

# CHURCH.

# LESSON 33

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| <b>1</b> | <b>PRAYER</b> |
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*Group leader.* Pray and commit your group and this course on building Christ's Church to the Lord.

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| <b>2</b> | <b>SHARING</b> (20 minutes) | <b>[QUIET TIMES]<br/>HEBREWS 1 - 3</b> |
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*Take turns* and *share* (or *read* from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Hebrews 1 to 3).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

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| <b>3</b> | <b>MEMORISATION</b> (5 minutes) | <b>[KEY VERSES IN JOHN]<br/>(13) JOHN 13:34-35</b> |
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*Review* two by two.

**(13) John 13:34-35.** A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

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| <b>4</b> | <b>TEACHING</b> (85 minutes) | <b>[CHURCH BUILDING MINISTRY]<br/>GIVING ADVICE AND MAKING DECISIONS</b> |
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*Introduce.* This teaching is about the principles and practice of giving advice and making decisions. People ask questions, because they have to make certain decisions. We will learn how to give advice and how to help people make decisions, choices and plans. We will also learn how the elders or leaders of the Christian church or Christian organisation should make decisions, choices and plans in the body of elders (the church council) or board of directors.

See also:

- "Gathering facts in order to give advice" in manual 7, supplement 10.
- "Making good plans" in manual 7, supplement 11.

## **A. LEARN TO ASK ADVICE FOR YOUR OWN DECISIONS, CHOICES AND PLANS**

*Introduce.* Before a Christian can give advice to others, he should learn to ask advice and accept advice himself from others. The book of Proverbs contains many truths about wisdom. The following are three wise truths about the great influence asking and accepting good advice may have on you.

### **1. A Christian asks advice in order to make good decisions, choices and plans.**

*Read* Proverbs 15:22.

*Discover and discuss.* Why should a Christian learn to ask advice?

*Notes.* A Christian needs to learn to ask advice in order to be able to make a good decision, choice or plan.

Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." All people make decisions, choices and plans. But not everybody makes *good* decisions, *good* choices and *good* plans, because they make them without seeking the counsel of others (experienced people, experts and wise people). They *think* that they know everything and that they do not need other people in life. However, God warns that the plans of such people will certainly fail! Therefore the questions and counsel of other people will help you to think about the different aspects of your decision, choice or plan.

Every decision, choice or plan that is executed has *consequences*! The consequences may be good or bad or something quite different than you expected! Thinking through the possible consequences of a decision, choice or plan together with another person, will give you an opportunity to make a realistic decision, a thought-through choice or a better plan.

#### **(1) In spiritual and moral matters, your counsellors must be Christians.**

As a Christian you are a part of the Body of Christ and need the other members of the congregation to function at your best (1 Corinthians 12:21). You need their questions and counsel to help you to think through your intended decision, choice or plan and its consequences.

*In all spiritual and moral matters*, your counsellors must be born-again Christians, spiritually mature and godly, because:

- unbelievers do not have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:12-16)

- immature believers cannot yet distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:14)
- and God does not listen to those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12).

**(2) In other matters, your counsellors may be non-Christian experts.**

As a Christian you are also a part of your society and need the other members of your society to function at your best. In all matters other than spiritual and moral, your counsellors may also include non-Christians, because they often have certain expertise that you need (for example, buying a new car).

You should seek the counsel of many advisors, because you need facts in order to make a decision, choice or plan, and you also need to think through the consequences of your intended decision, choice or plan together with them. The better your counsellors know you and your situation, the better their advice to you will be (Proverbs 27:23).

**2. A Christian asks advice in order to improve his relationship to God, to other people and to situations.**

*Discover and discuss.* According to the following Bible verses, why should a Christian learn to ask advice?

