

# The Choices We Make

Recently, when I stopped at KFC for some chicken I asked for 6 wings and some bites. The clerk told me that the wings were \$1.63 apiece. I said ok. Then after thinking about the choices they offer, I asked, “Could I get the wings for less?”

“Yes, you can,” he replied. “But you will have to buy two 3-piece wing snacks.”

“How much will I save?”

“A little over \$2.”

So I bought two 3-piece wing snacks, and I saved \$2 and got two biscuits into the bargain.

Now this was a choice I did not realize I had—until I asked.

Sometimes you have to ask. Sometimes we should ask and we don't. Then we wind up in sin. The choice of what kind of chicken to buy is not exactly trivial, but it must be ranked down the list of importance. There are some choices that involve life and death.

There is the story about Melissa Smart of Denver, Colorado. Three months after she learned that she was pregnant she found out that she had breast cancer. Doctors told her that the cancer had spread to her lymphatic system. She had a ten percent chance to live five years. They said she would have to undergo intense radiation treatment in order to have any chance to life, but that would also mean she would have to abort her pregnancy.

Faced with a life and death choice Melissa chose to bear the child. She gave birth to the baby, Michelle Elizabeth, and then died 18 days later.

Regrettably, she was not married. Her "boyfriend," John Eger, and the baby's father, said, "That baby meant everything in the world to her."<sup>1</sup>

Melissa made a difficult choice. Many people face dilemmas of the same kind.

Sam Davis, of Tennessee made a difficult choice. He was a Confederate soldier captured by the Union Army and placed on trial for his life. They gave him the choice to expose the officer in charge of Confederate intelligence efforts, or of death. He chose death rather than betray his friends.

Every day a person makes choices. Every day they say and do things that affect their course in life. It might mean a few extra biscuits, or it might mean your life.

The Bible says that a day came when King David chose to number the people of Israel, but he knew he had done something wrong.

2 Samuel 24:10 Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have acted very foolishly." 11 when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 12 "Go and speak to David, 'Thus the Lord says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you." ' ' " 13 So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and see what answer I

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<sup>1</sup> The Tampa Tribune, September 29, 1995.

shall return to him who sent me.” 14 Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man.”

People who rebel against God and commit sin wind up in suffering. David should have known and he should have asked. But the better choice was as David himself said, “Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercies are great.”

So the Lord sent a pestilence and 70,000 men died.

Sometimes the choices a man makes cause repercussions to fall on people who had no influence on his decision. Such was the case with King David and the numbering of Israel.

The Old Testament tells us that God delivered the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Then a day came when the children of Israel stood on the banks of the Red Sea. Before them lay the waters of a sea that they could neither swim nor go around. Behind them the Pharaoh came with his army and his chariots. The Israelites faced a bitter choice – at least, as they saw it. The Bible says,

Exodus 14:9 then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-Zephon. 10 as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. 11 then they said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 “Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been

better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

Many of them saw their choices as: remain in Egypt as slaves, or follow Moses and die in the wilderness.

The Israelites greatly feared the Egyptian army. They also feared drowning in the Red Sea. But God chose a path of safety for Israel through the Red Sea. It was as David said, “Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercies are great.”

God’s choices are not always what we expect. But they are choices that have our best interest in mind. God gave Israel a choice after they had come out of Egypt—after they had received the law.

In Deut. 30:15 God told Israel,

15 “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; ... 19 “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,

Just as Israel had a choice, God has given all of mankind the power of choice. God has no policeman to go around and grab us by the neck and say you must read your Bible, or you must go to church, or you must give to the poor. When God created man, he gave man the power of choice. He does not force us to choose one way or the other. But whichever we choose there are consequences. We have the responsibility to abide by the results or consequences of our choices.

In Matthew Chapter 7 Jesus told the multitude that they had before them two gates, one of them wide and the other narrow. Then he told them they had a choice.

Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through

it. 4 “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

As in all of life there are choices and there are consequences. If you choose the wide gate and the broad way you will find that you have a lot of company, but that your choice leads to destruction. The other choice is better—in the long run. Even though in the short run there are troubles.

