

# UPON THE ROCK

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## THE CHOICES WE MAKE

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## MOSES' CHOICE: PERSPECTIVE AND PRIORITIES

Phil Gear

Most people would have greatly envied Moses. Born to a family of Hebrew slaves, he was adopted and raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. (Exodus 2:10) He received the finest education available at that time, "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." (Acts 7:22) He grew up in the royal court of the world's most powerful nation. There is no way of knowing how far Moses could have gone. Was Pharaoh's throne a possibility someday? He would have almost unlimited amounts of earthly wealth and power.

However, Moses made a crucial decision. This was not the uninformed decision of an immature child. He made it when "he was come to years." (Hebrews 11:24) Should he retain his power and influence as a member of the Egyptian royal family, or give it all up and wander in the wilderness with a nation of slaves? Would he choose earthly wealth and power, or hardships, suffering, and persecution? This was easy. There really was no choice. He would go with the slaves. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26)

His decision had to confuse and amaze all those who knew him. His adopted family must have been completely dumfounded. What possibly could have motivated him to make such a choice? It just made no sense. But Moses understood something they did not, and that changed everything.

**MOSES' DECISION WAS BASED ON A PROPER PERSPECTIVE**

Moses viewed things differently from most people. His decision was based on his faith in something beyond this world. He made his choice from the perspective of one who looked for heaven. It did not matter how much of this world's goods he had. It made no difference how much power and influence he could have here. He had "respect unto the recompense of the reward"; that is, he considered the eternal ramifications of his decision. He knew that whatever he had here could last no longer than the world. Then he would face eternity, and no amount of money or prestige could possibly help him then. He would then face God, and how could he possibly impress God with money and power? Moses would gladly give up the temporary things of this life for the eternal things of the next because they were all that would matter in the long run. He viewed this world from the perspective of one who knew he would not be here forever.

Understanding the temporary nature of this world puts things in a whole different perspective. What difference will it make in a hundred years how much money I had? Will it really matter if I drove a luxury car or walked? So what if my house was not in the most exclusive part of town? So what if I do not wear designer clothes? "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) Why would we choose to give up that which will last for eternity in order "to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season"? (Hebrews 11:25) It just does not make sense.

**MOSES' DECISION WAS BASED ON PROPER PRIORITIES**

Moses had learned what really matters. The riches of Egypt did not begin to compare with the wonderful blessings of God. Christ offered "greater riches than the treasures in Egypt". (Hebrews 11:26) That

being true, there was only one choice. He would refuse "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" and take his place with "the people of God." (Hebrews 11:24-25)

It would not be easy. It would mean suffering and affliction, He would wander for forty years in the wilderness leading a nation of people that at times would be ungrateful, complaining and downright rebellious. He would have to listen to their murmurings, lead in spite of their criticism, and do his job even when totally exasperated with them. He would have to intercede on their behalf when they chose to worship golden calves instead of God, (Exodus 32:30-34) He would have to endure the faultfinding and criticism of his own brother and sister. (Numbers 12:1-16) But all of this reproach was to be accepted because of the blessings that came with it. He considered “the reproach of Christ” to be worth more than all the riches of Egypt. (Hebrews 11:26) The reward he would receive for his faithfulness to God would more than make up for any difficulties he had to endure.

Priorities can be our greatest struggle. It is so easy to get wrapped up in what *seems* important, and forget what really is. The urgent can overwhelm the vital, Pleasure can outweigh duty. Jesus instructed us to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33) We must constantly remind ourselves of what is truly important, or we will make wrong choices. We will choose to ignore our family to advance our careers. We will sacrifice our integrity to close that lucrative business deal. We will ignore our souls to make things more pleasant for our physical existence. We will compromise our beliefs to be accepted by others. There are so many ways to get our priorities out of order. As someone has said, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”

Moses’ choice was a costly one. He gave up much to be faithful to God. Many would have said he gave up too much, but Moses was careful to consider the cost of molding the wrong choice. He made his decision “by faith” (Hebrews 11:24), and that faith helped him keep his perspective and priorities straight. May we learn to do the same.

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unintelligible sounds seems to be inconsistent with the fact that He is God, the third member of the Trinity. I would suggest that the groanings that cannot be uttered are ours, not His. He hears our groanings just as He heard the groanings of His children in Egypt (see Stephen’s comments at Acts 7:34). He takes our malformed and mis-formed thoughts and joins Christ, interceding on behalf of His saints before the throne of God (see Romans 8:34).