**(1) You ask advice in order to improve your relationship to God.**

*Read* Isaiah 30:1-2. It says, “Woe to those ... who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance but not by my Spirit, ... who go ... without consulting me”. God warns you to make your decisions, choices and plans in dependence of God. God wants his people to consult him, to only form relationships with other people by his Spirit and to carry out his plans! Asking and accepting God’s advice will cause you to know God’s will and purposes. It will lead you to have a better relationship with God.

**(2) You ask advice in order to improve your relationship to other people.**

*Read* Proverbs 19:20-21; 14:22. Proverbs 19:20-21 says, “Listen to advice and accept instruction and in the end you will be wise. Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” A person who does not ask advice or refuses to accept advice is a fool in God’s eyes. Every Christian should listen to advice and accept instruction. Proverbs 14:22 says, “Those who plan what is good, find love and faithfulness.” Asking and accepting good advice from other people will make you wise, faithful and loving. It will lead you to have better relationships with people.

**(3) You ask advice in order to improve your relationship to difficult situations.**

*Read* Proverbs 28:14. It says, “Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.” It takes humility to ask and receive advice. A person, who hardens his heart against advice, will certainly fall into trouble. God opposes the proud (1 Peter 5:5) and pride comes before the fall. You should keep your heart soft, be teachable and fear the Lord. When you listen to the advice, which other Christians give to you, you will be able to make decisions, choices and plans in agreement with God’s will and purposes as revealed in the Bible. When you ask and accept good advice, it will keep you out of trouble. You will be more able to cope with difficult situations.

**3. A Christian remains responsible and accountable to God for his own decisions, choices and plans.**

*Read* 2 Corinthians 5:10.

*Discover and discuss.* Why should a Christian learn to be responsible for his own decisions, choices and plans?

*Notes.* You should not make your decisions and choices or base your plans only on following the counsel of other people. You would *blame them* when these decisions, choices and plans fail! You always remain responsible for making your own decisions, choices and plans! God will hold you responsible and accountable for your own decisions, choices and plans and their consequences.

**B. LEARN TO GATHER FACTS BEFORE YOU GIVE ADVICE**

Before a Christian can give advice to others, he should learn to observe, to listen and to ask questions. Only after he has gained sufficient facts, will he be able to give good advice and help people to make a good decision.

See “How to gather facts before you give advice” in manual 7, supplement 10.

**C. LEARN TO MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS, CHOICES AND PLANS**

*Introduce.* Decisions include making choices and making plans. Some decisions have to be based on the clear teachings in the Bible. For example, the decisions not to steal or not to tell lies are based on the Ten Commandments. Other decisions have to be based on God’s wisdom in the Bible and require a greater effort to make. For example, the decisions whether to marry or which job to take are not revealed in the Bible. Finally, there are decisions, which have to be based on the circumstances that God has arranged in a sovereign way for every individual person. Such decisions generally have to do with our attitudes and reactions to our circumstances, rather than with the freedom to choose our circumstances.

## **1. God's revelation in the Bible has been given in order to make decisions in accordance with his will and goals.**

**Introduce.** Everything God regards as essential for Christians to know, to believe, to be or to do, he has already revealed in the Bible. Thus, in order to make a decision, choice or plan that pleases God, a Christian must learn to use the Bible and base his decisions, choices and plans on God's revealed will. God's revelation consists of *his specific and his general teachings (instructions)*. These teachings form the limited framework within which a Christian may make his decisions, choices and plans.

### **(1) The specific teachings (God's moral will).**

**Teach.** God's specific teachings consist of all the specific commands, prohibitions and teachings in the Bible and are also called God's moral will. They teach Christians what is good or bad, right or wrong in God's eyes. God commands all people to obey all these specific commands, prohibitions and teachings, no matter what their human nature, human culture, preferences or feelings may be. All people must choose whether they will obey God or not.

Sometimes a Christian wants to obey God, but is unsure whether a specific command is directed to all Christians or only to a specific individual or to a group of people.

