

CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES

(Rev. Dr. H. L. Reynolds)

In this session, let us focus our attention on four words, namely: *choices* and *consequences; life and death*. Think about these four words for a moment.

A choice is a selection from at least two persons or things; it refers to a variety of options from which to select, decide. God has given each of us the ability to know right from wrong. We sometimes rationalize our selection or choice made so as to avoid feelings of guilt for a wrong choice, but the truth is that we all have consciences. *God is always willing to help us make correct choices if we ask for His help and wisdom.* The choices we make are very important; they all have consequences, results. A consequence refers to the effect, the outcome of a choice that has been made; it is the result of a decision chosen. The choices we make affect several aspects of our lives—socially, spiritually, physically, financially, and emotionally. The correct choices make us feel good, bring hope and life to those situations; the wrong choices bring despair and death to those situations. All choices have consequences.

Life refers to hope in God, obedience to God, serving God, seeking His wisdom, prosperity and other blessings, and a fuller, richer life in Christ. Death refers to despair, disobedience to God, destruction and other curses. In a sense, right choices in the things we say and do bring life because there is a deep-seated satisfaction that we are doing the right thing; wrong choices in the things we say and do bring death in that they evoke feelings of apprehension, irritation and, sometimes, guilt.

CHOICES/CHOICE

We make many choices each and every day. Here are some of the choices we make on a daily basis: What time to go to bed, when to get out of bed, which route to take to work or for an appointment, what to wear, what to eat, what to say, whether or not to gossip, whether or not to be angry at God, whether or not to give thanks to God for the day that He has made, whether or not to trust God for His provision for the day, and so on.

Some choices are simple and easy to make, but I am talking here about more serious choices that we periodically have to make. The dictionary tells us that to choose means to elect, to select as the most desirable or the most suitable; it also means to take as an alternative or to take by preference. Synonyms for choose include words such as: pick, select, and prefer. As the dictionary clearly indicates, *choice is the act, privilege or power of choosing.*

When we make choices, we choose. In order to make a choice, there must be at least two persons, two things or two situations from which to choose. When you are choosing, you are picking; you prefer or select one thing over at least one other thing; you are making

You did not ask God for help in solving this problem, neither did you view it from a Godly perspective. Your friend really had your best interest at heart and had not said anything negative about you to anyone. He was devastated by the choices you made—not talking to him about this matter, your vindictiveness, and betrayal of his confidence in you. He was a good, genuine friend to you, and you were close friends since childhood. A few people who were jealous of your closeness with him were trying to break up the close relationship.

What were **the consequences** of your choices? Displeasing God, falling into the trap that was set by jealous people, and losing a very close friend were the results or the effects of the choices you made. The enemy is the devil, and he is like a thief who comes in subtle ways to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). Your relationship with God has been damaged; your relationship with your friend has been stolen, killed and destroyed. We are reminded in James 3:5 that the tongue is a small thing but that it is capable of doing enormous harm. The tongue is a flame of fire, full of wickedness, and poisons every part of the body. It is wrong to gossip. **Life and death** are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21); the same tongue which blesses, also curses. **Where there is jealousy and strife, there is disorder and other types of evil (James 3:16).**

However, God is in the restoration business. You realize after some time that you were wrong. You feel miserable, even though you have been making excuses for the things you said and did. You can make new choices by asking for God's forgiveness and wisdom, and humbly asking for the forgiveness of your friend. Ask Jesus to help you, and He will. The enemy brought destruction and death to the situation, but Jesus came to bring life and to bring it in abundance (John 10:10); He came to bring salvation to people and to situations. **Seek God's wisdom when there is misunderstanding.**

You are given some advice regarding wisdom in James 1:5. If you want to find out what God wants you to do, ask him; He will be happy to tell you. God is always ready to give an abundant supply to everyone who asks Him. You should ask Him in faith believing that He will tell you. Expect Him to give the wisdom sought and do not doubt in your heart. **You cannot exercise faith in God with a doubtful heart. If you doubt, every choice you make will then be uncertain.** Ask in faith; have faith in God and expect Him to give you a clear, definite answer. God is infallible; he does not make mistakes. God is perfect in all His ways. As stated in James 3:17, wisdom that comes from God is pure, accurate, full of quiet gentleness; it permits discussion. **Wisdom that comes from God is courteous and peace-loving; it is willing to yield to others.** Wisdom that comes from God is straightforward and without hypocrisy; it is full of mercy and good deeds.

