

# Spiritual Choices

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Here's some trivia for you, from [science.howstuffworks.com](http://science.howstuffworks.com), and it's how the brain works. It goes like this: Every animal you can think of (mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, amphibians) has a brain, but the human brain is unique. Although it's not the largest—it's about the size of a head of cauliflower, or in some cases a bowl of oatmeal—it gives us the power to speak, imagine and problem-solve. It's truly an amazing organ. The brain performs an incredible number of tasks, including the following: It controls body temperature, blood pressure, heart rate and breathing. It accepts a flood of information about the world around you from your various senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching) and it also handles your physical movements when you walk, talk, stand or sit. It lets you think, dream, reason, and experience emotions.

Your brain is made of approximately 100 billion nerve cells called neurons, and these neurons have the amazing ability to gather and transmit electrochemical signals. Think of them like gates and wires on a computer. These neurons also share the same characteristics and have the same make-up as other cells, but the electrochemical aspect lets them transmit signals—sometimes over several feet or a few meters—and send messages to each other, through the synapses in the brain. Your brain generates, through that electrochemical process, anywhere between twelve and twenty-five watts of electricity, depending on whether you are asleep or awake. That's enough to light a lightbulb—or not, in some cases. (I'm joking just to stress the point that sometimes we don't use the thing sitting in this gourd on top of our head to the best of its ability or capacity.)

Another bit of trivia is that as we make our way through life, assuming all the gears are engaged, one estimate says (and this is a rough estimate—it's a figure that keeps popping up if you look this up on the Internet) we make about 3,500 choices per day. You have to think about that for a second because we do make a great many choices. Obviously we make conscious and unconscious choices, every waking moment. But I'm going to be referring to those spiritual choices we make each and every day, because we do that. If we are converted, if we've been baptized, if we have God's Holy Spirit, we do that. Sometimes we don't even think about it—hopefully we don't think about it too much, we just do those things.

As was mentioned in the sermonette, our standards should be godly standards; our behavior should be godly. Again, you may not have looked at it this way but in that calling, God gives us His Holy Spirit, and He gives us the freedom to make these choices. It's kind of wired in, so to speak. What did we used to call that? Free moral agency? Sure. God's word is full of accounts of these spiritual choices—good and bad. We have all kinds of characters in the Bible. I have several books in my library that are all about the characters in the Bible, and I like the Lockyer series—all of the men,

women, children, prophecies, promises and so forth, in the Bible. Coupled with God's Holy Spirit, we do have this freedom of choice. Thus, I'm calling this sermon:

### Spiritual Choices

From the moment we're baptized, we make ongoing spiritual choices our whole lives—the rest of our lives—until we die. Someone asked me one time, not too long ago, after I had mentioned a scripture in John 4 where it talks about worshipping God in spirit and truth, the question, how do you worship God in spirit? Oddly, I didn't have a ready answer. My first thought was, what have you been doing? The point is, every day in our lives we follow God; we committed to do that so we make those choices. That's what drives us, what motivates us in our lives. Let's look at a few scriptures to get a flavor for this topic. I would like to turn over to James, chapter 1. James is a very practical book. It runs counter to the ideas the early Protestants were promoting in their time—the “faith alone” reformers—so they didn't like it. I'll be reading from the New King James.

**James 1:1** *James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. (NKJV)*

We know that's referring to the dispersion of the Jews, the Israelites, from their homeland. Aren't we a scattered church today? Every time you look into that, or do a search on the Internet, or ask someone—years ago it was about 300 splits and now it's up to—I don't know—maybe 800? One hears different figures, but we're a scattered church. James is a “how-to” epistle. It tells us what to do if we're a scattered church.

2) *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*  
3) *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*  
4) *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing ... (NKJV)*

It talks about learning patience through trials, and growing in patience is one of the primary outcomes of a trial. I don't know about you but sometimes we just have to be patient when we're coping with our trial. Many times we learn from those mistakes that we've made; maybe we've gotten ourselves into a trial, even a self-made one, but we actually learn from those bad choices.

