize that Christ's death, burial and resurrection were in accordance with the Scriptures (the Old Testament). If the apostle considered it so important that he constantly pointed toward the gospel and the Scriptures, it is certainly important for contemporary Christians to know the gospel and the Scriptures in order to make the reality of salvation present in their lives. James 1:19-25 presents the dynamics of the relationship between the Word of God and blessing in a believer's life:

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, *get rid of all moral filth and the evil* that is so prevalent and humbly *accept the word planted in you*, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. *Do what it says*. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will *be blessed in what he does*.

In this text, James points to the fundamental spiritual process we can apply during decision making: a) Get rid of all moral filth and evil, b) Humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you, c) Do what it says, and d) Be blessed.

The Bible is Necessary for Knowing the Will of God

God loves every person and he desires the best for our lives. Is this only a Christian phrase, or a reality? What is God's best for humankind, and what is the best way to comprehend it, accept it and apply it in life? As people, do we have a better understanding of that which is best for us than God himself who created us, or is that a precious, but false belief? When we foster such and similar beliefs, Boa asserts (2001, 217), we devote ourselves to various attempts of pursuing happiness apart from God and his will. The Bible, on the contrary, points out that God will never give genuine joy and peace apart from himself because he alone is the source of such blessings. Therefore, we can enjoy God's blessings only if we live according to his will:

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God (Dt 28:1-2).

It is noticeable that God promised that he will exalt his people (and the Church of Jesus Christ) above all the nations on earth, and countless blessings will fall upon the believers. However, this promise is conditional to obedience to the voice of God, as well as to keeping and following all of his commands.

How can we recognize God's voice and message in the contemporary communicational basket? If we consider that we are daily confronted, consciously or unconsciously, with much information, often useless, and with an inflation of rather inferior and void knowledge that relativizes our already weakly established and applied truth, which commands should the contemporary believer keep and maintain? We know that God desires for us to follow his way. He promised that he will teach us, show us the way we should go, counsel us and be with us (Ps 32:8-9). But which way is his? Will he keep his promise if we trust in him with all of our heart? Will God truly direct our path if we consider him in all of our ways? (cf. Pr 3:5-6).

The most important thing for Christians is to know God and to do his will. The Bible reveals to us that by God's will all things "were created and have their being" (Rev 4:11). Jesus Christ said that he did not come from heaven to do his own will, but the will of God the Father who sent him (Jn 6:38), and that by this will Christians have been made holy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ once and for all (Heb 10:7,9-10). The fulfillment of God's will is central to the Christian life. Jesus declared that all who do God's will are his family: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:50). Just how much the keeping of God's will means to him is shown by his warning and incentive: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven"

(Mt 7:21). In the *Lord's Prayer*, given by him to his disciples, the central request is that "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). In his most difficult moment, Jesus pleaded, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Mt 26:42).

Wayne Grudem (1994:211) defines God's will as the personal will of God by which God approves and allows to happen that which is necessary for his activity and existence, as well as the activity and existence of the whole of creation.

God's will⁵ is God's decision which is revealed in creation and in history, and it can mean a call, a command or a requirement. The sovereign will of God reveals the preordained plan for all that happens in the universe, and especially reveals his plan for the world (Jambrek, 2007). This will is declared in the Bible along with the plan for every person (cf. Ro 11:33-36; Ac 2:23; Rev 4:11). Any person who desires to know God's will and his plans must inevitably read and study the Bible, that is, he or she must know God's written Word. As an individual plan for every person, God's will reflects God's desire for humankind to experience and fulfill his will. In order for a person to fulfill God's will in his or her life, human cooperation with God is necessary because a person should believe and accept God's plan for his or her life and then live accordingly. The decisions a person makes in his or her life affect the fulfillment of God's plan for that individual. God's will for a person is never in conflict with the will of God declared in the Scriptures (Jambrek, 2007).

While studying the Bible, many Christians today ask God questions to satisfy their curiosity rather than discover what God's will is for a particular situation. These are usually "Why, Lord?" questions. Why is the world such and such? Why is there suffering in the world? God, why didn't you do this? Why did you do that? And so on. The greater and deeper the spiritual crisis of the Christian (and of Christianity in general), the more frequent and subtle are the questions, and the greater in number. How can such situations be recognized?

