



Bits of Hope from 03-19-06

Pastor Cynthia L. Hale

Acts 9: 1-18

Life as we know it, is a series of decisions that must be made. There are minor and major decisions that we must make. Any decision can be disastrous if it is the wrong one. Don't you wish we could make the right decisions all of the time? Holding on to traditional ways of thinking can cause us to make the wrong choice. Persons of any age can get into a mess following the crowd and making the wrong choices. As humans, we are finite in our knowledge and understanding. We only have knowledge of the past and the present. But there is One who has knowledge of the future. He sees the end before the beginning Isa 46:9. God loves us and wants the best for us. He stands on the other side of our decision and wants to lead us in the right way all of the time.

The Lord speaks to us in a myriad of ways. We desperately need his guidance. Many of the decisions we make are not black and white. They are like twilight. In his Word, God gives us precepts and principles. Precepts are nonnegotiable. Principles are guidelines to help us make the decisions that are not black and white. They help us to find clarity Ps 119:105. We never have to be in the dark when it comes to God's will for our lives. In addition to the Word, he directs us by the wise counsel of others. He also uses the circumstances and situations of our lives to help guide us.

When you are a son or daughter of God, He speaks to you by His Spirit. If we would only listen to the Holy Ghost, He will give us direction. God speaks to us through prayer: Jer 33:3. God also speaks through fasting. "Fasting helps us focus on choices rather than food" -Elmer Towns. When we fast the way God tells us to fast, then God breaks through our consciousness like a light Isa 58:8.

When we first meet Paul, he is a young Jewish Pharisee named Saul. He is participating in the death of Steven by holding the coats of the persons who are stoning him. Saul was off base with his religious beliefs. He thought God only cared about the Jews and saw it as his mission to arrest and persecute the People of the Way. One day, Saul had an encounter that turned his life around. Some of you have had this experience. You were traveling on the wrong road, going the wrong way, with the wrong thoughts going on in your head, but God turned you around. God reads hearts and He knows everything there is to know about you. He knows all of the things that you are struggling with at this moment. Just like some of us, there was only one who could turn Saul around. It was Jesus.

After he picked himself up off the ground, he fasted and prayed. God spoke to him and gave him a revelation that set the foundation for most of the New Testament in his heart. God gave him a whole new direction for his life. Saul became Paul. The persecutor became the preacher. The hater of Christians became the lover of Christians. When you fast and pray, God will give you divine direction. To hear from him you must:

1. **Make time to listen to Jesus' voice.** You need to go somewhere and get quiet Ps 46:10. Turn off the television and radio. Turn off the telephone. Saul heard the voice of Jesus and fell to the ground. He took time to meditate and reflect on what happened to him. God wants to tell us what is on his heart.

2. **Be open to self-examination:** fasting reveals some things to us. The more time you spend in God's presence, the more you will see yourself as you really are. Sometimes we think we are on God's side, when we really aren't. God asked Adam, "Where are you?" God wasn't looking for Adam; he wanted Adam to look at himself. When we fast we need to listen to the questions God raises. Allow God to search your heart the way David asked God to search his heart in Ps. 139:33-34. After God asked Paul a question, Paul asked God a question, "Who are you Lord?"
3. **We must recognize objective truth.** As we approach decisions, we may be confused. Fasting will revolutionize your thinking. Paul was stunned when he realized the answer to his question was the One he had been persecuting. We make the mistakes that we make, because we are making decisions based on subjective truth. We are looking for objective truth. Jesus Christ is the son of the living God: that is objective truth. We have to be careful because we often justify our decisions without basing them on the facts. The more we consider the facts and look into the word of God and into the heart of God, the more we can determine that what we thought was right was wrong.
4. **When you fast, cease all self-effort and submit.** Gather all of the facts. Get as much information as you possibly can. Examine the facts, then, submit all of it to God and wait on God's answer. You have gone as far as you can go in this situation. You have to be yielded.
5. **Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you:** That's his job John 14:25-27. The Holy Spirit will teach you primarily through the Word of God. If you are studying the word on a continuous basis, He will order your day.
6. **Obey what you hear.** James 1:22. The Lord told Paul to go into the city to the street called straight. Saul did what he was told. Once God gives instruction, you have to act on it immediately. You can trust God's voice Prov. 3:5-6.
7. **Be willing to be patient.** God sometimes gives progressive revelation and information. God told Saul to go to the house on Straight Street and he would receive further instruction there. If Saul had never gone to that house, he would not have received further instruction. God has so much more for us if we would just follow simple instruction. How difficult is it to come out of your pity party and trust God? How difficult is it to stop eating after 6:00pm? When you are willing to do the simple things God will move further.
8. **Be open to the wisdom of others.** God can use other people. God can use a stranger to give you revelation knowledge. Paul had seen a vision of Ananias laying hands on him. God sent Ananias to lay hands in Saul and the rest of the scales fell from his eyes. God will give you holy and healthy direction if you will trust Him.

Peace.

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 The Ray of Hope Christian Church
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