**Examples of specific teachings that are directed to all Christians.** "You shall not have any other gods". You shall not murder". "You shall not commit adultery". "You shall not steal". "You shall not lie" (Exodus 20; cf. Leviticus 18:6,20,22,23). "Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). "Receive Christ as Lord". "Continue to live in Christ". "Get rooted and built up in Christ" (Colossians 2:6-7). "Forgive people when they sin against you" (Matthew 6:14). "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you" (Luke 6:27-28). Do not marry an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14).

These specific teachings are also called God's moral will.

**Examples of specific teachings that are directed to specific people or specific situations.** The commands about sacrifices and tithes are directed only to God's Old Testament people, Israel (Malachi 1:1,6-14; 3:6-12), not to God's New Testament people, the Church. The command to sell all his possessions and give to the poor is directed only to a rich young ruler (Mark 10:21). Physical circumcision was intended only for God's people during the Old Testament period (Genesis 17:9-14; Galatians 5:3-4; 6:12-15). The death penalty may only be executed by the government to people who have deliberately murdered someone else (Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:12; Numbers 35:16,30-33; Deuteronomy 19:11-13; Judges 9:24; 2 Kings 14:5-6; Matthew 26:52; Romans 13:4).

A Christian must therefore learn to interpret the Bible correctly. It is always the best to involve other wise and mature Christians if you have to interpret the Bible.

Sometimes a Christian is unsure about how he should practically apply a specific teaching, command or prohibition to his personal life. Then he should pray to God's Spirit and seek the advice of other capable Christians for advice. God will direct his mind, heart and actions through his Holy Spirit (Psalm 143:8-10).

### **(2) The general teachings (God's wisdom).**

**Read** Psalm 32:8-10; Isaiah 48:17; James 1:5-8.

**Teach.** The general teachings consist of all the general commands, prohibitions and teachings in the Bible and are also called God's wisdom. They teach Christians what is wise and what is foolish in God's eyes. God commands Christians to use his wisdom to make good decisions, choices and plans.

Sometimes a Christian is faced with an important decision. He cannot discover any clear instruction from the Bible and yet he is forced to choose between two possible courses. In such a situation, God has promised the Christian that he will guide the Christian in the right way. In Psalm 32:8-10, God promises, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." In Isaiah 48:17, God promises, "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go." And in James 1:5-8, the Bible urges Christians to pray and ask God for his wisdom that comes from above.

**Examples of issues that require a decision.** There are many issues in our lives about which God has not given any direct or specific command or teaching. For example, how can we discover God's will in questions like, "Which education should I follow?" "Which born-again Christian should I marry (a specific name)?" "Should I buy this thing or not?" "What kind of personal life-style should I adopt?"

**Examples of general teachings (instructions).** Luckily, God has given general commands, prohibitions and teachings or principles in the Bible, that is, his wisdom, in order to help us to understand his will and make the right decision, choice or plan. For example:

"Find out what pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10).

"Be very careful how you live - not as unwise but as wise ... Understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-16).

"Make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19).

In many cases of our lives we do not know immediately what pleases the Lord most, what is wise within these circumstances, what is really an opportunity or what course of action will lead to peace and mutual edification. God commands all people to be responsible to make wise decisions based on all these general teachings. When a Christian is unsure how to apply God's specific teachings to his particular situation, then he needs to use God's general teachings or wisdom and counsellors to make his decision. See "Discovering God's will" in manual 4, lesson 43 and supplement 18.

### **(3) The sources of God's wisdom.**

**Teach.** The sources of God's wisdom are:

- The Bible (Psalm 119:97-100)
- Prayer (James 1:5)
- Counsellors (Proverbs 11:14)
- Research (Nehemiah 2)

### **(4) Wise questions.**

**Teach.** God requires of Christians, who love him, that they use wisdom to make decisions. Christians must love God by using their minds (Mark 12:30) They must learn to weigh the evidence: For example:

- **Read** 1 Corinthians 10:23. It teaches that for a Christian all things that are not forbidden in the Bible are permissible, but not necessarily beneficial or constructive. Therefore, a Christian should determine: "Which of these permissible things are really beneficial and constructive!"
- **Read** 1 Corinthians 7:1,9. It teaches that a Christian may do all things that are not forbidden in the Bible, but that not all permissible things are the best (most profitable or edifying). Therefore, a Christian should determine: "Which things are merely permissible and which things are really better than just good?"
- **Read** 1 Corinthians 7:28,40. It teaches what makes a person happy, does not necessarily make another person happy. Therefore a Christian should determine: "What causes trouble and what causes happiness?"
- **Read** 1 Corinthians 16:4 and 2 Corinthians 9:5. It teaches that not everything that is advisable to do, is also necessary to do. Therefore a Christian should determine: "What is advisable and what is really necessary?"
- **Read** Matthew 6:33. God has certain priorities for every Christian. Therefore, a Christian should determine: "Which priorities in my life would be pleasing to God?"
- **Read** Proverbs 16:1-4,7,9,25,33 and Ruth 2. They teach that a Christian should always use God's wisdom to make responsible decisions, the best choices and good plans. A Christian should determine: "What is wise (responsible, the best)?"

Godly wisdom often narrows the options down to one. When it does, then only one choice is pleasing to God. When more than one option is equally wise, each is equally acceptable to God and the Christian is free to choose between them. God's sovereignty will sort out the rest. God will not permit his children to go in the wrong way.

## **2. God gives Christians freedom and responsibility to make certain decisions by themselves.**

**Teach.**

### **(1) Freedom of choice demands responsibility and accountability.**

God has not created man as a robot, but in his own image (Genesis 1:27). Moreover, God has not revealed to man every single action he must do, but has given man *the commandment* to love God with all his mind, heart and actions. He has given Christians *a mind* to use in order to make wise decisions and choices in all areas where he has not given any specific revelation in the Bible. He has given Christians *a heart and a will* which can and should choose to obey God willingly and wholeheartedly (Mark 12:30-31). He has given Christians *a conscience* (Acts 24:16; Romans 2:15) that can and should realise whether his decision is right and pleasing in God's eyes or not. And he has given a Christian *a body* (Romans 6:13,19) that can and should act upon God's will.

Therefore, God has not only given Christians *the ability and freedom* to make certain decisions, but he will also hold them *responsible* and *accountable* for their decisions and its consequences. A Christian may not blame other people for the consequences of their own decisions.

With God, freedom is always limited! No-one has an unlimited freedom to do what he likes in life. God's specific teachings in the Bible and God's sovereign control of circumstances form the limited setting within which a Christian has to make his decisions, choices and plans. Thus, a Christian has to make decisions, choices and plans based on either God's specific instructions or on God's wise principles in the Bible.

### **(2) God has given man a great freedom of choice.**

An important truth in the Bible is that in the majority of the decisions, choices and plans we make every day, God has not given a specific instruction. God has given Christians a great amount of freedom to make their own decisions. On the surface it appears to be more "spiritual" when a Christian seeks God's guidance before he does anything. However, except for the things that are expressly taught, commanded or forbidden in the Bible, it is God's will that Christians be free to exercise their own mind (intelligence), will and conscience. He commands: "Love the Lord with all your mind" (Mark 12:30). For example, a shepherd will lead his sheep, but he does not wish to decide which tuft of grass every sheep should nibble at a specific moment of the day! Another example: If God has given you a watch to use, would you

honour him more by asking him what time it is or by consulting your watch? Likewise, God has given you a mind, a will and a conscience to use!

**(3) Sometimes, several different choices may please God.**

The choice that would please God may not be one specific choice, but any one of a score of possible choices. Any one of these possible choices, which please God, would be the right choice. A Christian, who does not surrender his daily life to Christ, can and will make wrong choices. But a Christian, who has surrendered his daily life to Christ, may trust Christ that he will not make a wrong choice!