In order to understand the foundational spiritual principles, we will consider the report about the life and actions of Gideon who was a judge in Israel (Jdg 6:1-7:22). Consider the introductory part of the report:

The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did

5 The Bible uses several words for *will* which, when translated, mean will, desire, favor, and/or intention. For more, see: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985.

not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.” The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” “But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (Jdg 6:11-15).

The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and he told him, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.” This greeting was not a common greeting, and the words were not just spoken words; it was a direct word of God directed to Gideon that brought forth a new reality in his life – God’s presence and a changed future for Gideon. How did Gideon react to that specific word of God? The usual way – as a human! He asked questions. Why has all this happened to us? Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us about? How can I save Israel? He wanted to first acquire answers from God to the questions whose answers he already knew. God did not even attempt to answer the questions he asked.

While Gideon was asking for *answers* from God, God expected *obedience* from Gideon. The distinction in *asking* and in *expecting* is insurmountable. The answers to the “Why, Lord?” type of questions satisfy, first of all, a human’s unquenchable curiosity, and second, instead of God’s sovereignty, they attempt to impose their own sovereignty, asking God to justify himself before a human. Gideon could not discover God’s will in the specific situation by asking God questions, but instead, he discovered God’s will by obeying God’s commands unreservedly; the commands came one after another upon his steps of obedience. Instead of asking the “Why, Lord?” questions, by which he began his conversation with God, Gideon acted in obedience, asking: *What, when, how and where* do I do it, Lord? The specific will of God for a particular situation can be revealed during the process of obeying his commands that apply to that particular situation.

Knowing God’s will is important for Christians because it gives them guidelines for life since humans are not in a position to govern their own ways. God alone knows all of the future. A person can act in the present and remember the past. He/she can plan for the future, but only God has the real knowledge of the future: “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” (Isa 46:9-1).

Doing God’s will results in spiritual maturity, sound teaching (Jn 7:17), and answered prayers (Jn 9:31; 1 Jn 3:22; 5:14); it brings spiritual blessings (Heb 10:36; Dt 28:1-2) and it helps one escape penalty (Dt 28:15; Lk 12:47; Heb 12:5-9).

The Bible is Necessary for Maintaining a Spiritual Life

It is impossible to be a Christian without at least a partial knowledge and doing of the will of God. Jesus said, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every

word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). God’s Word is milk for spiritual babies (1 Pe 2:2; Heb 5:12-13), and solid food for every person (Jn 6:51). It is a light for our path (Ps 119:105), the Truth we can follow (Jn 17:17) and a mirror we can reflect in (Jas 1:23-25). God’s Word is a cleansing water that washes us (Eph 5:25-27) and the spring of living water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:14). It is the seed (1 Pe 1:23), the sword of the Spirit (Heb 4:12; Eph 6:17) and a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces (Jer 23:29).

Our readiness to cooperate with God plays an important role in the fulfillment of God’s will as a prerequisite for God’s indwelling in our lives. If we are willing to do God’s will, we will also be willing to accept his best for us. In Jeremiah 29:11, God’s Word tells us that God knows the plans he has for us, that they are plans for peace, and not for harm, that the Lord wants to give us a future and a hope. He promised us that we can find him if we search for him with all of our hearts. Based on his personal experience, the Apostle Paul confirmed this same truth: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Ro 8:28). While many openly brag about their knowledge about God (the problem is not in the knowledge, but in being puffed up by it), the application of that knowledge is not their strong point. It is good to study the Word of God in order to know him better, but there must be a firm balance between knowing God’s Word and keeping God’s Word.

The familiar saying, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up,” used by the Apostle Paul (1 Co 8:1)⁶, can be applied to the experience of the believers with the Word of God; the knowledge of the Word of God puffs up, and the keeping of the Word of God builds up. Our personal development promotes the development of the church of Christ.

