

BIBLICAL CHALLENGES 2007 (02).

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Introduction.

Last Lord's day we looked at the Lord's encounter with Martha and Mary in *Lk.10:38-42*. We saw that the primary point in this encounter relates to one's priorities as a Christian and how your priorities affect your choices. We saw in our study that there was no question about the fact that Martha was a Christian. Martha had a permanently abiding faith. Jesus was her Lord. But Jesus was not being given the true priority Lordship in her life. Martha did not take the time to think deeply about her faith in Christ as her Lord and the implications of such faith in Christ as her Lord.

When Martha welcomed the Lord into her home, Martha came face to face with two choices. The first was the moral choice of providing hospitality for her guests. However, Martha's shame/honor culture brought peculiar pressures to bear on the quality of the hospitality she must provide. The second choice was giving priority to the Lord, His teaching and the spiritual welfare of her soul. Martha chose the providing of hospitality for her guests. But Martha also caved in to those peculiar pressures of her culture regarding hospitality and gave them a priority they did not deserve.

From a moral standpoint Martha made a good choice. It was necessary for her to provide a meal for her guests. From a cultural standpoint Martha made a not-so-good choice. She didn't have to provide an elaborate meal for her guests. A simple meal would have been good enough. But she allowed the pressures of her culture to determine her priorities and the quality of the relationship she must have to the Lord and as a result, she neglected that which was the better and far more important choice.

Mary made the better choice. And her choice was rooted in the priority she gave to the Lord, His teaching and the spiritual welfare of her soul. It was a choice that brought her into conflict with Martha. And it is the kind of choice that will bring you into conflict with Martha-type Christians and unsaved relatives and friends. It is the kind of choice that will even make them become irritated with the Lord.

I closed our study by looking at *Matt.23:23* and made clear to you that you are not being told to neglect the good choices. You are being told that you must give priority to the better choices and then find a way to fulfill the good choices. In fulfilling the good choices you must not give an undue priority to them. And you must not cave in to the shame / honor pressures of your culture and the opinions of others who lack the Biblical mindset and priorities you must have.

II). The Basis.

Life is about facing, evaluating and making choices. Every day we make lots of choices without even thinking about them. And there are those choices that we are compelled to think about. At this moment, several of you are facing a choice. You did not get enough rest last night for worship today. You did not take time to spiritually prepare yourself. The combined effect of physical weariness and no spiritual preparation is the difficulty to focus and enter into the worship of the Lord as you should.

The next step in your thinking is to find a way to shift responsibility and blame and bring some ease to the pressures building up in your conscience. To do so, you go with the flow. The problem is not with you and your neglect of proper rest and spiritual preparation. The problem is with the church and the worship. If only the church would stop being so old-fashioned and boring. If only the worship was meaningful, lively and not so dry, you would be able to focus and worship and not have to struggle with sleep.

So now, what are you going to do? You can choose the torture of fighting to keep awake for the rest of the service. But the fight is such you will not hear or learn anything. Or you can choose to take a nap. In any case, the result is the same – you will not hear or learn anything. There are those who may have opted for the third choice – stay home and sleep and have ready that worn but always useful cliché, *“Pastor, you can’t understand how tired I have been.”*

The questions are : what Biblical basis do you use for evaluating and making your choices or making the better choices? What Biblical principles do you use to evaluate and make your choices or making the better choices? The answer I want to set before you is three-fold.

Firstly, you must have your priorities right. Your priority is summed up in *1Cor.10:31* says, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

It is an indisputable and greatly emphasized fact in God’s word that all the glory belongs to God and He will not share His glory. Today I will limit myself to primary verses in dealing with this fact. *Rom.11:33* says, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” In *Isa.42:8* the Lord declared, “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images (**idols**).”

This is the very hard lesson King Nebuchadnezzar learned as the Lord made him walk on all fours and eat grass for seven years. (*Dan.4:28-33*). At the end of the seven years, Nebuchadnezzar was restored and he declared, “I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.” (*vs.37*). Herod paid with his life for failing to give God the glory. We are told in *Acts 12:23*, “an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and he died.”

Your priority in everything you do and in every choice you make must be the glory of God. The pathway to living a life that glorifies God is found in what Jesus said in *Matt.6:33*, “seek first [God’s] kingdom and His righteousness.” The verb “seek” is a command that calls on you to continually seek. The word “first” is not merely sequential. “First” does not focus on one thing competing with other things to be first. The emphasis is on something being the most important thing of all. In other words, there is and must be no competition here.

