

Shall I, For Fear of Feeble Man*Johann Joseph Winkler (1670–1722); tr. John Wesley (1703–1791)*

Shall I, for fear of feeble man,
 The Spirit's course in me restrain?
 Or undismayed in deed and word,
 Be a true witness for the Lord?

Awed by a mortal's frown, shall I
 Conceal the Word of God Most High?
 How then before Thee shall I dare
 To stand, or how Thy anger bear?

Shall I, to soothe th'unholy throng,
 Soften Thy truths and smooth my tongue?
 To gain earth's gilded toys, or flee
 The cross endured, my God, by Thee?

The love of Christ doth me constrain
 To seek the wandering souls of men;
 With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,
 To snatch them from the fiery wave.

My life, my blood, I here present,
 If for Thy truth they may be spent:
 Fulfill Thy sovereign counsel, Lord!
 Thy will be done, Thy name adored!

Give of Thy strength, O God of pow'r!
 Then let winds blow, or thunders roar,
 Thy faithful witness will I be:
 'Tis fixed! I can do all through Thee!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Knowing God's Will: Part Six***Kevin T. Bauder*

God knows exactly those choices that will bring the greatest good into your life. Perhaps those are not the choices that will result in the greatest *apparent* good, especially in the short term—I'll have more to say about that in a future essay. But God knows who He wants you to be, and He knows which choices will bring you to that goal.

To deny that God is able to lead you in making those choices would be pointless. God promises that if we trust in the Lord and acknowledge Him, He will direct our paths (Prov. 3:6). In the Bible, He often directed His people through special revelation. Of course, He still directs us through the revelation that is recorded in Scripture, but there is no particular reason to think that He cannot direct us in other ways as well.

One of the ways in which God leads us to the right choices is through godly counsel. What Proverbs 11:14 posits of nations is also true of individuals: without guidance one is in danger, but deliverance is found in the abundance of counselors. While we may not always seek counsel for ordinary, mundane choices—whether we should wear the blue socks or the black ones—God wishes us to ask for counsel about the important ones.

Of course, if we want to get any help from counsel, we need to seek wise and careful counselors. Bad counsel can lead us seriously astray, as it did with Rehoboam (1 Ki. 12:1-23). Confronted by the people with his excesses, he accepted the counsel of foolish young men rather than wise older ones. That counsel brought disaster into his life. We should not expect to receive good counsel from people who are only going to tell us what we want to hear.

In some churches, people are told never to make a major decision without asking their pastor for counsel. When they go to their pastor for counsel, he listens to them describe their choices. He then pronounces God's will for their lives. A very high percentage of the time, God's will turns out to be the decision that is best for his ministry or even for him personally.

Still, the principle is a sound one. If a pastor knows his people, his God, and his Bible, he ought to be in a position to offer sound counsel. Pastoral coun-



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sel, however, rarely involves telling people what they ought to do. The only appropriate time for that is when a clear biblical requirement is at stake. Otherwise, a pastor's main responsibility is to help people think through the decisions that they must make. He will guide them through the various considerations (including biblical principles) that ought to inform their decision. He will point out any circumstances that should affect their choice. He will help people to understand any personal giftedness, abilities, and proclivities that might shape the decision. In short, he will play a supporting role, assisting people to exercise wisely their prerogatives as believer-priests before the Lord.

What is true of pastoral counsel should be true of other counsel as well. Counsel does not usually consist in telling other people what to do. Only very immature people need or want to have decisions handed to them. Mature people should choose for themselves, and they should exercise sound judgment in their choices. Offering counsel is a matter of helping them to be sure that they have weighed every necessary consideration before making their choice.

For married people, husbands or wives are often best equipped to offer this kind of counsel. Our spouses know us like no one else does. Usually, they also understand our choices in greater detail than any other. Here I can speak from experience: my wife is my wisest counselor. Her insights have spared me from trouble on many occasions. I would not dream of making a major decision without discussing it with her first. Furthermore, I would not make a decision that she was convinced was wrong. When it comes to the home-shaping choices of our household, I take the responsibility for the final choice, but the process of making that decision is shared.

For a wife to share in making household decisions is no violation of marital submission (Eph. 5:22-24, 33). Rather, it is the implementation of that love which husbands owe to their wives (Eph. 5:25-33). Even a very deferential wife needs to be involved in the decisions that affect her future, and a loving husband will see to it that she is. A husband who fails to solicit his wife's counsel, or who neglects or ignores it when it is offered, is simply a fool.

Besides spouses, parents are often among the best counselors. Even unbelieving parents can sometimes offer surprising insight into the decisions that their grown children must make. Parents who know the Lord and the Bible are some of the best counselors in the world. In any event, seeking parental counsel is part of honoring one's father and mother (Eph. 6:2-3). At more than sixty years of age, I still seek parental counsel before making most major decisions. My parents are wise people, and I want to take advantage of their insight as long as I can.

True friends also make wonderful counselors. A true friend is one who will be willing to wound you when necessary (Prov. 27:5). Like pastors, spouses,

and parents, friends cannot counsel by making decisions for you. What they can do is to make sure you've examined every legitimate factor that ought to affect your decision. They can point out any considerations that you may have neglected. They can talk with you, pray for you, and help you to weigh the various elements that affect your decision.

On rare occasions we may be confronted with decisions that must be made in isolation. Under normal circumstances, however, we ought to surround ourselves with as many wise counselors as we can. We should talk to them freely, hear them fully, and weigh their counsel carefully. Our counselors cannot take responsibility for our decisions, but they can help us to find God's leading.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