I have an example. I was in the military, I was navy, and I was young and didn't know any better. ((laughs)) The navy loves us kids, right? I spent some time on an air base in San Diego and then I was transferred to the fleet, and became a “tin can sailor”, that is, assigned to a destroyer. You can go to the U.S. Navy website, and if you know the name of the ship, you can enter it in and it will give you its history. The ship I was billeted to at that time was sitting at anchor in a harbor in Okinawa and was hit by a kamikaze; it came out of the sun at sunset—they probably heard it before they ever saw it. It slammed into the ship at 300 miles an hour. The point being, this skipper made a bad choice by sitting at anchor like that, and remember, Pearl Harbor had just

happened. Those folks in Pearl Harbor were sitting ducks. They were either sitting at anchor or they were tied up at a pier.

What about bad health? A lot of us have health issues of one kind or another. Maybe those issues are a result of poor choices and we need to change something. Verse 5.

- 5) *If any of you lacks wisdom [the wisdom to make right choices], let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*  
6) *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind [as if he just can't make up his mind].*  
7) *For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;*  
8) *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (NKJV)*

It kind of reminds you of the parable of the talents where one individual did nothing. If you make no choice at all, that is in fact a choice.

- 9) *Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation ... (NKJV)*

Doesn't matter who you are, that verse tells us that there are no status games with God, there just aren't.

- 10) *but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.*  
11) *For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. (NKJV)*

We all have the same end. In a physical sense, that's our station in life—we're all going to die one day.

- 12) *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life [eternal life, James is telling us] which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*  
13) *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (NKJV)*

Evil is not in God's character or His nature. He would never choose to do something evil nor would He influence us to do so.

- 14) *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. (NKJV)*

You know, the lusts, the things in our nature—our carnal nature.

- 15) *Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (NKJV)*

Proverbs 7 talks about lust, personified as a seductive harlot, which leads us into bad choices, if we allow ourselves to be led that way.

16) *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.* (NKJV)

Deceived by Satan, who of course deceived Eve into making a bad choice; she disobeyed God and ate of the tree from which God said not to eat. She was influenced and enticed to do that.

17) *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above ...* (NKJV)

Unlike Satan, God's nature is to be giving with His gifts, one of which is the freedom to make the choices that we make in life. We are faced with those each and every day. He could deny us those choices but He doesn't choose to do so, as we'll see.

17 continued) *... and comes down from the Father of lights [those gifts, those perfect gifts], with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.* (NKJV)

There's never any hint of God changing. God always chooses right—always.

18) *Of His own will [His choice] He brought us forth by the word of truth ...* (NKJV)

Here are just a couple of reference scriptures talking about truth: John 8:31-32, where the Pharisees are arguing with Christ. In verse 31 of John 8,

**John 8:31** *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*

*32) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* (NKJV)

The Pharisees had a great deal of religious training but they missed the point—they completely missed the point.

The last part of James 1:18.

**James 1:18** *... that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.* (NKJV)

We'll talk about truth a little bit later. Going on down in verse 19, I would like to read this passage, through verse 27, from the New Living Translation.

19) *Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.*

20) *Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.* (NLT)

This speaks of controlling our emotions, anger being a powerful one. What usually happens when we're angry? In the heat of the moment we make really bad choices.

We do things that we regret later. I have a personal example of that. We have a three-car garage, a double and then a single garage, and between the double and the single there's a walk-through door—an entry door—then one to the outside. With the big door open and the wind blowing, it can cause one or other of the doors to slam, and one day, as I was going through there, the outside door slammed really hard on my finger. I said, "Chihuahua! Chihuahua!"—several times. When I tell that story my wife likes to add, he didn't say that at all ((laughs)), he said something else. We're talking about an immediate smashed finger.

21) *So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it [through God's Holy Spirit] has the power to save your souls. (NLT)*

He's talking about eternal life there.

22) *But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. (NLT)*

That was addressed in the sermonette; we are accountable to God for what we do. We do those things as a result of the choices we make.

22 continued) ... *Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. (NLT)*

If God's Holy Spirit is operating in our minds each and every day, we make conscious choices every waking moment. We have many, many examples of that. I could finish the whole sermon with just those examples, but let's go on to verse 23.

