

Lesson One

The Problem: Most Christians would say they believe that what the Bible would say about a situation is superior to other sources of information. However, in practice, most Christians do not “inquire of the Lord” because they believe they have the ability to make decisions.

Why the Problem Persists in Churches: Christians believe that two things—1) our ability to assess situations and 2) our “redeemed” minds-- make constantly asking the Lord about His will something that is not only unnecessary but even confusing and counterproductive.

The Underlying Assumptions as Expressed in Everyday Terms:

- 1) God gave us a brain and expects us to use it to make our own decisions.
- 2) God doesn't care about which car you buy or other such decisions. You have the intelligence and ability to gather data to make those kinds of decisions.
- 3) If you lead a good moral life and attend church you will be able to make decisions about things not specifically mentioned in Scripture.
- 4) People who are constantly saying they have to pray about decisions are suspect, because their decisions look very subjectively-based.
- 5) The whole idea of depending on God and asking Him to give you guidance is scary.
- 6) Depending on data and information is methodical and satisfying. Depending on an unseen God feels less so. We feel we have little or no control in situations that we can't measure or move forward.
- 7) We have never been taught to do this, and it reminds us of Pentecostalism.
- 8) Our parents and others we respect always made decisions based on information they gathered. If we say that's not the way to do it, are we condemning them?
- 9) It's possible someone could take advantage of me by saying God told them to do something, and I would have no recourse or way to respond if I didn't agree.
- 10) Some decisions need to be made quickly, and God doesn't always move quickly. We could be stuck waiting for a long time when we feel we need to take action.
- 11) Some situations are so obvious that asking God about them is unnecessary.
- 12) Cultivating a relationship with God is more time consuming and requires more than I am willing to do because my life is already very busy and full.
- 13) I'm not sure I would recognize the guiding of God if I got it.

Essential background readings before teaching this lesson: The teacher should be able to give students a thumbnail sketch of the life and character of Joshua up to this point. Especially important scriptures include: Deuteronomy chapter 1, and Joshua 1-8. Make notes about how Joshua made decisions. Introduce the subject by asking the class, “What do we know about Joshua before this incident?” and be able to supply details and scriptures for them to look at.

The Scripture Passage: Joshua 9:1-27.

The Lesson:

- 1) Read aloud the passage.
- 2) With the students, list the factors that led Joshua and his people to decide to make a treaty with the Gibeonites.
- 3) These factors form an “**Information Complex**” that we can recognize today. They are: expert opinion, personal experience, risk assessment, empathy, and self-confidence. Look at each element of the Information Complex in detail.
 - a. **Expert opinion.** Like Joshua and the people, when we face a decision we look first to those who would have expertise or first-hand knowledge of a situation. In the case of the Israelites and the Gibeonites, the only ones who had first-hand knowledge were the Gibeonites. The Israelites depended on what the Gibeonites said, because they believed they had no other source of direct information about them or their nation. Today, expert opinion takes these forms: surveys, research results, statistical data, and eyewitness accounts. Each is unreliable because, like the Gibeonite’s account of coming a long distance, expert opinion is always generated and processed by human beings who are imperfect and make mistakes, and who can even be motivated to tweak results or even outright lie, as did the Gibeonites.
 - b. **Personal interaction with the situation.** The Israelites thought they were being thorough by sampling the provisions offered as “proof” of the Gibeonites supposed long journey. By themselves having their own hands-on interaction, the Israelites believed they had confirmed what the Gibeonites said. (In the New Testament, Thomas wanted personal physical proof of what the other apostles had reported: somatic confirmation of a linguistic assertion.)
 - c. **Risk assessment.** The most basic of motivations is that of personal survival. “You’ve got to live” is considered a ground-zero assumption, and anything that threatens survival, we think, takes precedence. There are two elements to risk assessment: first, description of the threat; and second, analysis of how the threat might affect us. In the case of the Israelites, they believed the Gibeonites could be a threat if they were nearby but believed the threat was minimized by two factors: the mistaken impression that the Gibeonites were far away, and the fact that the Gibeonites seemed submissive. The Israelites used their own logic and reasoning processes to come to a conclusion that the Gibeonites were not a threat.
 - d. **Empathy.** The Israelites undoubtedly identified with the motivations of the Gibeonites. In their situation, they would do the same thing to protect their loved ones and their assets. They wouldn’t want to be destroyed by

such a powerful enemy. However, the Lord doesn't want His people to operate only on their feelings. In fact, He reminded them repeatedly that the inhabitants of the Promised Land would lead them away from Him, and that they must be destroyed—without mercy—without the otherwise-commendable feelings that God at other times encouraged.

- e. **Self-Confidence in the Ability to Process Information.** The witness of expert opinion, personal experience, risk assessment and empathy were unanimous! They agreed perfectly! No wonder the Israelites all felt consulting the Lord was unnecessary. They had all the information they needed. Even Joshua, who along with Caleb had been able to enter the promised land when all the other hundreds of thousands of people died in the desert—even Joshua with all his “history” of closeness to the Lord and direct communication with Him, fell victim to his sense of being able to make decisions on his own. If he could be swayed by the Information Complex, so can we!

Questions for discussion with class:

- 1) Other than seeking the Lord's counsel on the situation with the Gibeonites, what other source of information did the Israelites already have before the Gibeonites came?
- 2) “The more complete and comprehensive the agreement among the elements of the Information Complex, the more necessary it is to seek the will of God in a situation.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement after reading the Gibeonite story? Support your answer.
- 3) What decision have you made recently? To what extent did the Information Complex inform that decision?
- 4) Read Romans 12: 1-3. What elements of the Information Complex do you find here? What does this passage say about making decisions?
- 5) What would be a valid generalization about the Information Complex?

“Yeah, but...”

Is the Information Complex so unreliable as to never be used by a Christian? Come back next week for scriptural answers.