

Choosing Jesus

When I was growing up I can remember singing, in the church we belonged to, a song whose first line went like this: “I chose Jesus as my Savior, you choose him too.” Then, later in adulthood, in another kind of church, I remember singing a similar song that began, “I have decided to follow Jesus...no turning back, no turning back.”

Had I actually chosen Jesus as my Savior, and was I really following him as I claimed in singing the words of those two songs? My response at the time (s) would have probably gone something like this: “well, sure, I guess so...I think so...I hope so.”

I’m sure the people who wrote those songs sincerely believed the words they wrote in them. I don’t doubt it for a minute. My question is, as it should be yours, are they in line with what the Scripture says about choosing, or deciding for Jesus?

To answer this, let’s begin with the idea of making choices. In the material world we live in this is a continuous process. When we wake up in the morning we must choose what we will wear that day (unless we’re sick in bed), then we must choose what we will eat for breakfast, etc. All throughout the day we make choices. In choosing, what in effect are we doing? For most of us it is a process of “picking” or “selecting” from among several alternatives. Sometimes it is between good and bad, sometimes between the best among two or more good offerings, sometimes between the lesser of “two evils.” In rare cases, where there is only one alternative, the “choice” is easy, because, in effect, it really isn’t a choice in the usual sense of the word.

Is this the same kind of process folks go through in “choosing” Jesus as their Savior? The song seems to say this. It’s like we have this smorgasbord of religious beliefs, which all have an individual leader or originator, we examine them all, and through an analytical process of elimination we choose one as the best alternative. As they say in the modern vernacular, we choose “whatever works best for us.”

The answer is no, and here’s why. The act of choosing began way back in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, when God created man, placed him in the Garden of Eden, and then gave him some instructions. One of those instructions to the man (Adam) was that, *“of every tree of the garden, thou mayest eat; But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”*¹

This is not the same thing as a choice between several good (or even bad) alternatives. This is a choice between life and death. Of course, we know the rest of this story: Adam chose to eat the forbidden fruit, and he and his mate, Eve, eventually died.

Many say that this proves God is guilty of duplicity at best, and a liar at worst, because Adam and Eve didn’t drop dead in their tracks the moment they bit into the fruit. What they miss is that God, upon discovering their sin, sacrifices an innocent animal instead of them, clothing them with its skin.²

¹ Gen. 2:16,17

² Gen. 3:21

There is an entire body of religious thought called “covenant theology,” which is built around this event. Covenant theologians refer to this as God’s “covenant of grace” with man. This belief system claims that by Adam’s sin and subsequent fall from grace—since, according to Romans 5:12³, this caused death to pass upon every human being thereafter—all humans are therefore totally depraved, and incapable of choosing or seeking after God. They will point to Romans 3:10-12, which says, “*There is none righteous.... there is none that seeketh after God....there is none that doeth good,*” and conclude from this that—because “choosing” God would be an act of righteousness—it is God who chooses man, not vice-versa.⁴ Thus God had to affect this grace covenant with these humans in order for them to continue living, sealed by the animal sacrifice.⁵

At the other end of the theological continuum is what is known as Arminianism. This theology is named after 17th century Dutch Calvinist, Jacob Arminius. Arminius was accused by other Dutch clerics of teaching Pelagianism,⁶ and after his death a convocation was convened by the Dutch government to settle the issue of whether election was unconditional or conditional, resulting in the “TULIP” acrostic, better known as “five point” Calvinism.⁷ This was precipitated by Arminius’ contention that election and reprobation was conditioned upon the inquirers “choosing” to receive it; that Christ’s atoning sacrifice was for all, and thus not limited. He agreed with Calvin’s proposition that man must be spiritually regenerated (i.e., “born again”) in order to exercise true faith, but he disagreed with the idea of irresistible grace, contending that all men are capable of refusing it, relapse into a state of sin, and be lost as a result.⁸

There are not very many pure Calvinists or pure Arminians left among Christendom today. Most Christian religious systems adhere to a mixture of the two. Catholic theology teaches that one becomes a member of Christ’s church as an infant, through baptism, but, from that point on, must remain faithful to the mandates of the Church,⁹ and partake of the sacraments of the Church¹⁰ in order to be saved and qualify for heaven. The largest contingent of Protestantism, Protestant Evangelicalism, teaches that atonement (forgiveness of sins) is available for all who make a decision for Jesus, which results in the decider being “born again,” which will result in a changed life, and good works. Some of the Pentecostal segments of Evangelicalism teach that one who has been “born again,” can fall away and be lost again. They teach that the remedy for this is to receive “the second work of grace,” or what they refer to as “the baptism of the Holy Ghost.” So, you can see that both of these systems adhere to parts of both doctrines, while rejecting other parts.

