

Decisions, Decisions : How (and How Not) To Make Them

by Dave Swavely

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Author Dave Swavely has written a very helpful book concerning a topic which all believers must confront on an almost daily basis: how to make godly, biblical decisions.

A particularly valuable aspect of the book is the helpful distinction which it makes between God's *sovereign will* and His *moral will*.

His sovereign will cannot be thwarted by our decisions (Rom. 8:28)--whether good or bad, godly or ungodly. God alone is in control of history and works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11).

[W]e should not try to make decisions by finding out what God has planned in his sovereign will; rather we should concern ourselves with the revealed will of God in the Scriptures. But although the sovereignty of God has no direct bearing on the activity of decision making

, our understanding and acceptance of it is essential to our attitude in the process of decision making.¹

This sovereign will of God is hidden in His secret counsel and all attempts by us to find it out are doomed to frustration and even dangerous—as they lead us into subjective means of decision making which go beyond that which God has revealed.

Although we cannot determine the sovereign will of God, we are held responsible for that which God has revealed—His *moral will*. One of the theme verses for this book, Deuteronomy 29:29, recognizes this distinction: "The secret [things belong] to the LORD our God, but those [things which are] revealed [belong] to us and to our children forever, that [we] may do all the words of this law."

The subtitle of the book, "How *Not* to Make Decisions," calls attention to one of the most valuable aspects of the book—identifying common, even popular ways in which Christians frequently make decisions. The importance of discussing how *not* to make decisions is seen in the division of the book into two halves, with the discussion of decision making pitfalls occupying the first half of the book.

Most readers will find themselves smiling wryly (or perhaps even frowning) as they read this section and recognize some of their own decision making foibles along with many others which will be frequently heard in any group of believers. It is our view that a particularly valuable contribution of this book is its identification of common decision making practices which lead to confusion and result in great damage, both individually, and to the body of Christ at large.²

1 p. 105.

2 This reviewer remembers a mission trip where one woman on the trip was "prophesied over" that she

As the author notes, not all will agree with his cessationist position.³ Yet even charismatics will find this book helpful because it establishes the clear priority of Scripture as the foundation for understanding and following God's will. And non-charismatics will come to see numerous ways in which their decision making reflects charismatic theology—even though they may not have been aware of it.

The recommended process of biblical decision making is summarized by a helpful chart (p. 141) which establishes a “line of freedom” based on the Scriptures. On one side of the line, the decisions of the believer are entirely constrained by Scripture. These are the areas where Scripture speaks directly and which God holds us responsible for learning and obeying. On the other side of the line there is Christian freedom and we can freely make decisions among a variety of choices based upon principles of Scripture, wisdom, and personal desire. The entire decision making process is subject to walking in the Spirit, praying for wisdom and providence, and recognition of God's Sovereignty.

The author is at his best when explaining that there is no *one perfect path* that Christians must strive to identify and fulfill in the plan of God. The distinction between God's sovereign will (which He alone knows and brings to pass) vs. His moral will (which we are responsible to know and obey) frees the believer from the fear of somehow making a godly decision based on Scripture, yet somehow frustrating what God intended. In the realm of His moral will, we have the full freedom to pick among various alternatives without fear so long as we recognize and apply biblical principles. We must believe in the ability of God's providence (which includes our God-given desires) to direct us in these areas of freedom.

would meet her future husband on the trip. From that point on, her trip was a disaster. Everywhere we went she was constantly on the alert wondering if the bellhop, waiter, clerk, etc. might be *that one* which she would eventually marry. When we boarded the airplane for our return flight, she broke down under the realization that this “revelatory gift” had contributed toward great disappointment and could have led to very poor decisions with serious consequences.

- 3 *Cessationism* holds that certain revelatory gifts were primarily given to the fledgling church during the period of her establishment, but ceased some time thereafter (1Cor. 13:8-10). There are three main views as to when these gifts ceased: (1) at the completion of the canon of Scripture—the position of the author (p. 23); (2) with the passing of the original Apostles; (3) when the church reached a level of maturity (1Cor. 13:10).