For getting into heaven, a person does not need countless qualifications and eligibility, rather faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. All we do after making that step which is pleasing unto God are deeds consecrated to God out of love, and not done in order to earn salvation. Therefore, along with the decision to accept Christ as one’s personal savior, there are a number of decisions we should make on the basis of God’s Word in order to follow Christ in a qualitative and God-pleasing way. As with all questions concerning faith, it is vital for the believer to know and obey the Word of God.

6 Paul closely connects knowledge with faith. Knowledge provides faith with guidance and conviction (2 Co 4:14). Knowledge is a spiritual gift (1 Co 12:8) that can grow, be abundant and fulfilling (Php 1:9; Col 1:9-10; 2 Co 8:7).

Personal Reading and Study of the Bible

Edwin Louis Cole (1995:9) highlighted a very painful truth for many: “Every man is limited by three things: The knowledge in his mind. The strength of his character. The principles upon which he is building his life.” The Bible removes these limitations because it brings the knowledge of the Truth that changes human character, and it establishes principles for the temporal and the eternal life.

The Bible presents us with the history of decisions made by individuals and nations regarding the will of God. Christians today can and must learn from the successes, the mistakes and the failures of those men and women. It is especially worthwhile to consider the consequences of every decision, both good and bad, and the consequences of avoiding timely decision making.

The Bible instructs every person to consider his or her personal way of life: “Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is” (Eph 5:15-17). Every person, especially Christians, on the basis of this text, can easily see in which group he or she belongs: in the group of the wise or the unwise, because the group of the foolish attracts the unwise, while the group of the wise attracts those who understand what the will of God is. While teaching Timothy, his co-worker in the cause of the gospel, the Apostle Paul wrote:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Ti 3:14-17).

From this and similar parts of the Scriptures, we receive an answer to the question regarding the regular reading and study of the Bible. Purposeful reading and study of the Bible implies the experience of salvation through Jesus Christ, the believer’s relationship with God, his/her readiness to follow Jesus Christ, the knowledge that sin separates him/her from God and his/her willingness to submit to God and resist the devil and sin (Jas 4:7). The purpose is not to live the rest of this earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God (1 Pe 4:2).

Sometimes we think (and often act) as if the understanding of the Scriptures is an end in and of itself, and that its application in our lives does not concern others. If we apply this to decision making in our personal lives and service to God, we will realize that the consequences of our decisions often affect others too, and that, in fact, we are recognized by the fruits (results, consequences) of

our lives which show whether we are truly disciples of Christ or not (compare John 14:34-35).

God's Word Establishes, Restores and Determines a Person's Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

Timothy was supposed to abide in the specific Word of God which he learned and of which he was convinced. That Word established and determined his belief because faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Regular reading, considering and study of the Word of God restores and determines beliefs, values and attitudes that are already established. Namely, every person is constantly confronted with the choice between two adverse value-systems: the worldly and the eternal. The worldly value system is based on that which can be seen, and the eternal value system is based on that which cannot be seen, but it is received by faith because "we live by faith, not by sight" (2 Co 5:7).⁷ James 3:13-17 points to the continuous struggle in humans between worldly and heavenly wisdom:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Every person chooses which kind of wisdom he or she will adopt and believe, and which value system he or she will apply in life. God will not do our part, and we cannot do his part (Cole, 1995:44). How can any person gain wisdom? James 1:5-6 gives us a basic and very practical bit of advice: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he

7 Believers who do not accept a radical devotion to Jesus Christ usually embrace both God's and the world's rules, but mostly they keep the worldly. This becomes possible, Boa asserts (2001:214), when believers distinguish and separate their faith from other aspects of life, such as their job, finances, friendships, marriage and parenthood. Such believers become comfortable deceivers who confess to know Jesus Christ, but their character is greatly shaped by the culture they live in. The parallel research of the behaviors of people who claim to have surrendered their lives to Christ reveal that, far from being salt and light, they often cannot be distinguished from any other person when certain issues are concerned, such as ethical behavior, problems in the family, financial malversation, addictions and psychological distress. Such people, concludes Boa, have not connected faith with living, their declarations of following Christ with becoming like him, and their faith with their character.

who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

We gain wisdom by considering the Word of God. The Psalmist describes this process of gaining wisdom in an excellent way:

Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.
I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path (Psalm 119:98-104).

