

As Gods Child

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we're going to turn back to 1 Thessalonians 3. Let me read again verses 11 to 13. Last Sunday and this Sunday, we're doing a short story, a short series with a strange title.

It's called Integrated Decisions. And that title is trying to capture the fact that life is full of decisions. Think of every decision that you made last week.

What you bought, what you ate, who you spoke to, where you went, what emails you replied to, what emails you ignored, what time you went to bed, who you spent time with, who you didn't spend time with.

Now, some of those decisions would have been good decisions. Others may have been quite neutral decisions. But maybe in the past week or maybe further back in your life, there are some decisions that you really regret.

And maybe you wish that you could go back and make a different choice. Our decisions have a huge impact on our lives, both for ourselves and for others.

[1 : 26] And in many ways, our decision-making also has a huge impact on our discipleship as we follow Jesus. And we can maybe even say that maturity as Christians corresponds to our ability to make wise choices.

And that's what I mean when I say that we want our decisions to be integrated. We are recognizing that we're not robots, we're not pre-programmed, we're not controlled by fate.

Instead, God has made us to think for ourselves. He's made us to be thinking, choosing, and deciding creatures. And as we've said last week and re-emphasizing this week, that's an amazing privilege.

It's a profound responsibility. And the key point that we're trying to make in our series is that that decision-making power that we have needs to be in harmony with the rest of reality.

Our decision-making should align with what is real, what is true, and what is right. In other words, our decision-making needs to be integrated with everything that we believe, with everything that's true.

[2 : 37] And as we think about this, we've been using a short summary and a diagram. Our short summary is that integrated decisions involve living under God's rule, in God's world, as God's child.

That's the kind of three things that we're highlighting, and we put it into a diagram. That integrated decisions involve making choices under God's rule, in God's world, and as God's child.

And we're using that diagram to highlight that in terms of our decision-making, there's an upward aspect, we're under God's rule, an outward aspect, we have to apply our decisions to the world around us, and there's an inward aspect.

It affects us as well. And in many ways, that upward, outward, inward corresponds to the question of authority. So in terms of your decision-making, what's the ultimate authority that should shape those decisions?

It thinks about application, how do you actually apply the decisions, how do you apply your choices to the situations that you're in, what impact is it going to have, how does your surroundings affect that, and how are your choices affecting those around you?

[3 : 47] And then inwardly speaks about our own attitude. When we make decisions, why are we doing what we're doing? What kind of person are we becoming through our decisions?

And in decision-making, that upward, outward, inward aspect, all are important, and we're trying to emphasize that all of these need to be integrated.

So last week, we looked at the upward aspect, we were thinking about authority, we were saying that decisions need to be made under God's rule. He's the one who sets the norms. He's the one who defines right and wrong, and as we saw with the children, he is the source of truth and justice

and goodness and all of these other things that overarch our decisions.

Last Sunday evening, we thought about applying decisions as we make these decisions in God's world. We were thinking outwardly, and we were recognizing that our decisions are influenced by the circumstances that we're in, and also the circumstances around us make a big difference as to whether our actions are right and wrong.

So you think of an ambulance driver, an ambulance driver's relationship to the speed limit is very different if he's on duty and going to an emergency, or if he's just on a day off. Circumstances have a huge impact on ethical choices.

[5 : 05] And we recognize that as Christians, in our decision-making, we need to recognize that we're part of a bigger spiritual battle between God's kingdom and the domain of darkness.

We need to recognize that our primary ethical obligation is to love one another, and love does no wrong to our neighbor. But we also recognize that as we apply our decisions to the world around us, what we think about today, what we decide this week, always has to be in light of eternity, of our eschatological situation.

The fact that ultimately, ultimately, ultimately, we will step into eternity, and what we decide now needs to bear that in mind.

So we've looked at the upward, we've looked at the outward. This week, we are focusing on the inward aspect of our decision-making. And as we do that, we want to think about who we are, we want to think about the attitude that lies behind our decision-making, and we are emphasizing that we want to make our decisions as God's children.

