

Going Deeper

WITH

A LIFE THAT MATTERS



Five Principles of Making Moral Decisions

BY RON HUTCHCRAFT

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF MAKING MORAL DECISIONS

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It's difficult to make Christian choices in a world that has chosen to leave Christian values behind. We must know how to make right moral decisions in a morally confused world before decision time comes.

How do you make right moral decisions when there's so much gray area? You know what's right and what's wrong, and everything seems to be pretty much a black and white issue—when you're a child. Unfortunately, in our morally confused world the choices get tougher all the time. How do you know what's right, especially when there doesn't seem to be a Bible verse to help make every choice?

Before you can have a strategy for making moral choices, there are a couple of foundational issues to deal with. The issue isn't always what's right to do, but will you do the right thing if you know what it is. Do you really want to do the right thing? It's kind of pointless if you're not convinced that doing the right thing is the smart thing.

One of the advantages of doing the wrong thing is that it may be pleasurable. Sometimes doing the wrong thing helps you get your way, helps you escape, or even helps you relieve some pain or hurt in your life. The Bible doesn't deny that there is pleasure in sin. It says of Moses' choice in Hebrews 11 that "He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." It's a pointless and even an unbiblical argument to say there are no advantages or pleasures to sin.

What are the advantages of doing the right thing? After you do the right thing you feel clean inside, you have a satisfied feeling, you have self-respect, you get respect from some other people, and you have nothing to hide.

All of the advantages of sin are short lived, but the disadvantages and guilt of sin last a long time, much longer than the pleasure. All of the advantages of doing the right thing last a long time, but the disadvantages of doing the right thing are short lived.

The choice you have to make between right and wrong is "Shall I have short term pain from doing the right thing and long term pleasure?" or "Shall I do the wrong thing and have short term pleasure and long lasting pain." It's smart to choose the right thing. Wrong is easier, but much more expensive.

That's what Jesus was saying when He said in Matthew 7:13, "Broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it." It's an exciting, brightly lit, popular road. The narrow road which leads to life and lasts forever doesn't have too many people on it. You need to first be motivated to want the right things.

It's important to understand the fundamentals of making moral choices and that what God says is right and there for your good, is not for your

restriction. God put those boundaries there because you don't have any identity without boundaries. The world is filled with people who have no identity because they have no authority; they have no boundaries.

Choosing the right thing is choosing your own happiness. God is against the things that hurt people and destroy happiness. When you're against what He's against, you have taken the side of your own welfare, your own happiness, and your own identity.

Choosing the right thing is sometimes painful, but it's choosing the smart thing. Even with a lot of good Bible teaching, many people have decided they will withhold judgment on whether a thing is right or wrong for them. They've suspended judgment until they get into the situation and see how it feels and how they feel, and then they'll decide.

If you're going to decide based on the majority rule, how you feel, or even on external rules, you're in trouble. If you want to choose the right thing, God has given us a clearly marked out road for how to decide a moral issue. It's not just what's right or wrong, but why it's right or wrong. To be equipped with this strategy for deciding is to be morally ready and really liberated.

When There's No Law and No Rule

The Bible clearly settles many issues. It's amazing when people say "I just don't know what's right," when it's so clearly covered in God's Word. So many things are covered by the Ten Commandments alone. If you are not to bear false witness, then any course of action that involves dishonesty is wrong. Anything that involves stealing or dishonoring our father and mother is easy to decide. You have to believe that God's way is the best way for you—not just best for God, but best for you.

This issue is not that you don't know what God says about it; you can know, but you may not like it. God cannot bless sin or disobedience, so it's important to know what the Bible says and the issues that it clearly settles.

Today, there are so many choices you have to make that aren't covered by any list of rules. Imagine how big the rule book would be to cover all the decisions you make in a week's time. Some people respond to moral decisions by trying to make up a rule for every occasion.

There's no way you could come up with a list of rules long enough to cover everything. So the question is what do you do about the choices that aren't clearly settled by a verse in the Bible, a law, or a rule? The Bible leaves us principles that cover every choice we will have to make. They can be summarized into five principles that can equip you to make moral choices for the rest of your life if you will internalize them and make them yours.

You need to know not just what's right, but what makes wrong things wrong. What you will find as you get into these principles is that God's interest in your decisions that you make every day is far broader than you realize.

Let's now discuss the Five Principles of Making Moral Decisions.

1. Christ's Control Is Important

Christ's control is important and shouldn't be shared with anything else. In 1 Corinthians 7:23, Paul says, "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." In Ephesians 5:18, he says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Jesus spoke in Matthew 6:24 and said, "No one can serve two masters."

You cannot be sitting on the fence with one hand holding hands with the world and the other holding onto Him. Anything of the world that controls you is wrong because it challenges the control of Christ in your life. If there is a habit you can't stop doing, then it's controlling you.

A grudge is wrong because it controls you. You make sure that where there's a grudge, you don't go there. Your whole life is lived in reaction to what controls you. The person you don't like controls you. A grudge controls you. It doesn't hurt the person you have a grudge against very much, it just runs you. Anything of the world that controls a Christian is wrong.

Are friends wrong? Friends are a wonderful idea and part of God's intention for us, but something very good can be destroyed if it controls you. Friends were never meant to control you—even Christian friends.

Is it wrong to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend? No, it's part of God's plan. It's a beautiful thing unless the guy or girl controls you, taking God's place in your life. Many couples who have had a beautiful relationship and who could have made it something that God could bless and enrich, ruined it because they made each other into a little god.

Things have to be kept in their proper place where they are under control. This principle applies to so many things. Whether or not something is wrong depends on if it takes the place that is reserved for Jesus Christ in your life.