In addition to the testimony of the Psalmist, I add the words of Edwin Louis Cole (1995:27) as stimulation for organizing a Christian thought system: “The man without an organized system of thought will always be at the mercy of the man who has one.”

The Word Changes and Forms our Character

Living a holy life in the power of the Holy Spirit is not based on a list of all we are supposed, or for any reason not supposed, to do, but instead it is rooted in the pursuit of God and a devotion to serve him, as well as in a subjection to his will in every moment of our lives. We apply the Word of God as written in Scripture in order to please God, and not a human, our family or society. Thus we allow God to change our hearts, attitudes, values and behaviors through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. The Apostle Paul testifies about that transformation in our lives in a strong and illustrative way:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which

Christ Jesus took hold of me (Php 3:7-12).

The formation of our characters is progressive and it happens under the continual influence of the Word of God and the activity of the Holy Spirit. God's power is manifested in us proportionally to the measure of our obedience to him. We participate willfully in the process of the formation of our characters in daily decision making in accordance with the will of God and his purposes. Every choice we make, and every decision, makes our next one possible.

The Word Stimulates and Guides our Actions

The Bible points out that we were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10). By this, the Bible implies a continuous and intimate relationship with God who has created us. The more connected we are to God, the more clearly we will perceive his will. The more we are able to "understand what the Lord's will is" (Eph 5:17), the more effective and fruitful we are in fulfilling it. James warns us, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (Jas 1:22).

The world knows many hearers of the Word of God; it is high time for the connoisseurs of the Word of God to become zealous and steadfast doers of the Word of God. Perhaps a radical change in the attitudes and decisions of individuals would serve as a spark that would eventually inflame and overtake nations for Christ. We should really give attention to the words of Jesus that the world should know us by our deeds, and not by our words. People will believe in God and try to align their lives with his will and his Word only if they see it functioning in our lives. Are we a good example, or are we ourselves ashamed of our own decisions? Do we have our lamps lighted, or are we neutral? Our daily decisions reveal our beliefs.

Consciously or unwittingly, we make hundreds of decisions daily. While making them, we have an opportunity to found them in the Word of God, putting them into practice for the glory of God and for our own benefit. If God's plan is the best for us, then we should also desire for that which is best for us – God's will. The fulfilling of God's Word is important because we ourselves are not in a position to govern our own ways. The prophet Jeremiah painfully asserted, "I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jer 10:23). As people, we lack the ability to direct our steps. Without God's leading, every person follows his/her own way and wanders away from God's plan because a human's way is opposite to God's way.

Joshua, the great leader of the Israelites, successfully completed his historical task and led the Israelite tribes into the land that God had promised them, the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8). From the number of his important decisions, I abstract only the most important: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Jos 24:15). This decision made by Joshua has inspired

millions of believers over a period of more than three thousand years. But this decision was preceded by God's calling, the revelation of his will and the command: "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Jos 1:8). Today we can also apply this decision which states, "Do not let [the Bible] depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it."

In this world that is abundant in failures and defeats, knowing and fulfilling God's will is the secret for a successful life. Applying the teaching of the Scriptures reflects our reliance on God, as well as the dynamics, the quality and intensity of our relationship with God. Our beliefs are reflected in our attitudes and actions. Obedience is foundational to a lifelong and continuous, not an occasional, application of the teaching of Scripture. Many Christians act in accordance to their current emotional state, forgetting that emotions follow actions. If we want to change our emotions, we need to change our actions. Thus we can conclude along with James, "But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, *not forgetting* what he has heard, *but doing it* - he will be blessed in what he does" (Jas 1:25). His challenge is still valid: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom" (Jas 3:13).

The Word Forms and Permeates our Relationships

A life that is rooted and founded in the love of Christ (Eph 3:17) reveals the relevance of our abiding Lord for all relationships and every situation. God's Word plays an extraordinary role in forming and permeating a human's inter-relationships, out of which the most important are the marital, friendly, working and the social relationships. Many of these relationships take place in the Christian home which has been called "a laboratory for the application of biblical truth in a relational setting" (Boa, 2001:233).