CHOICES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

God does not want us to be robots; He has given all of us the freedom of choice. **God will never force His will on anybody; He gives all of us the freedom of choice.** God wants us to love and to trust Him; He wants us to realize that His commandments are for

Joshua 24:14-24. In Joshua 24:14-15, the Lord (through Joshua) gave the Israelites some choices: they had to choose whether or not to fear the Lord, the true God, and to serve Him faithfully OR whether they would worship and serve other gods—that is, man-made idols or gods that their forefathers worshipped, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land they were living at that time. For example, their forefathers, like Terah the father of Abraham, worshipped other gods; Nahor who lived beyond the Euphrates River also served other gods.

Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel; he summoned all the leaders, elders, officials and judges to attend and to present themselves before the Lord God. He said to them that that was the day they had to make a choice about whom to obey and serve—whether to obey and serve the true God, who had already proven His trustworthiness to them, or whether they would obey the gods in the places where they lived. Joshua gave the Israelites an ultimatum; they had to choose for themselves that day who they would serve. In that same verse, (Verse 15), Joshua also stated clearly that he has already made his choice. Joshua made this decision: He and his household will serve the Lord.

The Israelites were grateful to the Lord for bringing them safely out of slavery in Egypt and they were very emphatic when they voiced their decision not to forsake the Lord and expressed their desire to continue serving Him (Joshua 24:16-18). **They chose life.** Joshua indicated to the Israelites what the consequence would be if they had chosen to serve other gods, foreign gods: God would turn and bring disaster on them. However, they did obey and serve God during Joshua's lifetime (Judges 2:7), but sad to say, that they later broke their promise and disobeyed God (Judges 2:2-3).

Acts 16:16-34. When Paul and Silas were in Philippi, one day they were met by a slave girl who had fortune-telling ability. The girl's ability to do fortune-telling came from evil spirits and she made a lot of money for her owners through this common practice there of fortune-telling. She followed Paul and Silas and shouted something at them which was true: She correctly identified them as servants of the Most High God, but the source of her information was demonic. Paul chose to command a demon spirit to come out of the girl. What influenced Paul's choice? (a) Her owners were exploiting her dilemma for personal gain. (b) If Paul had accepted what she said, it could be construed that he was linking the Gospel of Jesus Christ with demonic activities.

We suffer sometimes for making the correct choice, but we must learn to trust God in all situations. Paul made a difficult but right choice. What were the consequences of what Paul chose to do? (i) Paul and Silas were dragged into the marketplace before the magistrates by the owners of the girl. (ii) The magistrates ordered them to be stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison. (iii) The jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. (iv) In response to this request, the jailer put them in the inner cell and placed their feet in the stocks.

Paul and Silas kept their focus upon the Lord, and they trusted God to take care of the situation. Despite their desperate and gloomy situation, about midnight Paul and Silas

chose to praise God, to pray to Him, and to sing praises to Him. What were the results, the consequences of these courses of action? Several things happened: (a) The jailer and the other prisoners listened to Paul and Silas; they were favourably impressed by what they heard. (b) A severe earthquake shook the foundations of the prison. (b) The prison doors flew open. (c) The chains of all the prisoners became loose. (d) The jailer and his household became born-again Christians and were baptized. (e) The jailer was very happy; he was filled with joy because he and his whole family now believed in God. (f) When daylight came, the magistrates ordered that Paul and Silas were to be released.

Let us learn to trust God in all circumstances. Let us learn to be at peace and praise God in all situations because others may come to Christ and be saved due to our example. The choices we make can have eternal consequences.

CONCLUSION

I believe that the greatest and most important choice a person can make is to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Going to church every Sunday or fairly often is a good thing, but that will not save you. We all need a Saviour, and Jesus died for the sins of the whole world and rose again from the dead to make a close relationship with God possible. If you have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of your life, why not **choose to do so today**. You do not know when you are going to die, so come to God through Jesus **now**, now before it is too late. Jesus is the only way to God; He paid for our sins to bridge the gap that separated us from God, and that was God's plan for salvation.

Choose this day whom you will serve—God through Jesus Christ, with the consequence of eternal life with God, OR the enemy, with the consequence of being separated from God eternally. The choice is yours.

If you choose to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour of your life, what should you do? It is simple; it is not complicated: Acknowledge that you are a sinner, ask for His forgiveness, and ask for His help to live a good Christian life. Then, in accordance with Romans 10:9-13 do the following: Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord; believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead; invite him into your life as Lord and Saviour of your life. If you mean what you say with your mouth and in your heart, you are saved. Praise God! You are now a born-again Christian, not physically but spiritually. Read the Bible every day because it is your spiritual food providing sustenance for your spirit: Start with reading the book of John in the New Testament, then read the whole New Testament. After that, read the whole Bible, and continue reading the Bible on a daily basis.

May 18, 2012