

THE CHOICES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

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Introduction:

A. Every Christian seems to struggle with the temptation of wanting to blend in the world:

1. It instinctively does not feel good to know we are looked at as being different!
 - a. To know that by striving to live a godly and righteous life our friends and neighbors might look at us with disdain can cause us to feel ostracized and alone
 - b. While we academically know we are pilgrims, it can be an uncomfortable feeling
2. We can rest assured that the devil knows we have these feelings and will exploit them!
 - a. He will try to get us to sit back and take it easy – to relax spiritually speaking
 - b. He will try to convince us that we do not need to exercise our spiritual discernment
 - c. He will try to lull us into thinking that we don't have to be all that careful as we live and make decisions in our daily lives!
3. If our attitudes and behavior does not stand in stark contrast with the world, then we can be certain that we are not living a life that pleases the Lord! **(Romans 12:2)**
 - a. If we are being molded by the world and its pleasures instead of being changed into the glory and image of Jesus Christ → We are going the wrong way!
 - b. If our the way we think is not being transformed from pleasing ourselves and our own lusts & desires to seeking God's pleasure, we aren't living for the Lord!

B. This constant battle is best seen in the way we make decisions! (Col. 3:1-4)

1. Whether pleasing the Lord is the first priority of our life is clearly portrayed in the daily decisions we make! Whether or not Christ is truly the focus of our life will come out!
2. If these things are really true about us, they will be the driving force behind our decisions!
3. So what should run through the mind of a person who is striving to serve God as he faces a decision → Especially those with moral implications?

I. First we need to ask, "What has the Lord said about this?"

A. Some things and activities we should avoid because they are specifically condemned!

1. This principle assumes that we accept the Bible as God's word and that we recognize that it alone is the guide and the standard for our lives! **(2 Tim. 3:16-17)**
 - a. As such, any activity that violates the scriptures is wrong and thus sinful
 - b. If we seek to please God we will ask ourselves, "Has God said this is wrong?"
2. The Bible is very clear on the point that if we practice what the Bible condemns, it will keep us from Heaven! **(Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-11)**
3. Seeing what God has condemned specifically is not difficult at all! The problem comes in setting aside our own wills or being willing to be different!

B. Others should be avoided because they violate a principle in God's word:

1. Sometimes in seeking to justify participating in some activity that is wrong someone will say, "God never condemned it! He never said not to do it!"
 - a. First of all... Don't be so sure God didn't condemn it or say not to do it!
 - b. Do statements like these really come from the mouth of someone whose heart is dedicated to pleasing the Lord no matter what?
2. We have to recognize that God does not spell out every single thing that's wrong!
 - a. Where's the passage for abortion? Gambling? Pornography? Euthanasia?
 - b. If the Lord was to condemn every single sin the Bible would be a never-ending book! New pages would have to be added all the time!
 - c. **Illustration:** You expect children to use their heads! You can't specify everything!
3. We face many circumstances where it's the principle that's involved!
 - a. Paul approaches condemning various sins on the principle of idolatry **(Col. 3:5)**
 - b. Our relations with others are governed by the "golden rule" principle **(Matt. 7:12)**
 - c. Does it sound like something God has said is wrong? Would participating in it violate a principle God has taught? If so, its wrong! **(Gal. 5:21)**
 - d. **Illustration:** Gambling → "I want to clean your pockets!" – Christ-like?

4. If we are looking hard enough for some excuse or justification for doing something we know is wrong – we'll certainly find it! **(2 Cor. 10:18)**
 - a. "Self-justification" doesn't change the nature of the activity at all – it's still wrong
 - b. You may even find someone who will be willing to approve of it – still wrong!
5. So as we face choosing between what the Bible condemns and our own desires and wants, what is our attitude?
 - a. It's a mark of maturity when we look to the principle and understand its wrong
 - b. It's a mark of immaturity when we ask, "Where's it specifically condemned" as we look for justification for what we know isn't right!

II. Secondly, "How will this affect me or those around me?"

A. If I cannot do something in full assurance that it is right, it must be avoided!

1. First, we must never do something that we believe is sinful: **(Rom. 14:14)**
 - a. Think about the struggle any devout Jew would face when they obeyed the gospel
 - b. Now God says that the meat that was once condemned is now clean; however their conscience still tells them its wrong!
 - c. When we violate our conscience, even if what we've done is technically okay, we have sinned! The conscience must be protected and nurtured!
2. What about when we question something or have doubts about it? **(Rom. 14:23)**
 - a. Maybe we aren't totally sure whether its wrong or right! Maybe it something about it sets off warning flags in our minds but we cant put our finger on the problem
 - b. We walk by faith and not by sight → Where does faith come from? **(Rom. 10:17)**
 - c. We test whatever decision we are about to make against God's word – If we are still unconfident about whether or not its right, we'd better leave it alone!
3. Consider what David's example teaches us about presumptuous sin: **(1 Cor. 15:11-13)**
 - a. They were transporting the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem on a cart that is led by a group of oxen → David transports it with great care and grandeur!
 - b. Remember what happened? The ox stumbles, the ark begins to rock, Uzzah reaches out to stabilize it, and God strikes him dead!
 - c. David gets upset for a moment, and then understood that God is RIGHT!
 - d. What was wrong? Did God say to use an ox cart? God said to use two poles & men! David realizes he was presumptuous because he didn't check with God!