The Word Encourages and Creates Praise of God

Knowing and keeping the Word of God helps us to live in a God-pleasing way, to resist the devil, and to do spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10-18), as well as to make decisions for the glory of God. Jesus prayed this prayer, and then he left it as a paradigm to us: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Mt 6:9). The Apostle Paul prayed for the Philippians that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that they may be able to discern what is best and that they may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God (Php 1:9-11).

Sometimes we are not aware of the extent to which people observe our lives. Some Christians are the cause of the name of Jesus being mocked and suffering infamy, and this does not give us honor. We are called to proclaim the risen Christ to the world. He is an honorable king, and not only someone to whom we run when we pass through difficult times. Our daily decisions should also demonstrate to the world that we are disciples of Christ. There is nothing worse than a Christian who trembles before an unbeliever. Many acknowledge Christ in the church but not in their work place, at school or on the street. We should announce Christ everywhere. Is not this decision more important than the decision made about our existence? Why does it seem, then, as if many Christians are in a posture of defense, as if they are hiding in order to avoid questions regarding their relationship to Christ, and their denial of Christ like that of Peter? Perhaps it is high time that we prepare, through decision making based on biblical truths, the way to a clear recognition of the disciples of Christ, not by their confession, but by their lives that glorify God.

The Role of the Bible in the Process of Making Daily Decisions

The Bible should play the most important role in the life of a Christian regarding making decisions – major or minor, important and less so.⁸ God gave humankind a freedom of choice between numerous possibilities, but the basic choice is between good and evil. The Bible provides us with a whole range of reports about the lives, the activities and the deaths of people who used their God-given freedom of choice to the maximum. By studying the Bible, the believer becomes familiar with all of life's possible situations, human relationships and activities which may then be used as guidelines for the process of daily decision making. The Bible points to the possibility and the necessity of today's Christians to learn from the successes and the failures, as well as from the great and small mistakes,

- 8 It has been more than twenty years, but I still remember a conversation with a friend who shared with me about his understanding of the four most important decisions in the life of any person which directly determine one's quality of life. The first is, he said, the decision about the quality of eternal life. It is a decision about accepting or rejecting Jesus Christ as God and as one's personal Savior. Whether a person will spend eternity in paradise (heaven) in relationship with God or in hell, in eternal suffering, depends on that decision. The second decision is about choosing a husband or a wife. Whether a person will live in "paradise" or in "hell" on earth depends on that decision. The third decision is concerning the choice of footwear, because we spend almost two thirds of our life wearing footwear. That is why footwear should be comfortable and of good quality in order for us to painlessly pass through this part of life. The fourth decision concerns the choice of a bed, that is, a mattress. A person spends approximately a third of his/her life in bed, though whether or not he/she actually rests is not all the same.

of those men and women. It particularly points to the steady deliberation of the consequences of every decision, whether good or bad, and the consequences of avoiding the timely making of adequate decisions.

Just a glimpse, for example, at the text in James 4 provides us with a handful of guidelines that are necessary in making daily decisions. We could benefit so much more from a profound, thorough study of this and other texts in the Bible. From the first to the last verse, this chapter encourages us to consider the way we live and on what basis we make decisions. We will abstract only a few of the areas of decision making that we face daily. Fights and quarrels among believers (Jas 4:1) come from selfish interests and a departing from God's will. Envy, selfishness, various deficiencies, and friendship with the world are part of the everyday life of many Christians. We hardly include ourselves among those whose prayers are sometimes denied by God because we consider ourselves to always pray in accordance with God's will, while we easily pass over the assertion, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (v. 3) as if it does not include us. Many Christians have forsaken the "good, old-time religion", and they have become friends with the world. They care more about being accepted by their worldly friends or institutions, than about the uncompromised proclamation of God's kingdom through their lives. The Word is clear that friendship with the world is hatred toward God (v. 4). In his prayer for all believers (Jn 17), Jesus tells his disciples that they are not of the world any more than he is of the world (vv. 14-15). He asks his Father not to take his disciples out of the world but to protect them from the evil one. Making decisions according to the will of God, along with this guaranteed help from the Father, will provide the believer with protection from the evil one because the fulfillment of God's will drives the Devil away from us. It is important for us to learn how to recognize what it means "to be in the world" but not "of the world" because this unambiguously affects our lives, and thus, our daily decision making.