And we're going to use 1 Thessalonians 3, 11 to 13, as our guide. We'll also refer back to 1 Corinthians 13, and we're going to whiz through three points. In our decision-making, we need to be motivated by love, established in holiness, and disciplined by self-control.

[6 : 34] So first of all, thinking about this, being motivated by love, the first point to highlight here is that motives are incredibly important in decision-making. So our fears, our desires, our preferences, our frustrations, all of that can have a huge impact on the choices that we make.

And sometimes these motives, these inward motives, will actually have a, they'll override other compelling influences on us. So our bodies might be screaming at us that we need to rest.

And yet, that motivation to impress your boss or to impress your colleagues pushes you on, even though you know that you're exhausted. We might look at Orkney fudge or a chocolate cake, and we're desperate to eat it, but even more so, we're thinking, no, I want to lose weight.

I'm not going to eat it. I'm going to resist that and make my decision on that motive to lose weight.

You might be very aware that it's wrong to cheat at a test in school or wrong to lie in an interview or to kind of twist the truth if there's a discussion or a problem at work.

You might know all of that. You might agree with all of that, but your motivation to be successful results in you doing something even though you know it's wrong. You can think of a thousand more examples.

[7 : 58] The big point is that motives are incredibly powerful. And from a biblical point of view, motives are actually very, very important.

In fact, there's a quote here from a theologian called John Frame who says, Scripture is clear in teaching that a right motive is necessary for a human action to be good.

And that's a really important point that gets emphasized again and again. Jesus himself makes it very clear. He said in Matthew 15, These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

So yeah, outwardly they were doing all the right things, but Jesus said, Their motivation's not there. This isn't genuine at all. It was actually hypocrisy. Same in Matthew 12, You brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you're evil?

For out of the abundance of your heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of the good treasure brings forth good. The evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. He's emphasizing that actually it's from the heart, from the motive that that can determine whether what we do is right or wrong, good or evil.

[9 : 03] And it's also, this emphasis is also captured beautifully in the passage we read from 1 Corinthians 13. Paul says, If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, if I do something utterly miraculous and spectacular, but have not love, just like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And this is a key aspect of what we mean by integrated decisions. When we make a choice, it's not merely an outward act. It's connecting with the depths of our heart. It's tied to the very core of who we really are.

And as Christians, if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, we want all of this to be integrated so that what we want to do and what we choose to do all aligns with who we really are. Now, three things to highlight here that are quite straightforward but they're just worth reflecting on. Number one, we can often do the right thing but with a wrong motive.

We can do the right thing with a wrong motive. It can happen in thousands of ways. A rich nation might go to a poorer nation and offer aid but actually, they just want to control that nation and to gain access to its resources.

[10:13] A company might make a wonderful donation to charity but it's actually just part of their marketing strategy and they just want to attract more customers and get richer. A minister might preach a brilliant sermon but all the time he's just desperate to impress people.

And it can happen in a million other ways as well. And whenever that does happen, the outward positive action is being undermined by a sinful motive.

And all of us fall into that trap and we've got to remember that at one level our motives are never going to be pure until we're in the new creation with Jesus. But at the same time, it's highlighting the fact that we want to be on guard against patterns where we allow unhealthy motives to be cultivated in our hearts.

And that's just a really important thing for us to think through. We want to try and ensure that we don't cultivate a whole pile of unhealthy motives in our hearts.

And you think, well, how do we do that? Well, in many ways the solution is quite simple. We need to remember that God sees our motives. Because God knows the heart and God cares about our heart.

[11:31] And, you know, every Sunday morning we do a brilliant outward thing. Come together in church and that's such a brilliant outward thing to do.

But, but the thing that God's really interested in is your heart. And that's why when Jesus speaks about worshipping in spirit and in truth, that's what he means.

He's saying your worship's not just an outward thing, it's actually it's from your spirit, from your heart, from your very inside, you're worshipping. And that's why, you know, I mean, like take an example of singing.

You might have a terrible singing voice. You might be like a foghorn like I am. It actually doesn't matter at all. Because it's your heart that's singing and rejoicing to Jesus.