23) *For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror.*

24) *You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. (NLT)*

The point there, when I read that, is that we don't see ourselves as God sees us—we just don't. He sees the changes that we need to make, and sometimes we have to go through trials and other things, to get the push to make the needed changes. That takes effort, it takes choosing to be like God and following Christ's example.

25) *But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says [make those right choices] and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

26) *If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. (NLT)*

What I think James is trying to say here is that we look at the individual looking back at us and think to ourselves, I'm okay. Well, we're not; we're in the process of being converted and changed. People will say, I read God's word religiously every day, or, I pray religiously every day—isn't that enough? You mean to tell me that James says I have to act on what I read and what I understand? Yes, we do—we know that.

*27) Pure and genuine religion [it's the only kind that counts] in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress [doing something for those who really need help, as was mentioned in the sermonette] and refusing to let the world corrupt you. (NLT)*

The King James says to keep the self *unspotted from the world*—in other words, to exhibit God's nature, not the nature of Satan, who inspires the world around us. Remember that is part of what the Millennium teaches—that's what we're doing here. God has given us many gifts like that. One is expressed by the fact that we're all gathered here—we chose to be here. I don't know about you, but we chose to be here. He gave us the understanding of the holy days and we acted on it, we made a conscious choice, by coming here to the Feast. We're going to be with brethren who we want to be with.

Another facet of choosing—I don't have any enumerated points, I leave all the points to Rick ((laughs)), but what about truth? Maybe better said, do we have the freedom to choose our own truth? Do we? Someone might say that's a loaded question. Of course the answer is no; we don't have the option when it comes to God's truth, as it's shown to us in scripture. I have a few quick references; you can jot them down, as we won't try to turn there—I'm going to go pretty fast. John 17:17 is where Christ is praying for His disciples. He says:

**John 17:17** *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (NKJV)*

God's word is not option 1, option 2, option 3, or whatever you want it to be. But down in verse 19 of John 17, we read:

*19) And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. (NKJV)*

In John, chapter 14, Jesus said,

**John 14:6** *... I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (NKJV)*

**John 4:24** *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (NKJV)*

**John 4:23** *But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. (NKJV)*

Scriptural truth, biblical truth, as God reveals to us, always comes with a price. I don't know whether you've noticed that or not—I think many of us have noticed that—it comes with a price, and we see that today. What I mean by that—that it comes with a

price (and actually it's happened in the past, so it's not unique to our time), is if someone digs into scripture and sees what it actually says, and it invariably runs counter to the established organization and its belief system, whoever bucks that system that is going to suffer. Again, that's not a new phenomenon.

Most Bible students are familiar with the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Dictionary (also known as the BDB). One of the co-authors of that work, Charles Augustus Briggs (1841–1913), a biblical scholar, Presbyterian minister, and seminary professor, was one of the first Americans to master historical, critical approaches to scripture. In 1893 he was tried for heresy. His crime: He worked out a method to scientifically approach biblical scholarship. He used an approach that was driven by open and fearless search of truthful interpretation of scripture—what it says, not what someone says it says.

That's what Briggs did and he was persecuted for it. In fact, he was defrocked. He insisted that a search of scripture shouldn't be governed by inherited doctrine but through the use of linguistic, historical and archaeological tools—in other words, using the tools that are available so that one can see and interpret scripture with accuracy, and not just according to tradition.

I have a book, *Modern Religion* (I can't remember the title exactly but it's something like that—*Today's Religion*). Anyway, here's what it says about the Presbyterian system of governance and decision-making. It's done by a board of elders, who are the primary authority. That's from the Greek, *presbyteros*, translated “elders” as we see in scripture. This system emphasizes the importance of elders; they decide doctrine. That might sound familiar. Charles Briggs rocked the traditional boat and he was defrocked for it. He went from the frying pan into the fire—to me it's kind of humorous but I wasn't in his shoes—because he then migrated over to the Episcopalians, and here is their system: Episcopalianism is a hierarchical system of governance and decision-making, in which the denominational leaders are the primary authority. That's what we see in scripture, the Greek *episkopos*, translated “bishop” or “overseer”.

