

It Is Written

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Choices & Character

By Bill Crews

Cunningham Geike, a Scottish preacher of the 19th century, wrote: "Our character is but the stamp on our souls of the free choices of good and evil we have made through life." I believe his observation was correct.

We are free moral agents. The entire thrust of the Bible, addressed in its various parts and particulars to various individuals in the past and the present, is proof of this. God does not force men, but He does speak to men; and in speaking to men God instructs, reasons, warns, admonishes, promises, threatens, exhorts, encourages, appeals, pleads and implores. Man ever decides whether to listen or not; and upon listening, decides whether to respond or not; and, upon responding, decides what his response will be. For all of which God will call him to account. But man is indeed a free moral agent. He has volition. He has the freedom to choose.

Over and over man is placed in the position of making a choice (e.g., Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden [Gen. 2:16-17] and the Jews on the day of Pentecost [Acts 2:37-40]). Time and again men are called upon to choose. Moses said to Israel: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed; to love Jehovah thy God, to obey His voice, and to cleave unto him; for He is thy life, and the length of thy days; that thou mayest dwell in the land which Jehovah sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). Said Joshua to Israel: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Josh. 24:15). Said Elijah to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel: "How long go ye limping between the two sides? if Jehovah be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

Again and again you and I are placed in the position of making a choice between right and wrong:

1. As children, whether or not we will obey our parents. What does God say? Eph. 6:1-3
2. As students, whether or not we will listen, learn, study, do our assignments, put forth a good effort, be honest, abide by the rules. What does God say? Rom. 12:17; Eccl. 9:10.
3. Whether we will choose good companions or evil companions. What does God say? 1 Cor. 15:33.
4. Whether we will be careful or reckless drivers; whether or not we will obey the traffic laws. What does God say? Rom. 13:1-7.
5. Whether or not we will be honest and dependable workers. What does God say? Lk. 3:13-14; Col. 3:22-4:1.
6. Upon hearing the gospel, whether or not we will become Christians or whether we will serve God or go on serving Satan. What does God say? Acts 2:41; 24:24-25; 26:28-29.
7. Upon becoming a Christian, whether or not to really be or live as a Christian. What does God say? 1 Pet. 2:11-12; Rom. 6:1-2; Col. 3:1-2.
8. Whether or not we will be steadfast in prayer. What does God say? Phil. 4:6; Eph. 6:18.
9. Whether or not we will diligently read and study our Bible? What does God say? 1 Pet. 2:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:18; Col. 3:16.

10. Whether or not we will assemble faithfully with our brethren for Bible classes and worship assemblies. What does God say? Heb. 5:11–6:3; 10:19-25.

The decision we make in each case will be largely determined by the guidance we have received and the character we have thus far molded, but every choice made makes a further impression upon our character and, in turn, will affect the choices that lie ahead. Good character can be destroyed in a brief span of time, but bad character can be reformed and sin can be forgiven. Our readers are challenged to make the right choice in every case that confronts them. God will help you if you want His help.

To Capture Hearts...

By Robert F. Turner

Having spent many years trying to bring men to Christ, and pondering repeated failures, I have drawn a few conclusions from experience. We may have trusted the story of the cross too little, and our teaching ability too much. We have relied heavily upon the assumption that if we could teach men what to do, they would do it. There is something to do all right, but there will be little doing (and none that is valid) until the subject is made aware of a need, believes in a remedy, and desires the result of doing. Information may be adequate, but motivation may be lacking.

Motive is “that within the individual, rather than without, which incites him to action.” Peter’s sermon on Pentecost made the hearers aware of circumstances which produced self-judgment — “we have killed the long-awaited Messiah. What shall we do?” Under these conditions the answer can be brief and to the point. There was no need for charts, diagrams, and argumentative sermons on baptism.

This is no indictment of defense and proclamation of doctrinal details. Where such differences exist, and are the deterrent to full obedience, they must be thrashed out. But in many cases if we would expend greater efforts to convince men of their true status before a righteously indignant God, we would not have to press so fruitlessly the details of His will. A man who realizes he is drowning does not argue about the color of the life buoy thrown to him.

We strive for men’s hearts: casting down man’s evil reasonings, his pride, and bringing into captivity his thoughts (2 Cor. 10:4-5) to the obedience of Christ. If we are more interested in winning an argument than in saving a soul, we will certainly fail in the latter, and probably in the former. We are trying to win a man, not whip him.

To change the attitude of others, so that they will be open and receptive to the gospel of Christ, we may first have to revise our attitude. We must somehow become one with the Lord Jesus, who loved and sacrificed Himself for mankind; not because we were lovely, but “while we were sinners.”

A Matter of Life and Death

By Bill Crews

We’ve all heard the statement, “It’s a matter of life and death.” It expresses a sense of urgency, and it’s designed to get attention and solicit immediate response. It may be used in a phone call to the police, the paramedics, or the firemen, or in hospital situations. It is physical life and physical death we’re talking about, and when it’s a life or death situation involving us or our loved ones, we think anyone would agree that it is an urgent matter indeed.

But for some strange reason, when it becomes a matter of spiritual life or spiritual death, when it involves the salvation of a soul or the eternal destiny of a soul, our own, that of a loved one, that of a friend or neighbor or fellow-worker, the urgency is gone, and the matter can wait. With all too many this is not a priority that should receive immediate attention, and it is put off until it is too late - forever! How do we really feel about the life or death, about the eternal destiny of a soul - yours or some else’s? I really believe that if I were lost and knew it, I could not rest, could not sleep - could not have any peace - until I took care of that matter once and for all. What about you?