And that's what he looks at. So, it's good to remember we think about well, how do we cultivate good motives? Well, just remember that God knows them. God sees them. And so, if you're struggling with unhealthy motives in any part of your life, well, just talk to him about it.

[12:39] Pray about it and say, Lord, I am struggling with this. We can easily do the right thing with a wrong motive. Second point is that the opposite's true. We can do the wrong thing with a right motive.

And that happens very, very easily. So, you might share a prayer point with somebody and you actually then disclose confidential information in the process that you didn't mean to.

You might make a joke that is intending with the motive of making people laugh, you actually cause offense. And sometimes, and maybe this is a trap that grandparents fall into, you give too many chocolates and treats to a child because you want to be good to them, but you're actually, well, it's actually too much and it's unhealthy for them.

Now, all these are examples of doing the wrong thing with the right motive. It happens in a thousand ways. Now, when that happens, it's important to recognize that it reduces the wrongness of the wrong. So, the wrong thing with the right motive, it reduces the wrongness of the wrong in the sense that it's far worse to do the wrong thing with a bad motive than it is to do the wrong thing with a good motive.

That's definitely the case. But, we also got to remember that it doesn't actually make the action right. And so, motives are very important, but they're not the only factor in determining something.

[13:56] And so, you know, we can do the wrong thing with the right motive. It's still the wrong thing and it's important to recognize that. Our aim is that we do the right thing with the right motives.

That's an integrated decision. That's what we want for the two to go hand in hand. And that takes us to the third point, that in order for that to happen, in order for the right decisions to be made with the right motives, we must remember that our goal is that in every decision we make, the primary motive should be love.

We see this in 1 Thessalonians 13, that Paul prays that they would abound in love for one another. You see it emphasized going into chapter 4, that Paul again highlights that importance of loving one another and of course it's captured so beautifully in the chapter that we read in 1 Corinthians 13. Now, it's so crucial to think about this a little bit more because when you look at something like 1 Corinthians 13, when you look at the commandments to love one another that are everywhere in the New Testament, you think, it sounds so idealistic, it almost sounds impossible.

But the truth is, this is a Christian basic. This is the basics of Christian living.

[15:26] And sometimes, you know, we can get things really, really muddled up. And yes, there's lots of important things that we need to get right.

And so right now, you know, you can see when you came in, our kitchen door is being moved because we need to comply with appropriate regulations for access.

We made a mistake when we were putting the kitchen door and so we have to change the, move the door, reconfigure it, everything. All that's fine, all that's important. If we don't change that door, we break the law.

And so we're breaking, we're changing the law. We're changing the door to keep the law. But that's important, but I think God is saying, I don't really care about your kitchen door. I just care that you love one another.

Now, obviously, there's a sense in which, you know, having the right door is an aspect of loving each other, but you know what I mean. It's the, this is the basic, this is the absolute basic of Christian living that we love God and love one another and that should be the core motivation of every decision that we take.

[16:37] And yet it's, although it's basic, it's so hard because we so easily love other things and our desires are misplaced and our loves are disordered and we can make all sorts of bad decisions.

And you think, well, how do we do that? If this is basic, Thomas, how do I do it? Well, one of the key things you need to do is to remember that every time you look inward, you're looking at God's child. So if you are a Christian, if you become a Christian, every time you make a decision, you make that decision as God's child.

And that means, first and foremost, that He loves you and He is totally committed to you as your Father. But it also means that we want our decisions to be integrated with that, to be made out of a response of love and thanksgiving towards our perfect Father in Heaven.

And it also means that we want to be motivated by the fact that if we are God's child, the people around us are His children too. They either already are His children or they are potentially His children and we are to love them as well.

[17:44] And so for all the decisions that we make this week, a good question to ask is, who is getting loved by this decision? Who is getting loved in this decision?

It's a good question for us to ask because our goal as God's children is that our decisions are motivated by love. We also want to be established in holiness.

Paul uses a beautiful phrase in verse 13, that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father.

That word establish basically means to set something up so that it will last, so that it will be stable, strong, and secure. God wants to set up our hearts in holiness and all of that is preparing for our eternity with the Lord and with His people.

