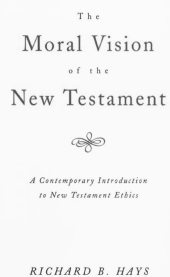


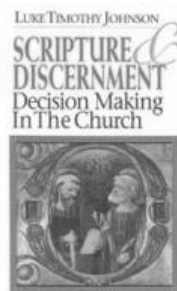
Scripturally Speaking
Using Scripture for Decision Making and
Discernment in the Church

Mark Vitalis Hoffman
Theological Ethics


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Richard B. Hays
The Moral Vision of the
New Testament:
A Contemporary Introduction to
New Testament Ethics



Luke Timothy Johnson
Scripture and Discernment:
Decision Making in the Church



Paul Jersild
Spirit Ethics: Scripture and
the Moral Life

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SESSION 1

“How do you read?”
The Ways That We Use Scripture

Why is this issue important?

Reaching decision in the church should be an articulation of faith.

Luke T. Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*

As a Christian, reaching decision should be an articulation of faith.

What are 'safe' topics people can talk about?

- ◆ Weather
- ◆ Sports
- ◆ Family
- ◆ Work
- ◆ Person's health / weight (?)
- ◆ Fashion: clothes, hair, body piercing (?)

What makes these topics 'safe'?

What are controversial topics?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sexual issues: premarital, homosexuality, same-sex marriage• Abortion, genetics• Religion: prayer, creationism, end time issues, salvation, other religions• Politics• Values | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Euthanasia / Assisted suicide• Financial issues: inequality, taxes• Justice issues: death penalty, immigration, wars, economic injustice, labor• Gambling• Racism• Gun control |
|---|---|

Controversial topics

Which of these are:

- Political issues?
- Social issues?
- Personal issues?
- Religious issues?

It is my contention that all such controversial issues have political, social, personal, and (especially to Christians) religious dimensions.

What is needed if useful discussions are to occur?

Some ground rules...

What is needed if useful discussions are to occur?

- A commitment to the process of the discussion
- An openness to listen and perhaps have one's mind changed
- Sufficient information about and understanding of the situation
- Some shared basis of agreement upon which to build

How do we make decisions about controversial issues?

We are likely to argue for a position by appealing to:

- Scripture

How do we use Scripture?

How is the Bible like or unlike the following?

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| book of proofs | law book |
| story/novel | book of prophecy |
| owner's manual | TV Guide |
| science textbook | newspaper |

How do we use Scripture?

We need to be aware of the following concerns when we appeal to Scripture:

- What texts are used or not? What is our "canon within the canon"?
- How do we deal with texts that are in tension with each other?
- What biases do we bring to the text?
- How do we handle the differences between the Old and New Testaments?

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"How do you read?"

"How do you read?" Luke 10.25-29

And now a certain lawyer stood up to test Jesus, saying,

"By doing what things will I inherit eternal life?"

And he said to him,

"What is written in the law? How do you read?"

"How do you read?" Luke 10.25-29

And answering, he said,

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

And he said to him,

"You have answered correctly. Be doing this, and you will live."

“How do you read?”
Luke 10.25-29

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus,
“And who is my neighbor?”

>> The Parable of the “Good Samaritan”

How do we make decisions
about controversial issues?

We are likely to argue for a position by
appealing to:

- Scripture
- Laws
- Traditions
- Experience
- Reason and Science
- Values (*cultural, family, American, Christian, etc.*)

**How do we use Scripture to
make decisions?**

In the example of discussing the death
penalty, Scripture might be cited as:

- Moral law (*Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed.*)
- Principles / ideals (*Love one another*)
- Analogy (*Cain and Abel*)
- Analysis of world / humankind (*Live by sword, die by sword*)
- Understanding of God (*God is love*)

**The Process of Developing
a Christian Ethics**

- The Descriptive Task
Reading the texts carefully
- The Synthetic Task
Placing the texts in canonical context
- *The Communal Task*
Discussing the texts within the faith community
- The Hermeneutical Task
Relating the texts to our situation
- The Pragmatic Task
Living the texts

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*

Test Case Questions

For each of the test cases, ask these
questions:

- What exactly is the problem?
- What factors shape the understanding of what is right or necessary?
- How is the decision made?
- What is the decision, and why is it made?
- How does this apply to us?