The irony in that is that most Christians accept that form of church government more than any other; it's a top-down structure, they accept it, and again, it sounds familiar to us. Briggs's story is not atypical at all in terms of honest scholars everywhere. It's been said that the history of the Christian church can be traced in the blood of its scholarly martyrs. There is a price to pay if you actually interpret scripture truthfully and accept that truth. Tens of thousands, maybe millions, have been tortured, imprisoned, and murdered, in the name of dogma, throughout the history of the Christian church.

In another book Briggs authored, he listed what he described as obstacles to the study of holy scripture. He labeled one such obstacle “sectarian partisanship”. He went on to write: *A sin against the Bible is often committed by the indiscriminate use of proof texts in dogmatic assertion and debate. These texts are hurled against one another by zealous partisans ... with such differences and inconsistencies of interpretation, which should disgust any opened-minded person.* It should. He's talking about the politicization of dogmatic doctrine. What happens when someone threatens that

political structure and its interests, its power, its authority? That person gets hammered. That's what any system (ruled by politics) does, in any age. Remember the account (and this is over in John 18:37-38; you don't need to turn there unless you'd like to) where Pilate is questioning Christ?

**John 18:37** *Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

38) *Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" [We know the rest of the story.] And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all. (NKJV)*

Pilate was a politician, right? He had to weigh the risks of telling the truth. He wanted his own version, and he had his own agenda. He had to worry about either pleasing Rome or pleasing the Jews, and we know what he did. The point is, we can't have multiple versions of scriptural truth—they just don't work. You can't choose the facts to suit yourself or your agenda, and you can't do it and get away with it. We think we can, but we can't. Truth is truth. It's either pure or not, scripturally speaking. It's not up to us to decide what's true, it just isn't.

Just turn on your television—watch how politicians invent their own truth. They'll rearrange the facts each and every day to suit their own agenda. We can't get away with that scripturally. Keeping in mind the choices that people make, read the whole chapter of Hebrews 11. Just think about following God's truth, following God's way of life, in the footsteps of those individuals. In Hebrews 11:24, it says this about Moses.

**Hebrews 11:24** *By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,*

*25) choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin ... (NKJV)*

Again, I like Lockyer's book, [All the Men in the Bible](#). Lockyer states in that book that Moses lived 120 years, in three, forty-year segments. The first forty years he was a prince in Egypt, with all of the perks, the bells and whistles, the chariots, the servants, the finest lodgings—all of it. Then he spent forty years herding Jethro's goats. I'm sure he got used to the goat droppings in his sandals. Then he spent the last forty years wandering in the wilderness—that was Moses's life. In every one of those phases of his life, he had to make choices. We have that history, that record in the Bible, of the choices, good and bad, that Moses made.

The spiritual choices we make can actually affect our eternal life. It might be a startling statement, when you think about it, but this freedom of choice that God has given us—if we don't exercise it in a godly way, we can actually nullify what God has given us. Paul teaches us that. Let's go over to Romans 8, beginning in verse 9. I'm going to be reading from the NLT.



**Romans 8:9** *But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)*

10) *And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.*

11) *The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.*

12) *Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. (NLT)*

Coming from that person looking back at you in the mirror, as James mentioned.

13) *For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. (NLT)*

That's what overcoming is all about; it requires conscious effort on our part. I don't know about you, but that's what I have to do.

14) *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. (NLT)*

Did you catch what he told the folks? What Paul was telling the brethren is that when we're called to repentance and we're baptized, and have God's Holy Spirit enter into us, in a very real sense (if you think about it, and want to look at it this way) we're entering into a partnership with God, through Jesus Christ, through that process He called us into. It goes on to say that instead of being led by the choices of our human nature, now, with God's Holy Spirit, we can make godly choices. Keep in mind the term that Christ used in John 14 and 15, where He referred to God's Holy Spirit as the Helper, as the Comforter—to help us through this process.

15) *So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. (NLT)*

It doesn't force you, doesn't shove you, doesn't drag you; you have the opportunity to make good choices willingly.