**(4) Some areas in which God gives to Christians a freedom of choice.**

- **Read** Romans 14:1-5. A Christian is free to choose the food he wants to eat, but it must not cause another person with a weaker conscience to stumble. He is also free to choose the days he wants to celebrate, but he may not participate in pagan religious festivals.
- **Read** 1 Corinthians 7:8-9. A Christian is free to choose to marry a person from the opposite sex or to remain single.
- **Read** 1 Corinthians 7:39. A Christian is free to choose whom he wants to marry, but the other must be a born-again Christian.
- **Read** 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. A Christian is free to decide how much money he wants to give to God's work in any local church or in worldwide missions.
- **Read** Philippians 2:13; Acts 16:6-10. A Christian, who remains in Christ, does not have to fear that he would make a choice against God's sovereign will. Philippians 2:13 and Acts 16:6-10 teach that God will guide the Christian's will and circumstances according to his (God's) sovereignty and good purpose.  
Also in Genesis 24, the Bible relates how God guided different people living far apart towards the right decision and at the right time.

**3. God gives Christians much grace to make decisions.**

**Introduce.** Exodus 34:6-7 says, "The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished."

- God is patient with the *weaknesses* of Christians.
- God is merciful towards Christians who repent of *sins* and wrong decisions and choices.
- God directs in a sovereign way the *circumstances* of Christians in order to accomplish his divine purpose with their lives.

**(1) Unintentional wrong decisions.**

What must a Christian do when he unintentionally made the wrong decision? When a Christian discovers that he has unintentionally made a wrong decision, and especially when a lot of trouble results from his wrong decision, he may begin to doubt or be anxious. At such times, he must trust in God's sovereignty and God's care (1 Peter 5:7)! When a Christian sincerely understood something to be God's will and acted by faith on it, and yet afterwards discovers that he has made a mistake, then he should trust God to overrule the situation and to take care of all the consequences for himself and others. A Christian ought to realise that he is not yet completely perfect or sanctified and that he will make mistakes in his life. But he also ought to believe that God is sovereign and that in all things he works for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28). A Christian might not always know the perfect will of God, but he should always act in faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).

**(2) Intentional wrong decisions.**

What may a repentant Christian expect when he has made a deliberate wrong decision? The Lord commanded Jonah to preach his word to a very large city, called Nineveh (Jonah 1:2). The prophet Jonah was *afraid* to do God's will and he deliberately chose to flee to a place, where he thought the Lord would not be able to reach him. But the Lord used a whale to bring Jonah to repentance! When Jonah had *repented*, the Lord gave Jonah a second chance to go to Nineveh and preach his word to Nineveh (Jonah 3:1-2).

Likewise, God may use particular circumstances in your life to bring you back to God. This shows that God does not have only one plan for every Christian. God has a second plan that is God's best plan in the new circumstances! When a Christian has repented from disobeying God's first plan, God will have compassion and forgive him (1 John 1:9) and mercifully give him his second plan that is as good as the first plan! For those of his children who sincerely repent and turn to God, God even has a third and fourth and fifth plan and they are all good plans, because God is perfect in his forgiveness and love (Proverbs 24:16). God has determined that nobody and nothing will be able to hinder him from accomplishing his purposes with his children (Isaiah 14:24,27)!

**(3) Uncontrolled circumstances.**

How should Christians regard God's hidden (secret) will with respect to their personal circumstances? God only knows God's hidden will himself (Deuteronomy 29:29). God is God, and his thoughts and ways are much higher than the thoughts and ways of man (Isaiah 55:8-11). God's revealed will in the Bible is sovereign and God will accomplish his purpose. But also God's hidden will is sovereign and also in this area God will accomplish his purpose! For example, God did not reveal to us *why* we were born in our particular family and at that particular time and place in history (Acts

17:16). He did not reveal to us *how many* years we would live (Psalm 90:10-12). He did not reveal to us *why* he permits us to go through particular difficult circumstances (Romans 5:3-4). But God has revealed to us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). God’s hidden will is *perfect* for his children! Therefore, a Christian should decide to submit his life to God and to trust that God is working out the very best plan for his life in all these particular circumstances (1 Peter 5:7)!