“Seek first”, that is, make this your most important and continual priority. What are you to seek first? God’s kingdom! God’s kingdom is His reign. As a Christian you are already in God’s kingdom. Live in that reality. As of first importance, submit yourself to God’s ordering of your daily life.

Let me illustrate. Trinidad – a peculiar culture & lifestyle.

Migrate (USA) – change mindset and lifestyle or pay the consequences.

You visit your good partner – complaints.

You are a citizen of God’s kingdom. Start living in that reality. And as of first importance, you must submit to God’s ordering of your daily life. This requires a change of mindset. God did that for you when He saved you. Before you were saved your mind was dominated by the world, the flesh and the devil. When God saved you, He freed you and placed your mind under the domination of the Holy Spirit and His word.

Secondly, living in the reality that you are a citizen of God’s kingdom demands a change of lifestyle that must flow from your changed mindset and God’s ordering of your daily life. This new lifestyle is a lifestyle marked by righteousness. “**Righteousness**” is the righteousness God requires of us and that He approves of. It is the right conduct that befits the one who is a member of God’s household. It is the right conduct that befits one who is a citizen of God’s kingdom. (*cf. Eph.2:19*).

How will the unsaved respond to your new mindset and lifestyle? The unsaved will complain about you and the changes in your life. Peter said they will be “surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you.” (*1Pet.4:4*).

The prayer Jesus taught us to pray in *Matt.6:10* is “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” In *Matt.6:33* we are commanded to live out that prayer by seeking first God’s kingdom and His righteousness.

The point Jesus was making in the *Matt.6* context is that physical daily needs and cultural demands must not determine your priorities. The things that must determine your priorities are God’s kingdom and His righteousness. The things that must determine your priorities are Christ’s Lordship and the demands of His Lordship over your life. God ordered priorities may produce the result of making you counter-cultural and put you in conflict with your culture and those who are close to you. But the clear promise is : when your priorities are right, God will take care of your needs.

Now here are the questions : Are your priorities in keeping with the demands the Lord Jesus has set before you? Are you, as of first importance, seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness? Or are you a Martha-type Christian who thinks you have right priorities but the reality is that your priorities are controlled and determined by your daily physical needs and the demands of the culture? When the unsaved have to deal with you, do they feel like, in their dealings with you, that they have entered another and strange realm that they do not know nor understand?

If you are a Martha-type Christian, do not expect that the Lord’s promise will be fulfilled in your life. Half-hearted devotion to God is not acceptable. Double-minded devotion to God is not acceptable. A devotion of convenience to God is not acceptable. A devotion that relegates God in your priority list is not acceptable. A devotion that fails to give God an incontestable priority is idolatrous. And God has said He will not share His glory with

idols. That idol may be your culture, your immediate family, your extended family, your friends, your job, your personal needs, or your goals in this life.

I want you to get it clear and not be mistaken about what God's word is teaching you here. You are not being told to neglect and / or forsake the genuine concerns of your culture, your immediate family, your extended family, your friends, your job, your personal needs or your goals in life. You are being told to evaluate them and deal with them in keeping with the clear incontestable priority that you have given to God, His kingdom and His righteousness. If they are in conflict with the incontestable priority you have given to God, then you need to resolve that conflict without compromising the clear incontestable priority you have given to God.

The clearest illustration of non-compromise is found in Moses' dealings with Pharaoh. Pharaoh told Moses to take the people and go and worship the Lord. But he said, "only let your flocks and your herds be detained." And he added, with the pretension of being generous, "Even your little ones may go with you." But Moses' response was, "our livestock shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind." (*Exod.10:24-26*). When it comes to the incontestable priority you have given to God and the making of choices, non-compromise means not a hoof must be left behind.

Jesus made it clear that you must "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." (*Mk.12:30*). God must never have to compete for your love, devotion, dedication, worship, and service. As a matter of fact God will not compete for your love, devotion, dedication, worship, and service. Your love, devotion, dedication, worship, and service to God must be voluntary, zealous and passionate.

Far too many Christians today are living Martha-type lives, making Martha-type choices. The result is : they do not live in the realm of God's better and God's best for their lives. Without a doubt they want God's better and God's best. But they also want to live like Martha and make Martha-type choices. The Lord Jesus has one answer for you if you are

a Martha-type Christian, “Become a Mary-type Christian because Mary has chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Are you living in the realm of God’s better and God’s best for your life?