In Matthew Chapter 7 the Lord told his disciples about the two trees and their fruits

Matthew 7:15 the Lord said, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

A headline in an article on the Business Insider magazine said, “A shocking number of Americans don’t believe in evolution.”

Shocking.

The article said that a “...third of Americans reject the idea of evolution.” In the new Pew Research Center poll the researchers found that a majority of white evangelical protestants (64%) and Republicans (57%) did not believe in evolution. That means one in three Americans would agree that “...humans and other living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time.”

I would argue that a third of Americans have made the right choice and have rejected the false prophets.

Regrettably, two-thirds of them have not.

Aside from the arguments about science it is clear that the belief in evolution should be rejected because of the fruit it bears.

Evolution is Godless. Does it help a person to believe there is no God? Romans Chapter One answers that question and the answer is “no.” The writer of the Psalms said that it is the fool who believes that there is no God.<sup>2</sup>

Man without the guidance of God is lost.

The basis of evolution is the philosophy of materialism, the idea that nothing exists except matter and its forces. To an evolutionist this idea is self-evident, apparently, since there is no experiment to prove that nothing exists except matter and its forces. It is an assumption. The idea is the evolutionist’s foundation postulate; i.e., his basic assumption, or premise which he assumes to be true. He makes this assumption in the face of obvious signs of creation.<sup>3</sup>

No one has ever conducted a successful scientific experiment showing that life arises from non-living matter. Experiments attempting to show that one created kind evolves into another distinct created kind have failed. Therefore, the wise choice is creation.

To refuse the knowledge of God and to choose instead to deny God’s sovereign power or His very existence leads to the worship of nature, degrading passions, and to a depraved mind.

Choices do have consequences.

At the beginning of the 1900s, two young Russian Jews were invited to a noonday service in a little church in New York City. One of them, Abraham Silverstein, accepted the invitation. He heard the gospel, accepted Christ, and became a missionary to the Jews. The other young man, known later as Leon Trotsky, refused to accept Christ. He returned to Russia and dedicated

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 14:1.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 1:18-21.

his life to atheistic communism. Ultimately he fell into disfavor with the communist party, fled from Russia to Mexico, and was murdered there in 1940.

Our choices do have consequences.

George Orwell expressing a dilemma he had seen for some time, knew that man's central problem was the death of Christian belief. In 1944 he wrote, "Since about 1930 the world has given no reason for optimism whatever. Nothing is in sight except a welter of lies, hatred, cruelty, and ignorance, and beyond our present troubles loom vaster ones which are only now entering into the European consciousness. It is quite possible that man's major problems will 'never' be solved.... The real problem is how to restore the religious attitude while accepting death as final. Men can be happy only when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness." Before then, in 1940, he had written of Europe's rejection of God which he approved—this way: "For two hundred years we had sawed and sawed and sawed at the branch we were sitting on. And in the end, much more suddenly than anyone had foreseen, our efforts were rewarded, and down we came. But unfortunately there had been a little mistake: The thing at the bottom was not a bed of roses after all, it was a cesspool full of barbed wire ... It appears that amputation of the soul isn't just a simple surgical job, like having your appendix out. The wound has a tendency to go septic." <sup>4</sup>

Believe in God, not materialism. Believe in creation, not evolution.

The Psalmist said,

Psalm 25:12 Who is the man who fears the Lord?

He will instruct him in the way he should choose.

13 His soul will abide in prosperity, and his

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<sup>4</sup> Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. (Cited in Christianity Today, January 13, 1984, pp. 25-26.

descendants will inherit the land. 14 The secret of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he will make them know his covenant.

The Lord helps a man to choose the right way—if he fears the Lord.

There is a story from World War II about an American bomber, a B-29, that took off from the island of Guam to bomb the Japanese city of Kokura. The B-29 reached the target but found that the city was covered by clouds, so they lingered over the target as long as their fuel would allow them. When the fuel supply reached the critical point they were forced to make a choice. They would have to abandon their primary target and proceed to the secondary. There was no other choice. So, the crew headed for the secondary target. When they arrived they found the sky clear. So they dropped their deadly cargo and then headed for home.