Test Cases

- 1 Corinthians 8.1-13
- 1 Corinthians 5.1-5
- Acts 1.15-26
- Acts 6.1-6

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³ but anyone who loves God is known by him. ⁴ Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." ⁵ Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth-- as in fact there are many gods and many lords-- ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

⁷ It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

⁹ But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. ¹² But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

- What is problem:
- Factors:
- How decision made:
- What and why:
- Application:

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

- What is problem:
Can Christians eat food sacrificed to idols?
- Factors:
- How decision made:
- What and why:
- Application:

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

- What is problem:
Can Christians eat food sacrificed to idols?
- Factors:
Love of God > knowledge; concern for weak
- How decision made:
- What and why:
- Application:

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

- What is problem:
Can Christians eat food sacrificed to idols?
- Factors:
Love of God > knowledge; concern for weak
- How decision made:
No explicit decision made, but...
- What and why:
- Application:

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

- What is problem:
Can Christians eat food sacrificed to idols?
- Factors:
Love of God > knowledge; concern for weak
- How decision made:
No explicit decision made, but...
- What and why:
Paul's not eating implies they not; concern that weak not fall nor sinned against; do not sin against Christ
- Application:

1 Corinthians 8.1-13

- What is problem:
Can Christians eat food sacrificed to idols?
- Factors:
Love of God > knowledge; concern for weak
- How decision made:
No explicit decision made, but...
- What and why:
Paul's not eating implies they not; concern that weak not fall nor sinned against; do not sin against Christ
- Application:
Lead by example; love of God and concern for weak

1 Corinthians 8.1-13 continued

OBSERVATIONS

- ♦ Paul provides something of an intellectual treatise, but ultimately it is not the key factor. Just because everyone should know better does not make it best.
- ♦ Paul does not appeal to the Church decision of Acts 15.29
- ♦ Paul does not make explicit command here but does in 1 Corinthians 10.21: "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons."
- ♦ Personal decisions have Church-wide implications

1 Corinthians 5.1-5

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you? ³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment ⁴ in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 5.1-5

- What is problem:
man is living with his father's wife
- Factors:
Old Testament law; social mores
- How decision made:
Top down: Paul independently acts in the name of JC
- What and why:
Remove offending party >>> so that his spirit may be saved
- Application:
Communal responsibility to the individual and how that works
Confronting people with their behavior

- What is problem:
- Factors:
- How decision made:
- What and why:
- Application:

Acts 1.15-26

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, ¹⁶ "Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus-- ¹⁷ for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

Acts 1.15-26

¹⁹ This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it'; and 'Let another take his position of overseer.' ²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us-- one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection."

Acts 1.15-26

²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Acts 1.15-26

- **What is problem:**
One disciple short due to Judas
- **Factors:**
Tradition (need 12); Scripture fulfilled; Qualifications
- **How decision made:**
Identification of problem, nominations, prayer, casting lots
- **What and why:**
Matthias by lots
- **Application:**
Pay attention to history and tradition; role of Spirit; answer to prayer; group process

- What is problem:
- Factors:
- How decision made:
- What and why:
- Application:

Acts 6.1-6

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables.

Acts 6.1-6

³ Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴ while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." ⁵ What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Acts 6.1-6

- **What is problem:**

Hellenist widows neglected

- **Factors:**

Concern for widows in need and preaching the Word

- **How decision made:**

Executive decision (by apostles) and delegation: Church approved and selected and defined qualifications

- **What and why:**

7 selected; both needs served; symbolic transmission of authority (blessing for ministry and mission)

- **Application:**

Recognition of various gifts; sharing for sake of M&M, role of leadership

- What is problem:
- Factors:
- How decision made:
- What and why:
- Application:

General Observations

- Acknowledgment of personal responsibility but also implications for the Church
- Role of leaders in guiding, making, enacting, and modeling decisions
- Role of group in being discerning and approving
- Appeals made to:
 - Scripture (with interpretation)
 - Knowledge and Experience
 - Cultural norms
 - Principles
- Key principals are:
 - Love of God
 - A concern for the "weak"
 - That the Church is an expression of Christ

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