The **second** basis for making better choices is the word of God. Please turn to *Prov.1:1-6*. (**read**). Once again, I want to focus your attention on one primary passage. In these first few verses we are told why the Proverbs were written. Five purpose verbs tell us why they were written. These five verbs are : “to know ... to discern ... to receive ... to give ... to understand.”

The verb “**know**” means to gain knowledge or to become wise in something. The focus, however, is on experiential knowledge that is rooted in the personal assimilation of intellectual knowledge and in the practical use of what was learned.

“**Wisdom**” is “**skill**”. It is the skill that produces something of value. It was the word used to describe Bezalel and his fellow craftsmen whom the Lord gave to Moses to build the tabernacle and all the things related to it. Bezalel and his fellow craftsmen were described as “**skillful**” or “**wise**” and the Lord said He put “**skill**” or “**wisdom**” and “**understanding**” in them “to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary.” (*Exod.31:1-11; 36:1-2*). In our context “**wisdom**” is the moral skill needed for living and producing in one’s life something of lasting value.

“**Instruction**” is moral training that corrects moral fault. “**Instruction**” assumes the presence of an authority to whom the one who is being trained must submit himself. The authority may be parents, wise teachers or God. In this case the authority is God and His word. This instruction consists of wisdom acquired by experiencing chastisement from God or by observing the consequences of foolish actions in others and developing the ability to control the natural inclination to folly. *Psa.119:67* says, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.” *Vs.71* says, “It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.” In *Acts 5* we are told that

when Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for their lying to the Holy Spirit, “great fear came over the whole church.” (*vs.11*).

Wisdom and instruction cannot be gained unless the one being taught is able to “**discern**”. To “**discern**” is the ability to understand facts or a situation; the ability to compare things and make proper evaluation; the ability to discern between things; the ability to discern between moral options.

The “sayings of understanding” is literally “**words of discernment**” and conveys the idea of wise counsel. The sentence can read, “to discern wise counsel.” To “**discern words of discernment**” is the ability to understand wise sayings or wise counsel and to use that knowledge to distinguish truth from falsehood and to discern the better choices when faced with moral options.

Vs.3 says, “to receive instruction in wise behavior.” “**Instruction**” is the same word found in *vs.2*. “Wise behavior” or “**wisdom**” is a different to the word we met in *vs.2*. The “**wisdom**” in *vs.2* focuses on skillful living. The “**wisdom**” is *vs.3* focuses prudent conduct. This word is used to describe David as conducting himself very wisely before the Lord and before King Saul. (*1Sam.18:4, 14, 15*). Abigail is also described as an “**intelligent**” or wise woman who conducted herself very prudently in contrast to her husband, Nabal, who was foolish and conducted himself like a fool. (*1Sam.25:3, 18ff*).

There are a couple points that must be made now. *Firstly*, the purpose of the Proverbs, and by implication, the word of God, is to give you wisdom, instruction, understanding and prudence. The purpose is to give you the knowledge, the moral skill, the moral training and the discernment to act and live wisely. The purpose is to get you to renounce the autonomous use of your finite flawed intellect for daily living and turn to God and His word. This point is made very clearly in *Prov.3:5*, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” To “**lean**” is to rely on something for support that is reliable. You are being told that you must not lean on your

own understanding, your own insight, your own wisdom, because : (1) they are unreliable and (2) they are not rooted in God's wisdom.

If you desire to avoid making Martha-type choices and desire to make Mary-type choices, then you need the word of God. You need the knowledge of the word of God and experiences from that knowledge. You need the moral training and skill the word of God gives you. You need the wisdom and discernment the word of God gives you.

If you rely on your own wisdom and insights you will make and keep on making Martha-type choices. If you rely on a culture dominated by the mindset of the world, the flesh, and the devil, you will make and keep on making Martha-type choices. If you rely on the wisdom of unsaved loved ones, relatives and friends, you will make and keep on making Martha-type choices.

The **third** basis for making better choices is prayer. You need to humbly submit yourself before God and confess your folly, confess your lack of the wisdom that comes from above, confess your naivety, confess your poor insight and lack of moral skill for living prudently.

At the same time you should give God praise and worship for His infinite wisdom, understanding and insight. Give thanks that the Lord who is the source of all wisdom, understanding and insight and who gives liberally to all who ask Him. Acknowledge that if you live according to His wisdom, understanding and insight, that if you live according to the discernment, moral training and skill He gives, that you will live wisely before Him.