15 continued) *Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."*

16) *For his Spirit joins with our spirit [in a partnership] to affirm that we are God's children.*

17) *And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. (NLT)*

We have to choose to follow Christ wherever He may lead, no matter what that costs us. Who hasn't been faced with those costs from time to time?

18) *Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.*

19) *For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day [part of what we're picturing here at the Feast] when God will reveal who his children really are.*  
(NLT)

It says if we are led by God's Holy Spirit, we are the sons of God, now and in the future. We can choose not to follow the leading of God's Spirit, and by doing that we can actually nullify the gifts that God gave to us, which are His Holy Spirit, His calling, the understanding that we have, along with everything else that He has done for us personally. We can nullify it all by making really bad choices. To me that just brings home the importance of this topic. It matters a great deal what we do, how we conduct ourselves, the behaviors that we exhibit in our lives—that was talked about in the sermonette. It matters a great deal but we have to choose to do that, to take responsibility.

I look out and see an awful lot of grey heads, white heads (and sometimes no hair at all), but what I'm getting at is that if you've been around long enough you can remember when church government was heavily emphasized. This was the teaching of the church. God will not allow anyone into His family that He cannot govern. I heard someone say one time that that was dead wrong. I have to say I partly agree. Yes, we have to submit to God—of course we do. We have to obey God, we have to have God's rule in our life, but that statement was always presented to us in the context of church government, also known as "God's Government on Earth!" That's how it was described, and if you didn't submit to it, then you weren't submitting to God.

I still have all those papers. I don't look at them anymore. We're past that, right? I hope we are. It's a maturing process and we choose to move past that. I hope we all have. Let's rephrase that statement a little bit. I don't believe God is going to allow anyone into His family who won't choose to govern themselves. If God gives us the freedom to choose, led by His Holy Spirit, would He then control us like automatons? God wouldn't do that—He doesn't do that. If He did, why do we need this guidebook [the speaker points to his Bible] on how to conduct our lives?

We have a biblical example, directly in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, over in Zechariah 14, if you would turn there. The setting is the Day of the Lord, which will probably be mentioned during the Feast.

**Zechariah 14:16** *And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, [that's YHVH—Yehovah] and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

17) *And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem [nations will willfully choose not to come up to the Feast] to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.*

18) *If the family of Egypt [to me, that's probably a reference to such Arab nations as will insist on hanging onto Sharia law, not wanting God's law in their life; and if they] will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

19) *This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. (NKJV)*

Early on in the Millennium, because of obstinate human nature, God is going to have to compel some stubborn people to keep the holy days by withholding rain, and allowing plague and all of that. He's going to have to do that, He's going to have to put pressure on them. Doesn't there come a point where that becomes internalized, where people will want to do the things God wants them to do? Where they will choose to obey God because they know it's the right thing? We've come to that point, and people in the future will, too. They'll just realize it's the best thing, and they'll believe it with all of their being; no one will have to push them or force them into it at some point. I'll say it again, I don't believe anyone is going to be in the family of God who won't eventually—by the time this is all said and done—govern themselves. We just have to do that.

Let's take a brief look at an example, a very familiar one. You don't really need to turn there; we've mentioned it so many times; Isaiah 14. Here's a being who didn't govern himself properly—he didn't. He chose to rebel against God. Isaiah 14 and verse 12.

Isaiah 14:12 *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!  
How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!*

13) *For you have said in your heart:*

He said such things as, I will ascend, I will exalt my throne, I will also sit on the mount of the congregation, I will ascend above that, I will be like the Most High. Do you think there is a pattern of thought going on there, of Satan making these really bad, rebellious choices against God? Choices that were contrary to God in every way? The point I'm making is that the selfishness we're reading about here will lead to the exact same result for us—we will end up in the same place, the lake of fire—if we don't choose to humble ourselves before our great and Almighty God. I just believe that wrong choices can get us into a lot of trouble. We have some warning from Peter—I have a couple of reference scriptures—in 1 Peter 2, again from the NLT. A newer translation is okay if it doesn't destroy the intent of the scripture.