B. We should also consider how what we do impacts our influence on the world around us:

1. **Illustration:** High School → People knew I didn't think a Christian should be participating in the school dances – My senior year, after the prom, a girl who I rarely spoke to came up and told me how much she appreciate my stand!
2. After reflecting upon the character of God's people, Jesus emphasized the positive influence we are to have on the world around us **(Matthew 5:13-16)**
 - a. Wherever a Christian is you should find a bright spot! We shine as positive lights for others to see so that they too may se and glorify God!
 - b. As salt of the world we impact those around us spreading forth the flavor of God!
3. So if something would harm this "positive influence" we must avoid it!

C. We have to realize that while an activity might be inherently good, if we harm others in participating in it, then it becomes sinful!

1. What we are doing might be right, but if it causes another Christian to stumble, then it becomes wrong and must be avoided! **(Romans 14:15-16)**
2. When we are unwilling to yield our own freedom to the destruction of another, it is nothing less than selfishness and a lack of love!
 - a. We are to have "Agape" love for one another: This is a sacrificial love
 - b. It's the same love that motivated God to send His Son and caused Christ to lay down His life for us → Sacrificed their best for the good of others
 - c. How much is it asking to give something up because we know it will hurt another?
3. When one is sincerely trying to please the Lord and my conduct causes him to fall

- spiritually – I have sinned against my brother and Christ! (**I Cor. 8:12-13**)
4. So when this comes up we ought to ask, “Will my brother or sister be hurt by seeing me participate in this? Would it possibly cause them to fall into sin or away from Christ?”

III. Thirdly, “What will be the outcome of this decision?”

A. It’s always good to ask ourselves the question: “Where will this take me? What will happen if I do this... or go here?”

1. **Caution:** We have to be careful in condemning something because of what it leads to!
 - a. Sometimes congregations are crippled because someone constantly objects saying, “It might lead to _____” when nothing is really wrong with it!
 - b. Something that is right is not wrong because of what it might lead to!
 - c. In Romans 14 was it the strong or the weak brother who was stricter?
 - d. The Pharisees held back with strictness where freedom actually existed
2. There is wisdom however in looking ahead and seeing the direction a decision will take us, the consequences we will face, and the outcome of choices

B. We should realize how our decisions might lead us to a situation where sin is at the door

1. There may not be anything inherently wrong with the activity but because of my own weakness or another extenuating circumstance, its dangerous for me! (**Matt. 5:29ff**)
 - a. A person who has struggled with Alcohol might stay out of some restaurants
 - b. One who knows he struggles with lust might stay away from the beach altogether
 - c. Realize though that just because you have plucked your eyes out doesn’t mean that your brother is wrong for keeping his!
2. Think about how this might affect one who is dating and looking at marriage! (**I Cor. 6:14**)
 - a. Cant be sinful → Repentance would create an unauthorized divorce
 - b. However, the thought of creating the closest relationship with have with someone on earth with one whose ultimate goal is not the same as mine is dangerous!
 - c. You would at best be without the encouragement → However, the void that would be created would be a negative force constantly working against you!
3. What about when you face a job promotion or moving somewhere else?
 - a. Are there sound churches in the area? Is it a good environment to raise children?
 - b. Some think, “I’ll have church in my home!” → Is this really wise or only convenient?
 - c. Some say, “I cant wait to move from Alabama!” – Why would you want to?
 - d. Remember the great cost of Lot’s decision! (**Gen. 13:12**)
4. The decisions we make in this life do have eternal consequences! It’s those who want to please God above all else and make Christ their life that sees them!

C. If the outcome of the activity does harm to our body, then it must be avoided!

1. Understanding this principle is based upon two foundational points:
 - a. We are not our own but have been bought by the blood of Christ!
 - b. As Christians there is something special about our bodies!
2. Corinth was a city filled with sexual immorality and so as Gentiles were being turned to the Lord teaching was needed to address this problem:
 - a. Paul teaches & emphasizes that their bodies are temples of God (**I Cor 6:19-20**)
 - b. They could not allow their society to determine what was acceptable behavior because there was something different about them... or rather IN THEM!
 - c. Anything that would harm our body would be sinful and must be avoided!
3. The principle would extend beyond sexual immorality wouldn’t it?
 - a. The abuse of alcohol, tobacco, non-prescription and even prescription drugs
 - b. Even gluttony is condemned by the Lord! (**Prov. 23:20-21**)
4. If there is something we are wanting to do and we realize that it is destructive to our bodies, then we must avoid it!

Conclusion: As you think about these factors and evaluate your life, are you really trying to please the Lord or just playing at religion?