Prov.2:6 says, "the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." **Jas.1:5** says, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach." The Lord said to King Solomon, "Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart." (**1Kings 3:12**). But the wisest man who ever lived became a fool when he turned away from God and God's

wisdom as expressed in His word and began to live in keeping with the cultural and political wisdom of the world. (*1Kings 11.*)

Instead of trusting in the Lord, Solomon began to establish political alliances with other nations by marrying the daughters of their kings. This political compromise for the maintenance of peace between the nations opened the door to cultural and religious alliances and compromises. The result was religious corruption and idolatry in Solomon's life and in the nation of Israel.

Having confessed your own shortcomings, having worshipped the Lord, having set before God His promises, now humbly ask Him for wisdom, understanding, and insight; ask Him for the moral training and skill and the ability to discern between your moral options. Ask Him for the Holy Spirit's help and guidance to make the better and best choices. The Lord Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you." (*Matt.7:7*). James said, "You do not have because you do not ask." (*Jas.4:2*).

God's goal for you men is to live like David lived – to think wisely, to act wisely in making the better choices and to live wisely. One day David forsook that wisdom and he thought like a fool, chose like a fool, and conducted himself like a fool. The consequences of his folly would reverberate into the next generation.

God's goal for you women is to be like Abigail. Abigail was not a dumb blonde. The Bible says she was intelligent and beautiful. She was a wise woman who thought wisely, who acted wisely by making the better choices and conducted herself with wisdom. In the face of her husband's astounding folly, she took action that saved her family from being destroyed. David would compliment her by saying to her, "blessed be your discernment." (*1Sam.25:3, 33*).

God has given to you in His word all that you need for life and godliness. (*2Pet.1:3*). You have in your hands the best life manual in the world. You want wisdom for living, turn to your Bible. You want wisdom for making choices, turn to your Bible. You want

wisdom for the conduct of your daily affairs, turn to your Bible. You want wisdom for dealing with others in the home, at work, at school, turn to your Bible. You want wisdom for dealing with your marriage, turn to your Bible. You want wisdom for your financial affairs, turn to your Bible. You want wisdom for dealing with those in authority, and especially when they abuse their authority, turn to your Bible. You want wisdom to deal with the arrogant, turn to your Bible. You want wisdom to deal with intellectual and / or moral fools, turn to your Bible. You want wisdom to deal with persecutors, turn to your Bible. We can go on and on with the list.

The closing exhortation is *Prov.3:5-7*, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil." *Rom.12:16* repeats the exhortation, "Do not be wise in your own estimation."

Those who trust in the Lord know that He is reliable, that He can be leaned upon. Those who trust in the Lord have renounced self-confidence. The Christian's trust is rooted in a God who has revealed Himself, a God who will never break His word, a God who will fulfill His word in His own time and in His own way, even when the wicked prospers and the righteous must suffer. Those who trust in the Lord trust Him with all their heart, without reserve. Those who trust the Lord submit to His Lordship. Those who trust the Lord obey Him.

Vs.6 says, "In all your ways acknowledge Him." The better translation is, "In all your ways, know Him." To know God begins with a mental awareness of who God is. To know God must move from the mental to the experiential. Those who know God have personal intimate knowledge of God. **Waltke** noted that this personal intimate knowledge of God is the result of risking oneself to obey the specific teachings that pertain to all sorts of human behavior in full reliance upon God to keep His promises that are coupled with them.

Psa.9:10 says, “those who know Your name will put their trust in You.” “In all your ways, know Him.” In all of your life, know Him and you will make the better choices. In all of your moral options, know Him and you will make the better choices. In all of your conduct, know Him and you will make the better choices. In all of your conflicts, know Him and you will make the better choices. In all of your fears and doubts, know Him and you will find comfort for your soul. In all of your daily struggles, know Him and you will receive strength to battle on. In every event of your life, know Him; trust Him for guidance in right conduct; lean on Him; obey Him.

Do you know the Lord? Are you praying like Moses, “let me know Your ways that I may know You.” (*Exod.33:13*). Do you have Paul’s heart cry, “that I may know Him.” (*Phil.3:10*). Are you heeding the prophet’s exhortation, “let us press on to know the Lord.” (*Hos.6:3*).

What are the choices you are presently facing and what principles are you using to help you make the better choices? Are you making the choices that are revealing that you know the Lord? Are you making choices that are leading you into a deeper experiential knowing of the Lord?