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A Matter of Conscience

1 Samuel 24

How do we determine God's will? Do we look to circumstances? the counsel of friends? the words of Scripture?

On April 17, 1521, Martin Luther appeared before the Holy Roman Emperor in order, he thought, to defend his Protestant beliefs. Instead, he was shown all of his writings and asked whether he still believed their contents. Luther asked "for time to think, in order to satisfactorily answer the question without violence to the divine Word and danger to my soul." The next day he stood before the Emperor and uttered the famous words, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason . . . I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. May God help me, Amen."*

GROUP DISCUSSION. How do you determine whether God is leading you to do something?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. In what ways has God given you clear guidance in the past?

In 1 Samuel 24 everything seems to indicate that David should kill Saul and take his place on the throne of Israel. Yet David rejects conventional wisdom and uses a different method for deciding what is right. His attitude should cause us to reexamine our own notions about guidance. *Read 1 Samuel 24.*

1. What feelings and struggles do you think David experienced in this passage?

2. What factors might have convinced David that it was God's will for him to kill Saul (vv. 1-4)?

3. We often rely on circumstances and the counsel of friends when making important decisions. To what extent are these reliable guides?

4. What additional factors convince David that he should not mistreat Saul in any way (vv. 5-7)?

5. Is it ever right to go against conscience in a small area for the sake of a supposedly greater good? Explain.

6. Why do you think David places such importance on respecting the Lord's anointed (vv. 6, 10)?

7. What arguments does David use to convince Saul of his innocence (vv. 8-15)?

8. Describe how Saul responds to David's words (vv. 16-22).

What do David's actions force Saul to conclude about David?

9. David could have killed Saul and seized the throne of Israel. Instead, he relies on God both to avenge him and to establish him as

king. Although the result would appear to be the same in both cases, how would it be different?

10. How can we know when to take matters into our own hands and when to leave them in God's hands?

11. In what area do you need God's guidance?

Ask God for the wisdom to know what is right and the grace to follow his leading.

Now or Later

James writes, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). How does this promise encourage you in a complex and confusing world?

**The New Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan, 1974), p. 1062.