2. Your Body Is Important

The second of these five principles is this: your body is important and shouldn't be degraded. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body."

This sounds like the song children sing in Sunday School, "Be careful little eyes what you see...be careful little ears what you hear...be careful little feet where you go...for the Father up above is looking down in love." Be careful what you do with your body. Your body is important and therefore anything that hurts or degrades it is wrong.

If you could go back in time and visit ancient Greece or ancient Rome, or go into almost any major city, you could find there a building that receives

extraordinary care. People are hired full time to take care of that building, and if anyone degraded it in any way, in some areas, it would be punishable by death. It is the temple. That's simply because they would tell you that is where our gods live and it must have the best of care.

Christianity bursts on the world with this revolutionary thought. If you want to look for God today, look at yourself. That's where He lives. If the temple of a pagan god was worthy of such protection and care, what about the body where the Living God lives?

What hurts your body? Are you doing something that degrades your body? When a Christian couple goes out on a date and ends up all wrapped around each other in the back seat of a car, they have degraded the place where God lives. That is why what they are doing is wrong. Since God resides in you, what you do with your body is very important, and anything that hurts or degrades your body is wrong.

You might say, "I'm against the abuse of drugs and alcohol." Are you against the abuse of eating too much? Isn't it interesting how we find vices that are acceptable and others we will have nothing to do with. These two problems are not very different. They actually have a lot in common. They are both the struggle with something which hurts and degrades the body, but in Christ you can be victorious.

3. Your Representation of Jesus Is Important

The third principle of making a moral decision is this: your representation of Jesus is important and should not be compromised. Colossians 3:17 in the Living Bible says, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Your representation of Jesus is always on the line with whatever you say or do.

In the Bible, Paul calls you an ambassador for Christ. In countries around the world, there are many people who only know one American—the ambassador. They have to judge that all Americans are like the only ambassador they know. Everyone around you will picture Jesus to be sort of like you because you carry His name with you.

Be prepared to say to the people around you, "Look at me to get a good idea what Jesus is like." Everything you say or do represents and conveys what Jesus is like to somebody else. Therefore, anything that will contradict what Jesus is like to a non-Christian would be wrong, wouldn't it? That's why when you flare up and lose your temper it's going to confuse a non-Christian.

Cheating is also a poor representation of what Jesus is like. You are silently but persuasively saying that Jesus is associated with dishonestly and you're associated with Him. That means that you don't belong any place where Jesus would be out-of-place, because it would be wrong to represent Him in a place where He would not go. Anything that contradicts what He is like, misrepresents Him and is wrong. Remember that your representation of Jesus is important and shouldn't be compromised.

4. Time Is Important

The fourth principle of making a moral decision is: time is important and should not be wasted. In Ephesians 5, Paul says, make "the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." In Psalms 90:12 it says, "Lord teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Jesus said in John 9:4, "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work."

The picture of a Christian is someone who has a lot to do in a short lifetime. Anything that wastes your time is wrong. Something might be constructive for one person, but it might be a waste of time for someone else. A lot can depend on how much time you spend doing something.

Is television a waste of time? It's for sure a waste of time if you devote a whole block of your life to it regularly. If it's putting you back together again and giving you a mental rest for an hour, maybe you have it in the right perspective. It also depends on how constructive the thing is that you're watching.

Some people would say fun, recreation, and vacations are a waste of time and we shouldn't do them. It's comforting to know that Jesus took the disciples away to rest. Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:8, "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

The point is that any activity which takes up large blocks of time is a luxury. We have a short life to accomplish a lot. Time is important and it shouldn't be wasted.

5. Other People Are Important

The last principle for making a moral decision is: other people are important and should not be hurt. In Romans 14:13, Paul said, "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way."

Someone who thinks it's wrong to do something and sees you doing it, as you believe there is no harm in it, will then become bold enough to do it also. If they truly believe it's wrong, while they are doing it, they will still feel it is wrong. You will be responsible for causing great spiritual damage to someone with a tender conscience for whom Christ died. This will be a reminder of the infinite worth of the one you hurt. It is a sin against Christ to sin against your neighbor by encouraging them to do something they think is wrong.

Older children get to help their younger siblings learn how to walk. They often take their hand and help them walk around the room. Can you imagine if instead the older sibling gave them a tricycle or threw toys or blocks in their way when they got up to take those faltering steps? You don't cause someone to stumble that you're trying to teach how to walk. Paul said you are hurting a brother when you do that.

You hurt people when you use them and when you offend them. Your life needs to be controlled by love. It isn't that you're a slave to someone else; it's that you love them and you don't want to hurt someone you love.

There's the framework of making moral decisions. Christ's control is important and shouldn't be shared with anything else, and your body is important and shouldn't be degraded. Your representation of Jesus is important and shouldn't be compromised. Time is important and it shouldn't be wasted. Other people are important and should not be hurt.

That's why things are right and wrong. The Holy Spirit of God living in your life will build a bridge between that principle and every situation you will face so that you can be a model of what God had in mind for a lifestyle on planet earth. Choose to make right moral decisions today!

About Ron Hutchcraft

Ron Hutchcraft is committed to communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost in their language and to motivating and equipping believers to communicate Christ to the lost in their world. In all he does, he seeks to reach the lost and the young with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ.

As President of Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, Ron and his team specialize in developing authentic, relevant, and creative tools to reach people with the message of Jesus. A veteran of over 48 years of youth and family work, Ron has presented the Gospel across North America and around the world. Mr. Hutchcraft is also involved in work with Native Americans, and is founder of the On Eagles' Wings® Native leadership program.

For more information about Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, visit www.Hutchcraft.com.

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