

Decisions, Decisions

It seems to me that there are two kinds of issues that churches must address: those issues in which God is interested and those that He doesn't care about. How the church makes decisions about these issues is extremely important.

Let's first take decisions in which God is not interested. If He is not interested in the issue, I would say that He doesn't really care how the decision is made or the final outcome of the decision. Here are some examples: Sunday morning schedule, color of the carpet and/or the walls of the worship center, whether or not to order hymnals, when in the worship service do you take the offering, where you buy church supplies, where you place extension telephones, etc. Although these are sometimes issues that spark controversy in the church, God doesn't care—at least we see nothing in the scripture to indicate otherwise. I would think that He would like for us to make these decisions in a manner that would protect the unity of the church (that is scriptural—see John 17).

The other kind of decision involves issues that concern God. The scripture gives us a lot of things that God is concerned about: reaching unchurched people, protecting unity in the church, each member growing in personal relationship with Him, rightly preaching the Word, activities that extend His mission in the world, obedience to His Word, living in holiness, etc. These issues have spiritual significance for church members or for those who the Lord wants to reach through your church. How we decide these issues is very important. If the Lord desires the church to decide in one direction, and they decide in another direction, a big problem exists: the church has just “voted” against what the Lord wants.

This raises a number of questions. One problem concerns how Southern Baptists have traditionally made decisions: by majority vote at a business meeting. Although this is very common in many churches, it is not scriptural. At least in my understanding of scripture, the Bible gives us no indication for the church to vote on anything. When votes were taken in scripture, often the vote was wrong. (For example, the 12 spies came back with the wrong recommendation for Israel NOT to go into the land of Canaan. That decision caused Israel to wander in the wilderness 40 years until nearly everyone who lived at the time of the decision died!). Our voting on issues in the church probably comes from United States governmental democracy (just guessing). Voting in opposition to God's desires can be downright harmful to the church and its members. (I am not saying the church should have no say in church operation. There are things that are very appropriate for church members to consider.)

Here is a related issue: You don't have to look around very long to understand that it appears quite likely that there are some unregenerate church members (they may think they know Jesus, but, their lives don't display fruits of the spirit). Let's get honest. Some of our church members are not saved. If that is the truth, why in the world would you allow them to vote on spiritual issues in the church? In addition, many churches allow children to vote—as long as they are church members. Others in the church, even some adults, are not really grounded in the Word and do not understand scriptural mandates. Why would you give them opportunity to vote on

spiritual issues they may not understand? It creates a scenario of the church becoming spiritually disobedient.

Here is another issue. It is my impression that most votes cast in the church result in the church member voting his/her preference on the issue. That, in my opinion, is a recipe for spiritual disaster. If the outcome of a decision is very important to God, why wouldn't we ask people to seek His leadership in the issue and then vote God's way rather than vote their preference? Voting our human preferences in the church is the quickest way I know for a church to become disobedient to God.

Well I surely don't have all of the answers. I do have a lot of questions.

Jesus said if you have a problem "Come unto Me". If you have a decision to make in the church, especially one that has spiritual consequences, Jesus said "Come unto Me". He wants us to consult Him. It is as easy as that. Here is a suggestion, for whatever it is worth: If you have a spiritual decision to make and you are asking church members to vote on it, ask them to pray about the issue and then ask them to vote the way the Lord has led them. If a church member can't understand God's direction, maybe he shouldn't vote—or else he might find himself opposing God. If church members can't get a consensus on a decision, maybe we ought to give the Lord some time to convince people what He wants.

I wonder if that is why God has chosen not to bless some churches—they have opposed Him too many times.