

The Folly Of Indecision In Matters Of Religion.

Text: Acts 5:34-42

Suggested Hymns:

507, 597, 615, 377, 335

1) Reasons Given For Indecision In Matters Of Religion
Are Not Valid

2) Reasons Given For indecision In Matters Of Religion
Are Not Honest

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Acts 5:34-42, ³⁴ *Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while.*

³⁵ *And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. ³⁶ "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. ³⁷ "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.*

³⁸ *"And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; ³⁹ "but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it -- lest you even be found to fight against God."*

⁴⁰ *And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A great failing of many people is indecision, the inability to make up one's mind on one side or the other of a matter demanding a decision.

It is pitiful to hear some one constantly saying, “*I don’t know what to do.*” We admire a firm mind which can balance arguments and feelings and then resolutely make a decision. The story of the progress of civilisation is to a great degree the story of men and women of prompt decision and action. A properly formed decision often determines the destiny.

Napoleon once said, “*In any battle there is a crisis, ten or fifteen minutes only, on which the outcome depends. To make proper use of this short space of time means victory; its neglect, defeat.*”

But harmful as indecision in human affairs often is, it is more positively disastrous in matters of religion because much more is at stake than simply a victory in battle or success in a business venture.

Everlasting happiness in the bright mansions of heaven is placed in jeopardy by the sinner who hesitates to embrace the opportunities offered to him in the Gospel of Jesus. Indecision is what keeps a person from opening his heart to the message of forgiveness. Indecision in matters of religion is folly and the a most dangerous kind.

Let us consider *The Folly of Indecision in Matters of Religion*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Reasons Given For Indecision In Matters Of Religion Are Not Valid

It was now the second time that Peter has been arrested, and with him one or more of the other apostles, because they openly disobeyed the command of the Council who *commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*.¹

But stone walls and armed guards mean nothing when God has work for His servants to perform, and the next morning finds them in the Temple teaching the people, after having been miraculously freed from the dungeon.

We read of this account in Acts 5:17-21, ¹⁷ *Then the high priest rose up, ... and they were filled with indignation,* ¹⁸ *and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.*

¹⁹ *But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,* ²⁰ *“Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the*

words of this life.” ²¹ *And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught.*

²² *But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,* ²³ *saying, “Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!” ...* ²⁵ *So one came and told them, saying, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!”*

²⁶ *Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.* ²⁷ *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,* ²⁸ *saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!”*

Then just as on a previous occasion,² Peter’s raised his voice in a courageous defence of his own and the other apostles’ actions. *Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.* ³⁰ *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹ “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² “And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”³*

But neither the miracle of their escape from prison, nor the eloquence of Peter had any effect on the members of the Council except to rouse them to still greater fury, as we read in Acts 5:33, ³³ *When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.*

There was, however, one exception to the cry for the apostles’ blood, the Pharisee Gamaliel, an important figure in Jerusalem, and the teacher of St. Paul.⁴ He is calm, cautious, calculating, and has different advice to offer, and his reputation for wisdom causes his advice to prevail over that of his more hot-headed colleagues.

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³⁸ *“And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; ³⁹ “but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it -- lest you even be found to fight against God.”*

He argues against taking a positive stand on the new religion by prosecution of its followers because it might be of God. If the movement is not of God, it will soon die of its own accord. If it is a revolt against the established authority, the iron hand of Rome will crush it, like other uprisings, which were almost constantly occurring in various parts of Palestine. But if the almighty God is behind it, then we certainly do not want to find ourselves set against divine power.

All this seemed wise and prudent; yet the renowned Gamaliel, in recommending indecision in this important matter, was guilty of the greatest folly. His reasons given for suspending judgment seem reasonable, but are unsound.

Certainly he was right in his assertion that it would be useless to fight against God.⁵ But he was altogether wrong in wanting to wait and to see the outcome of the agitation that was filling Jerusalem as a result of the apostles' preaching, before deciding on a course of action. He was wrong in wanting to make outward success the criteria of the truth.

Certainly it is true, *Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.*⁶ But a thing is not necessarily true because multitudes profess to believe it.

About one quarter of earth's inhabitants are adherents of Islam, the religion of Mohammed, founded on lie and error, and not even Christianity has ever enjoyed such a rapid spread. Would it not be folly to argue from this fact that *“Allah is God, and Mohammed is His prophet”*? On the contrary, Jesus distinctly calls His Church a *“little flock”* in Luke 12:32.

The growth of the Church has been seriously hampered by foolish indecision on the part of those to whom God in His mercy sent the Gospel of His Son. You would think that the story of atonement and redemption, the sweetest story ever told, would be welcomed with joy and enthusiasm wherever it is proclaimed. But many a person, on hearing it, has hesitated.

The message is so strange, so amazingly different from what human reason offers as a solution to the problem of appeasing offended divine justice. The sin-burdened soul finds it hard to believe and is prevented from joyfully accepting the offered treasures by the thoughts - it is too wonderful to believe; or, it is unreasonable. The sinner makes the mistake of judging the workings of infinite wisdom by the yardstick of finite human reason. We read in 1 Corinthians 1:25 that *the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Or a person may notice that most of those to whom the Gospel-message is brought reject it, and among them he finds many people with a reputation for wisdom and learning. Surely, he thinks, that these people know much more about the matter than I do; and if they will have nothing to do with Jesus as their Saviour, that is reason enough for me to hesitate. They can't all be wrong, surely!