Weeks later, an officer received information from military intelligence that chilled his heart. Thousands of allied prisoners of war, the biggest concentration of Americans that were held by the Japanese, had been moved to Kokura a week before their bombing mission!

“Thank God,” breathed the officer, “Thank God for that cloud.”

It turned out that the city that had been hidden from the bomber was a prison camp and thousands of Americans are now alive who would have died but for that cloud.

But that is not the end of the story.

The secondary target that day was Nagasaki, and the bomb intended for Kokura was the world’s second atomic bomb!

Sometimes God prevents us from making a choice. In this case good for Kokura, but bad for Nagasaki. Who knows why God chose Nagasaki over Kokura? We don’t know why, but He did.



We must wonder how many times we have complained about being forced into a choice we would not have made. Was it God's Providence that forced us? Maybe. Then again, perhaps God prevented a worse choice.

What was it that the Psalmist said?

“Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose.”

Jesus told his disciples of another choice they faced. This was the choice of foundations.

Matthew 7:24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

Jesus said we must trust in what he said.

That means “acting” on what he says.

Matthew 7:26 “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

Jesus said we must trust in what he said—not in what we think. That is the choice we must make. But the wisdom of the world and the circumstances of life can stand between us and trust in God. Nevertheless, choosing not to act on what Jesus said is foolish.

We must trust God, and we must trust in God's Providence.

In Acts the 27th Chapter Luke tells how Paul and his companions embarked on an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy. Paul was under arrest and a Roman guard accompanied him to Rome so that he could stand before Caesar to appeal his imprisonment.

Luke wrote in the ninth verse,

Acts 27:9 when considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, 10 and said to them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.”

In the 11th verse we read,

Acts 11 But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul.

The centurion placed his trust in the ship’s pilot and not in Paul. The centurion trusted human knowledge more than divine knowledge.

It was a bad choice. Luke wrote,

Acts 27:14 but before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; 15 and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along. 16 running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship’s boat under control. 17 after they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along. 18 the next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; 19 and on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.

The centurion had chosen to trust the pilot of the ship and now they were lost in a storm and had no hope of being saved.

This reminds us of the saying of Jeremiah,  
Jeremiah 17 Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind  
and makes flesh his strength, And whose heart  
turns away from the Lord.

But Paul received assurance from the Lord. And he told  
them,

Acts 27:23 “For this very night an angel of the God  
to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before  
me, 24 saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must  
stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted  
you all those who are sailing with you.’ 25  
“Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I  
believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have  
been told. 26 “But we must run aground on a  
certain island.” 27 but when the fourteenth night  
came, as we were being driven about in the  
Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to  
surmise that they were approaching some land. 28  
they took soundings and found it to be twenty  
fathoms; and a little farther on they took another  
sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms. 29  
fearing that we might run aground somewhere on  
the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern  
and wished for daybreak.

But there were some of them who still doubted. They made  
another choice,

Acts 27:30 but as the sailors were trying to escape  
from the ship and had let down the ship’s boat  
into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out  
anchors from the bow...

Even as they began to approach land the sailors had decided  
not to trust Paul.

They chose to abandon ship.

The sailors on the doomed ship had chosen the lifeboat provided with the ship and they were using deception to get into it.

Here is a lesson for us and for all of mankind. The sailors thought there was safety in the manmade lifeboat. There wasn't.

In the same way there are people who have made lifeboats for themselves and they trust in them rather than in the Lord.

But safety is in the Lord and in his promises. God's advice that he spoke through Moses is just as valid today as it was when Israel wandered in the wilderness, and when Paul and his companions floundered upon the Mediterranean sea.

Choose life.

Deuteronomy 30:15 "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; 16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. 17 But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Jesus has done the same thing for our generation.  
Choose the Lord because in Him there is safety.

Acts 27:31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it fall away.

Finally, they acted in faith, although under the threat of death from another quarter. Finally, they believed Paul and they chose the better way—the safer way.

Acts 27:39 When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. 40 And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. 41 But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves. 42 The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape; 43 but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

They obeyed the word of the Lord and they were saved. The principle that acted in their favor is the same that acts in our favor.

Believe the word of the Lord, and obey it.  
Choose the way of the Lord and be saved.