³ “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

⁴ Other corroborating passages covenant theologians use would be: **Rom 8:29**: “For whom he did foreknow, *he also did predestinate* to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren;” **Eph 1:4**: “According as *he hath chosen us in him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:” **II Th 2:13** “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation* through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:” (KJV)

⁵ This is said to be a “type,” or forerunner, of the new covenant, which was sealed by Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary.

⁶ Teaching of the fourth century monk, Pelagius, who denied the doctrine of original sin, and asserted the doctrine of free will, and the merit of good works.

⁷ T=Total depravity; U=Unconditional election; L=Limited Atonement; I=Irresistible grace; P=Perseverance of the Saints.

⁸ This is paraphrased the definition in Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary of the English Language.

⁹ This means the Church “fathers,” and the physical Church hierarchy, or Priesthood.

¹⁰ Primarily, the “sacrifice of the mass.”

How could Christianity, concerning a foundational doctrine like salvation, have become so mixed up? The answer to this is simple. It has become this way because of 1.) the failure (or refusal) to allow Scripture¹¹ alone to be the final authority in faith and practice. It seems that men just want to put their own spin on things so they can claim credit, and get their name recorded in history, when they should be concerned with doing and saying what God said, and assigning Him the credit. 2.) The refusal to use the method of “rightly dividing”¹² Scripture in coming into conformity with God’s present will for man.

So, here we find ourselves back where we started with the original question: do we choose Jesus, or does he choose us? The answer to this is yes, and yes. He chooses us through his offer of salvation, but we must choose to accept his offer. Is the offer limited to only a select group among men who have been given a spiritual regeneration, enabling them to receive the offer? No, and here is why:

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 1 Tim 2:5-6

Some astute Bible students might say to this, “yes, but Mark 10:45 says he ‘gave himself a ransom for *many*,’ not all.” Is this a contradiction? No, because this isn’t written to anyone living in the world today. This is, indeed, written to a very select group the Lord Jesus referred to as “*the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*”¹³ He told the Gentile woman who he was speaking this to that it was *only* these “sheep” for whom he came.¹⁴ The verse above, from Paul’s first letter to Timothy, includes everyone—Christ’s atoning work at Calvary, therefore, is *now* unlimited.

We can corroborate this with other Scripture. For instance in Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 11, he says:

***For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.* (Rom 11:32)**

The ‘all’ in this verse has to include everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. Moreover, in the same letter to Timothy, Paul makes this clear charge,

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
(1 Tim 2:3-4)

If God has selected only a few folks out of humankind unto salvation, and his atonement was for only these folks, then the above passages from Scripture are total and complete falsehoods, as is the following verse:

***For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.* (Rom 1:16)**

The gospel of Christ is simply this:

¹¹ John 17:17; Psalms 12:6,7; 119:105

¹² 2 Timothy 2:15

¹³ Matt. 15:24

¹⁴ verse 23

That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:3,4)

Noah Webster gives as an example of the word “election,” the process of electing those who run for political office. Everyone who is elected to a political office in our country must be “inaugurated” before they can possess or occupy the office. We can look at God’s present offer of salvation to the world in this way. He has elected you to salvation by paying the price for *all* your sins, for all time through Christ’s atoning sacrifice at the Cross, and therefore is offering eternal life to *all* who will receive it. The question is, will you receive it? This is not a “work of righteousness,”¹⁵ folks, it is a simple acquiescing through belief of the truth. It is cutting through all the religious goobledigoo, to exactly what God has said, in Scripture, to *you*.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ by trusting that he paid for all your sins, and you shall be saved, sealed and bound for heaven.¹⁶ This is the only true choice there is. If you, friend, have never done this, now is the time.

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¹⁵ Works of righteousness, as in Acts 10:35, Romans 4:4 and Titus 3:5, are referring to the observance of the law.

¹⁶ Acts 16:31; Eph. 1:13,14.