And this is pointing us to the fact that the gospel brings within us internal renewal and transformation. and that's so, so important to recognize that when somebody becomes a Christian, please forgive the stickman drawing, there's a change in their heart.

[18:56] We call that regeneration. We call it being born again. There's a change in our hearts and it enables us to see our sin, to see Jesus and to trust in Him.

There's this change that takes place when we are converted, but then that leads on to a progressive change that we call sanctification, whereby we grow and grow and grow in holiness.

In other words, we become more and more like Jesus. And that's a gradual process. There's lots of ups and downs, struggles, failures, mistakes, but God uses all of these to help us grow in our faith,

to help us to become more and more like Jesus.

As Christians, we're being transformed day by day by His grace. And that should shape our decision-making. And as we've said, in many ways, discipleship is about the restoration of our decision-making.

Discipleship is about the restoration of our decision-making. Maturity as a Christian is demonstrated in wise decisions. And that's been emphasized for us here.

[20 : 07] It's highlighted again in Thessalonians 4. God's called us not for impurity, but for holiness. And the big thing here is that we want the gospel to shape every single aspect of who we are.

The Bible uses various concepts to describe who we are as people, and often these are carried forward into contemporary psychology and anthropology. We are made up within us of lots of different components.

We've got a conscience that is our sense of right and wrong. We've had experiences that shape our personalities. We have a reasoning where we try to figure things out and understand them.

We've got our will where we make choices. We've got our imagination where we can picture things before they've come. We've got our emotions, which is all the stuff that we feel. All of these unite together to make us the person that we are.

All of these affect our decision-making. And the big point is that in all of these areas of your life, you've got a conscience, experience, reasoning, will, imagination, emotions, you've got them all.

[21 : 14] In all of these things, you are God's child. And the big point I'm trying to emphasize here is that we don't separate all of this stuff off.

So we don't sort of think to ourselves, well, I've experienced a conversion or something, but actually when I make choices I don't really think about it.

Or we think to ourselves, well, I can reason that I understand the gospel, but I don't feel the way I should.

And we can sometimes separate these things so that these are all kind of in conflict with each other. It shouldn't be like that. Instead, all of these should be shaped by the fact that if we are trusting in Jesus, if you have trust in Jesus, if you put your trust in Jesus, you are God's child.

In your whole person, you are a whole child of God. And so we want that to shape our decision-making. So we want our sense of right and wrong to be directed by our Father in Heaven.

[22 : 26] We want all our experiences to be recognized that He is guiding us, looking after us, and using those experiences for our good. In our reasoning, trying to figure out what's going on in our lives, we recognize that this is God's world and all order and coherence comes from Him.

In our choices, we want to obey Him. In our imagination, we picture the things that God might have for us in His purposes and in our emotions. We want to cultivate love and joy and affection towards the God who has loved us so, so much.

And it's all coming us back to the fact that as you look at yourself, you are God's child. Now, what that means is that every time we make a bad decision as Christians, we are not being true to who we really are.

In secular thinking today, there's a lot of emphasis on things like self-actualization, self-realization, self-fulfillment, self-enhancement, self-satisfaction, being true to yourself.

And at one level, we can see difficulties with that thinking because it can make people inherently selfish and it can lead to people not being able to live with each other because one person's priorities are incompatible with another person's.

[23 : 53] So there's lots of difficulties with that kind of thinking. But at another level, we completely agree with it. We completely agree with actualization, realization, fulfillment, satisfaction.

We agree with all of that. We just have a completely different definition of self. Because in the gospel, we have a far higher definition of self.

Your true self is that you're a child of God. And as we look inward, we want to see that. We want to be established in holiness in all of these ways for God's influence on our lives to extend more and more.

Last of all, we want to be disciplined by self-control. This is an area of decision-making that's easy to neglect and in many areas of our society, it's viewed negatively.

But scripture is very clear that one of the key traits that should shape our decision-making is self-control. You see that in Thessalonians 4 here, speaking about self-control in the context of sexual immorality.

