

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be looking at choices in the scriptures.

I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter. The primary criteria for inclusion are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include the references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

In addition, if you have a testimony to share, please send that to me as well and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

Also, if you have particular subjects that you would like me to cover in the Newsletter, please let me know.

You can also view previous editions of The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN) in PDF (Portable Document Format) by going to:

<https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/TheGospelNotesNewsletter>

If at any time you do not wish to receive this newsletter, please let me know. Your responses to me are confidential unless you request otherwise.

2 Nephi 1

115 Adam fell, that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

116 And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall.

117 And because that they are redeemed from the fall, they have become free forever, knowing good from evil,

118 To act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the Lord, at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

119 Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man.

120 And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil;

121 For he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

122 And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments,

123 And be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit,

124 And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein,

125 Which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.

It seems a common fallback line in movies and television for some character to say, “I had no choice...” with regard to doing something terrible or particularly evil. The reasons they give can be very compelling as though it were true. Real life seems to mimic this philosophy – people will do all manner of evil because they felt they were compelled to out of lack of choices.

There are only a few reasons why people might have this as their answer:

1. Lack of imagination
2. Lack of courage
3. Lack of moral understanding
4. Lack of conviction
5. Lack of love
6. Lack of compassion
7. Lack of knowledge

There may be others, but when you consider the many ways that people can choose to do things that are wrong it typically comes down to one of these things. One of the “powers” of the adversary, Satan, is the ability to lie and confuse people. He sought to do this with such an one as Jesus Christ when he began his ministry:

Matthew 4:3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, **command that these stones be made bread.**

Matthew 4:6 Then the devil came unto him and said, If thou be the Son of God, **cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.**

Matthew 4:9 And the devil came unto him again and said, **All these things will I give unto thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.**

As we look at these, Satan tried to tempt Jesus with philosophy, with vanity, and with covetousness. These are all tools of his trade, so to speak, and there is never an indication that Satan has stopped using these tools on the whole of humanity since the beginning. These were also choices, and they are still choices to us.

As recently as the twentieth century – the century we have not long ago left behind – there have been world wars, cold wars, and other wars too numerous to mention here, in which each of these same tactics can be seen at work in the world. Our country has done it and so have others, each providing justification for those tasks they have performed that would not quite fit into the definition of righteousness, but into the definition of evil.

That is not to say that any country – any people – has been entirely good or entirely evil, but there are things we each do every day that puts that question squarely in front of us – will we choose to do good or will we choose to do evil?

One thing the adversary does to make this choice unclear is to try to confuse and confound our sense of right and wrong, but in this we have the scriptures for a guide through the nonsense and confusion that abounds.

Moroni 7

10 Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin and to do that which is evil continually.

11 But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him is inspired of God.

12 Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.

13 For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.

14 For behold, **the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that they may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge: For everything which inviteth to do good and to persuade to believe in Christ is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ;**

15 Wherefore, ye may know with a perfect knowledge, it is of God; but **whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge, it is of the devil.**

16 For after this manner doth the devil work: For he persuadeth no man to do good, no not one; neither doth his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.

17 And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge, ye shall also be judged.

18 Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ, that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ.

This is not much different wording than that provided by the apostle James, the brother of Jesus.

James 3

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

The object of God is to bring life, and the object of the devil is to turn people away from that. It's the same reason he tempted Eve, saying that the warning of God was without merit, that it was in fact a lie. Satan provides a lie to turn the truth into a lie.

I have to ask you then if you feel that you are in despair and struggling with hopelessness? I would suggest that you consider that the adversary is working on you to turn something good in you into something that resembles his own bitterness and strife. And if you cannot see what hope there is, then consider that you are being given a choice: Do you choose to accept misery and hopelessness, or will you choose to desire hope and joy?

For many people this choice is not a very clear one. Many people feel that they need to keep rubbing the wound because it will feel better eventually because it provides some temporary form of relief, while knowing quite well that it will only make the wound worse.

There is never a lie that makes the truth better.

The modern world is not discovering some new philosophy about what can make us happy or joyful. People seek to make themselves happy by changing themselves either by cuttings of the flesh, markings of the flesh, or by cuttings of their spirit and markings in their spirit. The things people think they need to be happy are not the things that will actually make them happy, but without a knowledge of the truth, they try to let their passions run unbridled – sometimes for attention and sometimes because they want others to be like them – taking joy in things forbidden by God.

Isn't that what Satan not only tempted Eve with, but deceived her with? Taking joy in something forbidden by God.

Alma 19:74 Behold, I say unto you, **Wickedness never was happiness.**

When you consider the various political, religious and other philosophies, which of them will lead you to believe in Jesus Christ and to obey his commandments?

The fruit partaken by Adam and Eve did not lead them to belief in Jesus Christ – they already knew him from the beginning, so you should consider that a knowledge of the truth is not sufficient to guarantee that you will be excluded from temptations. What the knowledge of the truth does is to provide insight and understanding, but it does not make your choices for you.

Our privilege to choose between good and evil – to choose God as our father or to choose the devil as our father is the most important power that we have been given, and that power cannot be taken from us because it is the everlasting decree of God.

There is no wickedness that can make righteousness more righteous any more than you can shine darkness into light to make it brighter.