**1 Peter 2:11** *Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. (NLT)*

These are worldly desires that rage every day in our lives, but we have a choice. We can choose to be influenced by Satan and the world around us, or we can choose to be influenced by what God tells us in His word. That's a choice we make—we make it every day.

12) *Be careful to live properly ... (NLT)*

There's a reason for that, and it's an unselfish reason, when we put it in the context of what Peter is telling us here.

12 repeated) *Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong ... (NLT)*

People don't understand; they don't understand why you keep the Sabbath, they don't understand why you keep the Feast. You'll lose your job—are you crazy? You have to make a living, right?

12 continued) *even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. (NLT)*

One day they will understand—one day. That's a secondary result of the choices we make. We seldom think of that. Remember how Peter ended his letter, in 1 Peter 5.

**1 Peter 5:8** *Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. (NLT)*

How does he seek to devour us? By his ways, by his means, not ours and not God's—he just wants to eat us alive like that.

9) *Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. (NLT)*

Faith is not my topic today but exercising faith involves a whole bunch of choices.

9 continued) *Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are. (NLT)*

God gives us the freedom to choose but we have to be wise in how we do that, how we exercise that. He won't force us into His Kingdom; He refuses to do that. In fact, He loves us so much He'll throw us in the lake of fire before He'll allow us to become like that being we just read about in Isaiah 14. We have to make those life choices, every day of our lives. We have to ask ourselves, do those choices affect my eternal life? We have all kinds of scriptures that bear that out—over in Matthew 16.

**Matthew 16:20** [We know the story] *Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. (NKJV)*

Let's go down to verse 22.

22) *Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"*

23) *But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”* (NKJV)

We have to choose the things to be mindful of—all of us. Just like Christ is telling Peter.

24) *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.* (NKJV)

That’s daily choosing to follow Him. It’s not something we do once and that’s it.

25) *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

26) *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?* [His own life, his eternity]

27) *For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each [for what?] according to his works.* (NKJV)

What he or she has done with their life, and that involves choices, on an ongoing basis. Another scripture Paul was inspired to write, over in 1 Corinthians 9; again, this has to do with choices. What I’m getting at is we have to choose eternal life.

**1 Corinthians 9:24** *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*

25) *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.* (NKJV)

Again, that’s a reference to eternal life.

26) *Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.* (NKJV)

Here’s his spiritual fight; he tell us what it is.

27) *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection ...* (NKJV)

That sounds like he’s making choices to me. He’s choosing to deny himself certain things in order to stay on top of them; as he puts it, to keep control of his body—the things he does physically. He also keeps under control his mind and his thought processes.

27 continued) *... lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.* (NKJV)

The King James says, *lest...I myself should be a castaway.* He’s talking about eternal life there, isn’t he? Yes, he is. It’s pretty clear; our choices have everything to do with

our eternal life. I think we all want to be a member of God's family and that means we have to make certain choices, like Paul did—choices that are completely against our carnal nature, and that's a daily struggle. I look at that old guy in the morning, looking back at me in the mirror, and say, what are you going to do today? What kind of trouble are you going to get into today? Are you going to control your mouth and control your thoughts, every day? Sometimes people have to come to the point of understanding this whole concept, that spiritual choices are our personal responsibility. They have to come to that point before they actually start making progress in their life.

People will go into denial—nothing wrong with me. Organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous understand that. They use a twelve-step program but they understand that it all boils down to the fact that individuals have to take responsibility for themselves and start telling themselves, no, I won't have any more alcohol.

That principle applies to any kind of addiction. How many times did Paul tell himself, no, when disciplining himself? We don't know, maybe we can ask him one day. The point again is this idea, this gift of choices, of choosing—that God gives us—He places that responsibility right back on our shoulders; squarely on our shoulders. I'm not talking about gaining eternal life through works, it's not possible. We do have certain things to show God; we have to prove to Him that we earnestly want that eternal life, and we have to choose it. We can choose not to, we can neglect it, and that's a choice, too, if you think about it. Our choices can lead us to a closer relationship with God or they can lead away from Him. It's that simple, really. Let's turn over to Isaiah 65. This will probably also be mentioned later on during the Feast. Ancient Israel in Isaiah 65; the context is the consequences to a people who choose to forsake God.