[25 : 00] And that's, of course, an area where a lack of self-control can be devastating. But the principle applies more widely and scripture makes it absolutely clear that self-control is a key virtue in a biblical ethic.

God wants us to be characterized as people who exercise self-control. And this is where the Bible is completely happy to go against the tide of what culture around us is saying.

Because around us we'll hear voices that say, enjoy yourself, be true to yourself, express yourself, fulfill yourself. The Bible says, control yourself. And that's so wise and so important.

We are only ever one bad decision away from a huge mistake. Self-control guards us against that. Now, there's two big misunderstandings that can potentially arise here.

The first is that this is absolutely not saying that God wants to restrict or hinder or dampen your life. God's purposes for humanity is that we would thrive as we glorify and enjoy Him.

[26 : 10] So self-control is not about accepting a rubbish life. It's actually about protecting us from so many things that will ruin our lives.

And God wants us to exercise self-control. God gives us a whole ton of ethical instructions. Why?

Because He wants to protect you. Why does He want to protect you? Because you're His child.

Now, as a father myself, I can think of hundreds of reasons why I would say to my children, don't do this.

Don't go there. Don't think like that. Don't speak like that. Don't start that. Don't neglect that. I can say don't for a thousand different contexts always for the same reason.

because I love my children. And every one of you, you know that's true. Not just as parents but for family members in every other way.

[27 : 12] If that's true of us, how much more is it true of God? God is not trying to ruin our lives.

He's trying to protect us. The second big misunderstanding is probably more important for us to recognize because when we realize that we have made bad decisions, we can immediately think I'm done.

it's too late. I've blown it with God. He's had enough of me. But that's never true and it's never going to happen.

Why? Because you're his child and he's never going to turn his back on you. So in all of this, we want to think about having integrated decisions and as we bring this little mini-series to a conclusion, we need to remember that we have to look upward, think about God's rule in our lives, ask the question, who has ultimate authority in our lives?

We need to look outward, thinking about how we apply the gospel to the situations we face. We need to look inwardly, thinking about our own attitude. attitude. We want our decisions to be made under God's rule in God's world as God's children.

And all of this is just reminding us of something that's so, so crucial. God just wants to give us a lifestyle and a pattern of behavior that's so coherent, balanced, wise, and so, and for the people around us.

[28 : 46] This is what the gospel is calling us to, a life of integrated decisions. And all of it starts over here with the most important decision of all, and that's the decision to follow Jesus.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we pray that in every part of our lives the truth of the gospel would shape all that we are and all that we do.

We pray that we would look upward to you and follow all that you teach and command. We pray that we would look outward and apply the principles of the gospel to our lives with wisdom.

Help us to have that discernment that applies your truth, your unchanging truth, to the ever-changing circumstances that we live in. And help us to look inward and to recognize that you have made us your children and may that truth shape all of our motives and all of our decisions.

And we pray that for every one of us here, and especially for any who have maybe not yet put their trust in you, that they would hear your call to follow you and to make that most important decision of all.

[30 : 05] Amen. We're going to conclude with Psalm 116 and we're singing verses 1 to 9. These words are amazing because they express thanksgiving to God that he's heard our voice and responded to our cry for aid, but they also culminate in words of commitment from us to God as we seek to live for him in every part of our lives.

So Ken will lead us and we'll stand and sing together. Amen. I love the Lord because he heard my voice.

He listened when I cry to him for aid. I'll call on him as long as I shall live because he turned to hear me when I pray.

The force of death I was overcome and wish of the grave With grief and trouble I was overcome and on the name of God I called Lord, say the Lord, say the Lord, our God is kind and full of grace both righteous and compassionate and the Lord the Lord protects all those of childlike faith

When I was in great need he rescued me rest rest O my soul God has been good to you for you O Lord how saved my soul from death my feet from some way and my eyes from tears that I may live for you while I have breath As you step into a new week together may the grace of our Lord

[33 : 30] Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all and all God's people say Amen Thank you so so much for being here this morning We've got tea and coffee from the hatch as always so please stay behind and we'd love to get the chance to chat Have a lovely afternoon and church tonight is at six if you're able to come Thank you