#### **4. Corporate or organisational decisions.**

**Introduce.** Many times decisions need to be made within a group. These decisions are also subjected to the same limited framework of God’s revealed moral law and wisdom in the Bible. God has given no one (whether Christian or non-Christian) the authority (right) to set up his own rules and make his own decisions that are against God’s will in the Bible.

Among Christians, the board of elders (the church council) makes decisions that affect all church members. In the Bible, God teaches the following responsibilities of a Christian church or Christian organisation (firm):

**Discover and discuss.** What are the responsibilities of congregations and organisations with respect to organisational decisions?

**Notes.**

##### **(1) Decisions with regard to the doctrines that are taught in the Christian church.**

**Read** Titus 1:9. God has given the Bible to Christians as the absolute authority for human thought and behaviour (for Christian doctrine and life). The creed or confessions of faith of a church may never replace the Bible as the highest authority for Christian doctrine and life! Every Christian has the constant duty to test the confession of faith (creed) of his own church by studying the Bible diligently (Titus 1:9).

##### **(2) Decisions with regard to the leadership in a Christian church or Christian organisation.**

**Read** Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:3; Acts 5:29; 1 Timothy 5:20; 3 John 9-11; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13.

**Required qualifications of Christian leaders.** The church should appoint elders on the basis of the qualifications required in the Bible. The church may not set up any qualifications that violate the qualifications set by God.

**Required tasks of Christian leaders.** The church should limit the tasks of the elders to the tasks taught in the Bible: to be shepherds of the people, to be stewards of the activities and possessions of the church, to be teachers of God’s Word and to be servants in the way they lead instead of lording it over the people.

**Limited authority of Christian leaders.** The congregation should also limit the authority of the elders to the tasks that are required in the Bible. Christians should respect and obey their elders wholeheartedly in the area of their responsibilities (Hebrews 13:17). However, the authority of all elders is limited to the tasks that are described in the Bible. Elders are forbidden to lord it over the Christians under their care (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:3).

Christian leaders may not call themselves “a prophet”, “a high priest”, “an apostle”, “a bishop”, etc. because by doing so they force Christians to accord them greater authority than to the elders! It is also incorrect to give to just one person in the council of elders the title: “the priest”, “the reverent”, “the pastor”, “father”, “minister”, “the leader”, “teacher” (Matthew 23:8-12).

Christians are never under the obligation to obey leaders that make decisions that violate the principles of the Bible (Acts 4:19; 5:29). Christians should also not allow their leaders to make decisions concerning their personal lives, which either God or they themselves should make (for example: which church they should join, which task they should fulfil in the church, how much money they should give, with whom they should marry, how many children they should have, where and how they should raise their children, etc). No elder or Christian leader may take the place of the Holy Spirit or of the Bible in the life of another Christian!

**Discipline and discharge of Christian leaders.** Christians should discipline leaders who disobey God or the Bible (1 Timothy 5:20) and if necessary discharge them (3 John 9-11; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

##### **(3) Decisions with regard to Christian rules of procedure and the decision-making process.**

**The rules of procedure.** The congregation should limit the rules of procedure in the church to those things that are clearly required in the Bible. The elders and leaders may not take Christian freedom and Christian responsibility away from the Christians, because that would make the Christians *legalistic*. It would also make the Christian leaders *authoritarian* and keep the ordinary Christians spiritually *immature*. God warns people not to exchange “living under grace” for “living under laws and rules” (Galatians 5:4). God rejects authoritarian leaders (Matthew 20:25-28)!

**The decision-making process.** Every local congregation should be governed by a body of elders and not by just one leader, whatever he may be called (1 Timothy 4:14). The elders of a congregation or the leaders of a Christian organisation may not lord it over the Christians entrusted to them (1 Peter 5:3). Because all the ordinary Christians were involved together in making the most important decisions in the congregation, like for example the selection of a new apostle (Acts 1:15-26) and the selection of deacons (Acts 6:1-7), they must also be involved together in the selection of

the elders of their congregation and in all other important decisions. The Christian leaders should make all the important decisions together with all the members of the congregation.