**Isaiah 65:12** *Therefore I will number you for the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight.*" (NKJV)

Yes, those words are in the scripture. Jumping over one chapter to Isaiah 66, verse 4.

**Isaiah 66:4** *So will I choose their delusions, and bring their fears on them; because, when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight.*" (NKJV)

This is a people who consciously chose not to obey God. They had their idolatry, they had all kinds of things they got into. That was their choice, rather than God. We're sitting here at the Feast and we'll have an opportunity to rectify some of that. In spite all the bad behaviors and choices that mankind has made, that humankind has done, they are going to be reeducated and we're going to have a part in that. It talks a little about that over in Isaiah 30 and verse 20.

**Isaiah 30:20** *And though the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers [those who will educate, shape, direct, and*

instruct—they won't drive or beat into submission] *will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers.*

21) *Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way ... (NKJV)*

Make this choice, not that one. We know what you're thinking, we know the direction you're heading—don't go that way.

21 continued) *"This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left. (NKJV)*

You make a decision whenever you turn to the right or the left. Of course this is talking in a broader context, but we do, all the time.

22) *You will also defile the covering of your images of silver, and the ornament of your molded images of gold. [Sounds like false religious images to me.] You will throw them away as an unclean thing; You will say to them, "Get away!" (NKJV)*

Of all the idolatry that we see today, people will come to see what it has done to them. I was driving around the other day in Post Falls, and it's striking to me—I thought of Washington, Oregon and of course California; the liberalism of California is spreading like a cancer up the West Coast—and what I saw was a lot of was taverns. There are taverns on just about every corner—a bar of some kind—and cannabis shops. What's wrong with us as a people? Hopefully we're going to tell people that's really not the way you want to live, no matter what people try to tell you.

Here's another famous scripture over in Deuteronomy 30. I'm sure you know exactly where I'm going.

**Deuteronomy 30:15** *"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil,*

16) *in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments [that's all about right choices], that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.*

17) *But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, [really bad choices]*

18) *I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; (NKJV)*

God never compromises about our choices. He wants us to make right choices, godly choices.

18 continued) *... you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.*

19) *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life ... (NKJV)*

It's the same for us. Do we want eternal life? The choice is ours. Again, we can choose not to accept that.

19 continued) ... *that both you and your descendants may live;*  
20) *that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.*" (NKJV)

Just summing it up, we choose to love, glorify and honor God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. We want and choose to put our hope in God, through all the trials and things we suffer through this life. We want and choose to put our trust in God for the protection and the help that He offers to us. No matter what comes to us in this way of life. There's a psalm that I really like that speaks to that; it's about what God does for us, the protection and help that He gives us. It's Psalm 91, verse 1.

**Psalm 91:1** *He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.* (NKJV)

We're familiar with that protection—that's YHVH, that's Yehovah throughout here.

- 2) *I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust."*
- 3) *Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.*
- 4) *He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.*
- 5) *You shall not be afraid of the terror by night [nor any of the other terrors we see in the world], nor of the arrow that flies by day,*
- 6) *nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.*
- 7) *A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you.*
- 8) *Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked.* (NKJV)

The wicked? We can see the reward of the wicked—the bad choices. Just drive around.

9) *Because you have made the LORD [YHVH—Yehovah], who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place ...* (NKJV)

That's where we want to be, that's where we want to dwell in our lives. It's where we want to dwell in our thinking; we want to have in mind the things of God and not so much those of the world. We can't escape them but we do have a choice of whether we absorb them or not, and whether we reject them or not.



- 10) *No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;*  
11) *For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.*  
12) *In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*  
13) *You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.*  
14) *“Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. (NKJV)*

Knowing God’s name—we know God’s name.

- 15) *He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.*  
16) *With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.” (NKJV)*

Let’s choose life, brethren. Let’s live God’s way in everything we do, each and every day, and let’s enjoy the Feast.