***To Conform to the Pattern of this World or to be Transformed by the
Renewing of the Mind in Order to Test and Approve God's Will***

Scripture provides us with solutions for every situation in life. While the Word of God teaches us to love even our enemies, it also warns us that we should not live according to the standards of this world. In Romans 12:1-2, we have an instruction and a command that we should not conform to the world, but to live in accordance with God's will:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transfor-

med by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will (Ro 12:1-2).

Our daily decisions depend on what we consider to be more important at the moment of making the decision – conforming to the world or proving and keeping the will of God. In accordance to these decisions, we will experience consequences and fruits which we cannot hide. That is why Jesus said that his disciples will be recognized by the fruits of their lives, and not by what they said or considered as their beliefs, the things they deprecatingly prayed or confessed publicly. If we know the Word of God, we will know his will, and that, in return, will greatly affect our decision making.

Love for God should be the most important criteria in life and decision making. So often, we consciously neglect biblical instructions regarding decision making while expecting good results. We keep forgetting that we cannot sow a bad seed and expect good crops. In the same way, we cannot expect good results if we are making decisions that are contrary to the revealed will of God. God's will is clearly revealed in Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God and in the whole of creation. No one has an excuse. God's prophet Balaam⁹ tempted God even though he knew that God would not, and never did, call him to put a curse on Israel. God never changes; therefore, it is futile to attempt to lead him to change his decisions in order to please us or others. Maybe the tempting gift of Balak played a crucial role in Balaam's decision, but his decision was opposite to God's will, and thus implied ill consequences.

If we follow the biblical instructions about making daily decisions, we will always be on the right path. "Walking with God" is not just a nice phrase that reminds us of Abraham, David, Paul and others who are loved by God, but rather a specific way of life and a living, active relationship with God that includes daily decision making in accordance with the will of God.

We may not be able to change the entire world by our wise decision making based on the Bible, but we will surely change our own world. For example, the decision of a wife to be submissive to her husband in accordance to the Bible may not bring revolutionary changes in the world, but it will contribute to the quality of their shared life. The decision of a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church may not bring abundance to the nation, but it will surely bring a blessing to their life together. Instead of allowing ourselves to be attracted by the world through its rich and temporary offers, we can decide to serve as a fragrance so that many can be attracted to God for eternity when they see "the purity and

9 The report of the invitation of Moab's King Balak to Balaam, in which he asked Balaam to put a curse on Israel as they journeyed to the Promised land, and offered him substantial material compensation in return, is found in the Book of Numbers, chapters 22-24.

reverence of our lives.” Is it a worthy task to contemplate, in a biblical way, all the challenges and needs in our lives? Surely, it is worthy! Because, along with God’s perspective on life, we also gain access to God’s power and help for a holy life.

Applying Biblical Truths in Life’s Situations

God has given us all that is necessary for us to make productive decisions according to his will in all of life’s situations. Ninety five percent of all the instructions we need in life can be found in the Scriptures (Gordon & Fardouly, 1988: 150). The Apostle Peter emphasized this by writing, “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Pe 1:3). Jesus said to the Jews who believed him, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31-32). We can apply these words of Jesus in our lives: If I hold to Jesus’ teaching, I am his disciple; I will know the truth and the truth will set me free.

In the process of decision making, we will sometimes inevitably make mistakes regardless of how much we know God’s Word and his will because we are not mature enough, nor enabled to please God perfectly. But this should not disappoint or discourage us, instead, it should move us to repent for our sins and to relentlessly pursue God in all of our decisions. God was with Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah and Peter even after their poor decisions and sins because, when they realized their sin, they repented and drew near to God anew. When, for example, the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin, David immediately confessed, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Sa 12:13). He did not even attempt to blame others, or Bathsheba. He admitted his wrongdoing and humbled himself before God. David’s prayer of repentance is recorded in Psalm 51. There is an eternal consolation for Christians, and that is the fact that God forgives all who come to him with sincere repentance.

