

A MATTER OF PERSONAL CHOICE 2006

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, October 8, 2006



JOSHUA was the leader of the Israelites who first took control of the Promised Land of Canaan. He, not Moses, led the people into the Promised Land. They were **nomads** no more! In their new land there were many pagan gods contrary to the faith that they brought with them from the land of slavery. Joshua's God was the God Abraham, Isaac & Jacob. Joshua's public choice for God remains one of our favorite bible stories. After an intense argument, sparing no punches, he decided to set an ultimatum and finally convinced his people that it was in their own best interest to choose God over all other possible gods.

Joshua 24:15-18 Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who

did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

Much, much later in different times and in a different tone Paul pleads with the new Testament Church folks in Ephesus, in present-day Turkey, which was an important center for early Christianity.

Ephesians 5:15-20: Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, **but understand what the will of the Lord is**. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; **but be filled with the Spirit**, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, **giving thanks to God the Father** at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Some time ago, a school bus with the **woman driver and ten kids** disappeared. Someone saw the bus crossing the state line between Massachusetts and Connecticut. **An all-points bulletin was issued for the driver on charges of kidnapping and the FBI was called in**. After finally locating the woman and questioning her, though, the police and FBI agents discovered that **this 61-year old grandmother** took some **wrong turns** and made some **poor choices** on the first day of her new job as a driver!

Have you ever made a choice that turned out to be a disaster? How many choices did you have to make in order to be in Church today? Which choice that you once made ~ turned out to be so good that it positively changed your life?

The most far-reaching choice imaginable was suggested in a time of war between Hindus and Muslims. In 1947 "Gandhi," the beloved leader and father of India ~ stopped eating. **It was soon known throughout the land that this long fast was going to cause his death.** A Hindu leader comes to the bedside of Gandhi, who is now near death, pleading with him to end his long fast. Gandhi reaffirms that he will end his fast only when the Hindus and Muslims stop fighting.

The Hindu, with hatred for the Muslims burning in his eyes, says he will continue fighting. To justify his resolve, he tells how Muslims took his little boy and crushed his head. He, in turn, captured a Muslim boy and killed him the same way. Then he added sorrowfully, **"I have been living in Hell."** Gandhi reflects on this a moment and then says softly, **"I think I know a way out of hell."** ~ With the Hindu hanging on his words, Gandhi tells him, **"Go and find a boy similar to the son the Muslims killed, take him into your home as your son, and raise him as a Muslim."**

Gandhi places before the anguished Hindu father the kind of choice Joshua placed before the people as they arrived in the Promised Land. A way out of hell is to choose life over death. One's choice brings God's blessing or it can bring sorrow. **"I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse: therefore, choose life that you and your descendants might live."**

Many of us are facing difficult choices. Some of our choices are not always black or white, but sometimes are in the gray area because that is the best that can be done. Not all choices are between obvious right and wrong, and oftentimes our choices are made with the full knowledge that it is not necessarily right or wrong, but it is the best choice that can be made at that moment.

Lucy once asked Charlie Brown if he knew any good rules for living. He gave her his own personal set of rules: **"Keep the ball low; don't leave your crayons in the sun, use dental floss every day; don't spill the shoe polish and don't let the ants get in the sugar!"**

Joshua also had a list: **Love, Follow, Obey and remain faithful to God.** Times have changed but people still discover in our times that **this simple formula contains the map to peace, love and happiness.**

There is freedom to choose which side we shall be on ~ but no freedom to negotiate the results of the choice once it is made! We may repent a wrong choice and alter the consequences by making a new and right choice. Beyond that we cannot go.

Not only are there many choices, but, sooner or later, we come to grips with the reality that at some time we must choose and we must be accountable for our choices. Some persons will try to go through life without making choices. **Remember, every road will lead to nowhere if you do not know where you are going.**

The phrase, "The Devil made me do it," makes for **good comedy, but poor theology.** Gone are the days when we could blame a devil for our own doing! **You and I are talked or enticed into only what we want to be talked or enticed into.**

The other side of the coin would suggest that God does not make us do anything either. **God invited and encourages, but does not force us to act in any particular way.** It is always a matter of personal choice!

Once a young, eager seminary graduate said, **"There are two sides to every question."** "Yes," said one of the older professors, **"and there are two sides to fly paper, but it makes a difference to the fly which side it chooses."**

Joshua was pleading with the people. It is a matter of choice! He gave them the five verbs of life from the Hebrew Testament. **Loving the Lord, Walking in his way, Keeping God's Commandments, Obeying his voice, and Holding on to God,**

Paul said to the Ephesians, "Understand what the will of God is. Be filled with the Spirit! Jesus simply said, "Follow me!"

Gandhi suggested to a Hindu filled with hate against the Muslims to raise a Muslim child as his own son, **but in Muslim ways.** In such a choice ~ **hate** would have to be exchanged for love ....

- Choose to love—rather than hate
- Choose to smile—rather than frown
- Choose to build—rather than destroy
- Choose to persevere—rather than quit
- Choose to praise—rather than gossip
- Choose to heal — rather than wound
- Choose to give — rather than grasp
- Choose to act —rather than delay
- Choose to forgive — rather than curse
- Choose to hope — rather than despair.

"In the midst of death, life persists; in the midst of untruth, truth persists; in the midst of darkness, light persists."

We can make the choices that bring about life, truth and light. Abraham Lincoln was once listening to a person who closed his remarks with the pious hope **"that the Lord is on our side."** President Lincoln responded by commenting, "I am not at all concerned about that ~ for we know that the Lord is always on the side of right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and **this nation should choose to be on the Lord's side."** Christianity begins with such a choice. To be on the Lord's side is far more an important issue than trying to get the Lord to be on our side.

Choose then this day.... It is always a matter of personal choice.

One day there came along that silent shore,  
While I my net was casting in the sea,  
A Man who spoke as never man before,  
I followed him; new life began in me.  
Mine was the boat, but his the voice,  
His the call; but mine the choice.

**His call!**

**My choice!**

**AMEN**