Other important decisions should be made at a yearly meeting of the church. Such decisions are for example: decisions about the doctrinal confessions of the church; decisions about the moral standards or ethical confessions of the church; decisions about the yearly plans, activities and programmes in the church; decisions about the yearly budget and expenditure of the church; decisions about the acquisition and sale of property of the church; and decisions about the discipline of any leader who sins.

Decisions in the biblical church were never made by the democratic method of majority vote, but always by the biblical method of a complete agreement with the Bible on the one hand and a general agreement of all the members of the church on the other hand. When the elders and the members of the church cannot agree on an important issue, the decision must be postponed. Then the whole church should study the Bible more, discuss the issue more, pray more about the issue and involve counsellors (for example, the council of elders of a sister church), until a general agreement with God's Word has been reached. It is the responsibility of the elders to see that this is done.

## **D. TEACH PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS**

### **1. Giving advice is the responsibility of the advisor, but making a decision is the responsibility of the inquirer.**

**Teach.** It is always a temptation to tell the inquirer *your answer* in stead of helping him to discover the answer from the Bible and make his own decision! The advisor must not make decisions for the inquirer! Never say, "If I were you, I would do so and so." Therefore, teach new Christians the difference between listening to the advice of an advisor on the one hand and making their own decision as the inquirer on the other hand.

The advice given by the advisor may never be more than helping the inquirer to discover more facts and realise the consequences of his eventual decision.

The decision should always be made by the inquirer himself. He must always remain responsible for his own decisions, choices and plans and for all the consequences of his decision! The advisor must not tell the inquirer what he should do, otherwise the inquirer may blame the advisor if the advice does not turn out well. A Christian counsellor or advisor may never stand between God and the inquirer. In 2 Corinthians 1:24, the apostle Paul says, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm."

### **2. Setting an example is the responsibility of the advisor, but following any example is the responsibility of the inquirer.**

**Teach.** It may be comforting for the inquirer to hear what the advisor decided, chose or did in a comparable difficult situation in his life. However, it is often better for the advisor not to tell the inquirer what he decided, chose or did in similar circumstances, because the inquirer may see the advisor's example as also God's will for him! The advisor should motivate the inquirer with biblical principles rather than with his personal example. The advisor should motivate the inquirer to make his own application of the truth and to make his own decision. The advisor should help the inquirer to understand that only the inquirer is responsible and accountable for the decision or choice he makes, for the action he takes and for all its consequences.

### **3. Judging another counsellor's advice or the inquirer's decision is not the responsibility of the advisor.**

**Teach.** The advisor should be careful not to criticise the advice of another advisor or counsellor, unless it is clearly against God's teaching in the Bible. He should also be careful not to judge the inquirer's final decision or choice or course of action, unless it is clearly against God's revealed will in the Bible. The inquirer is ultimately responsible and accountable only to God. Never accuse the inquirer of a lack of faith. God does not give the same kind of faith to every person in the church. Timid Christians should rather be encouraged (1 Thessalonians 5:14)!

**Conclusion.** The advisor's task is to help the inquirer discover as many facts as possible, to make his own decision or choice, to take action and to take full responsibility for the consequences of his decision or choice.

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| <b>5</b> | <b>PRAYER</b> (8 minutes) | <b>[REACTIONS]</b><br><b>PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD</b> |
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**Take turns in the group to pray** short to God in response to what you have learned today.  
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

(*Group leader.* Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of "Making decisions and giving advice" together with another person or group of people. Encourage every Christian to take responsibility for the advice they accept, for the decisions they make and for the advice they give to others.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of **Hebrews 4 – 7** each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (14) **John 14:6**. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. **John 15**. Make use of the five steps method.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.