God has promised to be with us until the end of time (Mt 28:18-20), but we must not forget that this implies our fulfillment of his will. God does not support our poor decisions, he does not justify them, neither does he take responsibility for the bad actions or deeds we commit. We have received instructions and regulations for our lives, as well as devotion given in advance, along with the power of the Holy Spirit who was given to us as our comforter and helper in keeping the will of God, and so God is released from any responsibility if our lives start going in the wrong direction. God offers us his help throughout our lives, but it is a question as to what measure we want to use this help that is at our disposal. Naaman, for instance, received clear instructions by the prophet Elisha, but he was not ready to give God a chance to intervene in his life, regardless of the indispens-

able need he was confronted with. Only upon his decision to act according to the instructions he received was he able to experience God's help and the unforgettable touch of his divine hand.¹⁰ Sometimes we act in the same way. We want first to see, and then to believe. We underestimate God's desire to help us by imposing conditions on the almighty, sovereign God. Can we allow ourselves to do that? God requires an unreserved obedience, therefore, it is for our benefit to make our decisions based on the Word of God even when we doubt. If we are honest, we will admit to ourselves that we often run ahead of God without considering the inner voice of the Holy Spirit in our decision making; sometimes we grab his help and miss the opportunity to give him gratitude, but more often we come to him defeated, quietly admitting that we have failed to ask him, "What is your will for my life, for this situation? How can I please you?" If we consider ourselves to be Christians, do we live according to the biblical standards for Christian life? Does our life reflect God's glory, or do we blend in with the world which is inevitably running into disaster?

Making decisions based on the Bible will often separate us from worldly company because people choose "darkness rather than light", and selfishness rather than self-denial and sacrifice, but fulfilling God's will brings far greater blessing than the acceptance of the milieu. God cares for us. By his Word he has set guidelines, commands, rules and standards for life in order for us to know exactly what to do in each life situation. Following is advice which, if applied, may help us in the process of decision making:

Draw near to God and be willing to obey him in every life situation: "Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (Jas 4:8).

Read and study the Bible for the purpose of realizing and fulfilling the will of God. We should keep the clear commands, advice and instructions. In the areas where the Scriptures do not give clear instructions or answers to particular questions, we should follow the general teaching of Scripture because God's message in the Bible can be direct or indirect.

Pray for wisdom and strength to fulfill the will of God. Every believer should take full responsibility before God for the application of the biblical truths in his or her life.

Based on the teaching of the Scriptures, every believer should avoid sin. If he or she has committed sin, he or she should confess it to God and ask forgiveness from the person against whom the sin was committed. The believer should accept direct and indirect critique from the Scriptures, confessing his or her sins and wrongdoings, and should be willing to change. Since every wrongdoing and

¹⁰ For more details, see 2 Kings 5:1-14.

sin have consequences, the believer should be ready to bear the consequences, or the results, of his or her mistakes and sins.

Conclusion

This discussion, along with the explanation of the power of God's Word and its necessity in the life of a Christian, offers an explanation of what is meant by the will of God, and it indicates what it means to do the will of God in daily life, under every circumstance and in each life situation. The most important thing for Christians is to know the Word of God, to understand and fulfill the will of God, to be led by the Holy Spirit and to have a strengthened process of daily decision making. God's Word is spiritual food necessary for a holy life in the every day, especially for understanding the salvation and the will of God, as well as for maintaining a spiritual life, growth and advancement of the Christian life.

The more we are trained in the daily reading and understanding of the Bible, as well as in hearing God, the more clearly we will be able to hear his voice and realize his will. The Bible points out that God will never grant genuine joy and peace apart from himself, for he is the only source of these blessings. Therefore, we can enjoy the blessings of God only if we live according to his will for us. God loves us and desires only the best for us. Jesus said that he came that those who believe him may have life, and have it to the full (Jn 10:10). God's Word is a creative Word.

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