A permanent cure for indecision caused by people blindly following others can be found in 1 Corinthians 1:26-27, ²⁶ *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.*

We also read in Luke 10:21, ²¹ *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes.*

Perhaps the most common excuse for indecision in religious matters is the excuse *"I don't have any time just now."* This is not new, as we read in Acts 24:25, ²⁵ *Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."*

If you received news that a wealthy relative of yours had left you a fortune, you wouldn't say: I haven't time just now to investigate, but I will look into the matter next month or next year. Yet by your indecision you are risking the loss of that which is worth infinitely more to you than all the gold in Ophir.⁷

Scripture says in Hebrews 3:7-8, ⁷ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness.* — What folly! Hell will be filled with those people who could not make up their mind and all through life *"falter between two opinions"*⁸ until it was too late. There is a song with the words, *"the road to hell is paved with good intentions."*

If there is any one with a divided mind, let him examine carefully in the light of the Word of God anything that seems to be keeping him from believing in the Saviour. Let him discuss the matter with any earnest Christian, and he will find that the reasons seeming to warrant his indecision are simply not valid.

2. Reasons Given For indecision In Matters Of Religion Are Not Honest

Look again at Gamaliel and the members of the Council, who agreed with him to wait and see if this thing is of God. Why did they need more evidence than was already at hand? Surely, they had not remained ignorant of the remarkable life of Jesus of Nazareth, for His fame had gone out into Judea and Galilee and even beyond.

Time and again Jesus had shown by signs, miracles and wonders that *"in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."*⁹ These learned men were well acquainted with the prophecies of the Old Testament and had seen how one detail after another of these had been fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus.

They had before them the recent stirring events of Easter morning and the miracles of Pentecost. What more could they have desired? Should they not have said, and this time without hypocrisy, *"What further need do we have of witnesses?"*¹⁰ This is the work of God.

They were not honest, and they at once proceeded to show that their seeming indecision was in reality deep-rooted opposition to Christ and His apostles because after voting to accept the advice of Gamaliel, they had the prisoners

beaten, and then *they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.* Certainly a strange way of waiting to see whether the work be of men or of God!

Jesus had solemnly declared in Matthew 12:30 that ³⁰ *“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.* Accordingly, all mankind may be divided into two classes, those on the side of the Gospel and those opposed to it.

In a conflict between two nations it is possible for a third country to remain neutral, but in the conflict between the Church of Christ and the unbelieving world every one must take a stand.

Indecision, perhaps calling itself *“honest doubt,”* is really opposition to the cause of Christ. Not only those who openly oppose the preaching of salvation, as did the leaders of the Jews at the time of Christ and the apostles, but also those who feel they have all sorts of reasons for remaining “neutral,” are really allies of Satan in his attempts to undermine and destroy Christ’s kingdom.

A person might say, *“I admit that much good has come to the world through Christianity, but I cannot bring myself to believe the Bible account of Creation, the doctrine of free salvation, the miracles, and a life after death.”* The truth is he does not want to believe these things. He is actually opposed especially to the Bible-truth, so distasteful to the unregenerate, that he cannot work out his own salvation, but must look to another.

There is also much foolish indecision in matters religious among professing Christians. Their actions are so often contrary to what they sing in Hymn 377.

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

They are willing enough to take and enjoy the benefits which church-membership offers; but when asked to serve, to give of their time, resources, or work, they hold back and have many reasons for hesitating to give themselves to the work of the Kingdom. They say that they have no ability, no time, and helping may harm them in a business way, or in social life.

In reality they are putting themselves alongside those like Pharaoh who said, ***“Who is the Lord that we should obey His voice?”***¹¹ If ever any one had reason to waver at the beginning of a task, it was Peter and his companions. Yet where else can we find such assurance and conviction as that with which they performed their work, ¹² ***“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ, not in a gloomy spirit of hopelessness, but rejoicing.***

We read in Matthew 5:11-12, ¹¹ ***“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”***¹²

Let us strive to acquire for ourselves some of the holy resolution which characterised those early witnesses of Jesus. The more we experience the glory of the Gospel through diligent study of God’s Word, the less there will be in us of indecision and unwillingness to take our place in the ranks under the Captain of our salvation.

And when the call comes ***“choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve,”***¹³ our answer will be firm and prompt, like that of Israel of old, ***“The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!”***¹⁴

May God banish all doubt and indecision and grant us a firm, joyous, living faith. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Acts 4:18

² Acts 4:8-12

³ Acts 5:29-32

⁴ Acts 22:3

⁵ Proverbs 21:30-31

⁶ Psalm 127:1-2, see also Matthew 15:13

⁷ 1 Kings 9:28, 1 Chronicles 29:4

⁸ 1 Kings 18:21

⁹ Colossians 2:9

¹⁰ Matthew 26:65

¹¹ Exodus 5:2

¹² See also 2 Corinthians 12:10, Romans 5:3, 1 Peter 4:13

¹³ Joshua 24:15

¹⁴ Joshua 24:20