We can speak of love and faith and hope, but if it is not supported by the choices we make it must be in vain. Think on James' words:

James 2:15 Yea, a man may say, I will show thee I have faith without works; but I say, Show me thy faith without works, and **I will show thee my faith by my works.**

The works we do are the expression of our choices, but let us not forget the admonition of Mormon to his son Moroni,

Moroni 7:7 For behold, if a man, being evil, giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore, it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore, he is counted evil before God.

Here is a question: if we do good works grudgingly, should we be counted as righteous or as evil?

There is sometimes a fine line between being compelled to do good things and being willing to do good things, but what if that line is not very fine at all? What about the wealthy who contribute to charities not because of the good works it might do, but because they get a tax credit for doing so? Or the poor who give to a ministry because they believe it will give them a worldly benefit? Is that a choice to do good or a choice to do evil? Mormon seems to suggest that it is not counted towards that man as righteousness, even if the “gift” benefits someone else.

The admonition, then, is to do good because you want to do good, and not because you benefit from it. Do it out of love and because of your faith in Christ, because by any other choice it is not counted to you for righteousness.

Satan cannot compel us to do evil, and God can not make us righteous if we don’t want to be. That is the inherent meaning of the “free agency” that we have been given.

Is it any wonder, then, that God looks for those that are willing to be led into righteousness so that they might be saved? And does that not mean that we also should be willing to be led of God into righteousness and not be willing to be led into error?

Alma 5

39 And now, I would that ye should be **humble**, and be **submissive**, and **gentle**, **easy to be entreated**, full of **patience** and **long-suffering**, being **temperate** in all things, being **diligent** in keeping the commandments of God at all times,

40 Asking for whatsoever **things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal**, always **returning thanks unto God** for whatsoever things ye do receive.

41 And see that ye have **faith, hope, and charity**; and then ye will always abound in **good works**;

The choices that we make lead us into the path of righteousness or away from it, but the path of righteousness leads to a kind of joy that we cannot conceive even now.

1 Peter 1

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which **according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**

4 **To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,**

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time--

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations,

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, 8 Whom, having not seen, ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, **ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory,**

The remarkable thing about choosing to believe in and exercise faith in Jesus Christ is that you get three things: you get joy in serving the Lord in this life, you get the hope of an eternal joy, and you get to help others do the same. Even if no other souls choose life, you have chosen life and will get to have a more abundant life.

Helaman 2

107 And Aminadab said unto them, You must repent and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, who was taught unto you by Alma, and Amulek, and Zeezrom; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you.

108 And it came to pass that they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shook the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed.

109 **And it came to pass that when they cast their eyes about and saw that the cloud of darkness was dispersed from overshadowing them, behold, they saw that they were encircled about, yea, every soul, by a pillar of fire.**

110 **And Nephi and Lehi were in the midst of them; yea, they were encircled about; yea, they were as if in the midst of a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not; neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison; and they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.**

111 **And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven and did enter into their hearts; and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words.**

112 And it came to pass that there came a voice unto them, yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying, Peace, peace be unto you because of your faith in my well beloved, who was from the foundation of the world.

113 And now, when they heard this, they cast up their eyes as if to behold from whence the voice came; and behold, they saw the heavens open; and angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them.

114 And there were about three hundred souls who saw and heard these things; and they were bid to go forth and marvel not; neither should they doubt.

115 And it came to pass that **they did go forth and did minister unto the people, declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen,** insomuch that the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them because of the greatness of the evidences which they had received;

116 And **as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred, and the tradition of their fathers.**

The joy of the Lord is an infectious thing! When you have been converted and convinced, you want to share it!

But it all starts with a choice – do you want to be happy and joyful? Do you want to live with an unspeakable joy? Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God?

Or do you want to live in darkness and sadness, taking only momentary pleasures that fade away with the doing?

You would think the answer is obvious and clear, but make no mistake that ***you must make that choice by yourself*** because no one else can do it for you. You might consider it to be our greatest gift and our greatest curse: the ability to choose. A great gift because the Lord in his great benevolence has granted it to us so that we might choose Him. A great curse because if we choose wrong there is nothing God can do for us.

In the world of computers and computer programming the whole field is built upon this most simple of comparisons: True or False; Yes or No; One or Zero – there is nothing in-between. It is binary language and mathematics, and it was by this that the modern world of computers and components has been formed. Good programs and bad programs depend exclusively on the difference and the distance between these two values.

It is just as true for our lives: distinguishing between true and false is the base code programming of our agency.

Do you want to have eternal life?

- a.)Yes
- b.)No

Do you want to have lasting joy and peace?

- a.)Yes
- b.)No

Do you have reason to hope that any pain or suffering you experience is only temporary?

- a.)Yes
- b.)No

Do you want to have the Holy Spirit of God to come down into your heart and fill you with words that are marvelous and wonderful?

- a.)Yes
- b.)No

Do you have a reason or do you want to have such an abundance of love and hope that you cannot contain it or restrain it?

- a.)Yes
- b.)No

Do you believe that God loves you and knows you completely and perfectly and wants you to be free from despair and hopelessness?

- a.)Yes
- b.)No

These are all choices we can make ***every single day***, and how you conduct your life is the fulfillment of your answer to these questions.

Genesis 6:35 (Inspired Version) Say unto this people, **Choose ye this day to serve the Lord God who made you.**

Joshua 24

14 Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.

15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, **choose you this day whom ye will serve**--whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Alma 16:9 For thus saith the scripture, **Choose ye this day whom ye will serve**.

Choose wisely.