### **Love’s Grand Finale through the Gospel**

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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says two things of which we take note at this time. First, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” (Romans 8:16), and “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Romans 8:26).

Before declaring what the first passage teaches, I will state what it doesn't teach. This is necessary due to the appeal of error to mystical acts and deeds of all kinds as confirmation of a multitude of equally erroneous doctrines. For instance, all who claim that salvation (forgiveness of sins) is an experience that can be confirmed by feelings contradict the scriptures. Consciousness may tell us how we feel, but it cannot tell why we feel that way. Reason tells why. This fallacy is used by numerous proponents of false religions (Mormons, Pentecostals, Shamans, Witchdoctors and others). As a simple statement of fact the Bible teaches that feelings come from faith, not vice versa!

The verse simply states that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit; it does not say “to our spirit.” To bear witness “with” is to give testimony that is consistent with that of another. The verse does not declare how He does this. I would suggest that He does it in the same way He bears other testimony of Divine Facts, namely through the scriptures. The Spirit declares what one must do in order to be saved and declares the promises that are to be received based on that obedience. Our spirit knows whether or not we have obeyed these commands. If we have, our spirit is in agreement with the testimony of the Holy Spirit, thus confirming forgiveness and the receipt of other blessings promised by the gospel.

The second passage says that the Spirit helps us by interceding before the Father on our behalf with regards to prayer. He does this because “we do not know what we should pray for as we ought.” How and when He does this is not revealed in the inspired record. The fact that He does it is a matter of faith that must be accepted on the evidence given. I would suggest that any claim as to how the Spirit does this is a matter of human speculation that is beyond our ability to know. Also, any theory that has the Spirit of God speaking with

## Peter's Chooses To Repent

Patrick Morrison

Where would the church be today without great men of faith like Peter? There are so many wonderful characters in the Bible from whom we can glean so many valuable lessons. There are many in the Scriptures who fell because of weakness, but who then got back up to continue in service to God. For some reason, most of us identify more with Peter than with any other Bible character. Why is this so? What makes Peter seem more human to us than every other Bible character? Perhaps it is his impetuosity—on more than one occasion he put his foot in his mouth because his tongue outran his brain. Maybe it is his fickleness—one minute he was as strong as a rock, the next he was as weak as water. Maybe it is the fact that the Lord could use someone like Peter to accomplish so much for the kingdom of God, in spite of all his imperfections. Whatever the reason may be, I am convinced that most of us can sympathize more with Peter than with anyone else in the Bible. What if Peter had chosen not to repent after denying the Lord? What if Peter had never been such a great instrument for good in the church?

The story of Peter's fall is found in Matthew 26. As Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper on the night of his betrayal, he proclaims that all would be offended because of him that very night (vs.31). As is normally the case, Peter is the first to speak. He affirms his fidelity (vs.33), saying that he would never be offended by the Lord. In a way, he elevates his faith above the faith of the other disciples. In essence he says that his faith is stronger than that of the others. They were weak, and might be offended, but Peter was strong, and would not fall. Jesus then turns and speaks directly to Peter, telling him that before the night was through, Peter would deny him three times (vs.34). Peter again responds without thinking, stating that he would die with the Lord before he would be offended by him (vs.35). All of this climaxes toward the eventual fall (and a great fall indeed it was) of Peter. As Jesus is led away to “trial,” Peter follows from afar (vs.58). The one who just moments before was willing to die with the Lord (John 18:10) was now unwilling even to be seen with him. On three occasions Peter has the opportunity to proclaim his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, to claim to be his follower (vv.70, 72, 74).

In every instance, he denied the Lord. As a matter of fact, each of the denials finds Peter becoming more animated and angry at those who would accuse him of being a follower of Jesus. After the third of these denials, the rooster crows for the second time (Mark 14:72), bringing to remembrance the words of painful truth the Lord had spoken not long before. Luke lets it be known that at this instant, the Lord turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61). The look, the words flooding his memory, were too much for Peter. The events of this night were overwhelming, and he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75).

Can you imagine what Peter saw in the eyes of the Lord? He must have seen the pain and the disappointment in the Savior's eyes. He must have sensed the heartache that he caused the Lord. He must have wanted to crawl under a rock! As the innocent Lamb of God was being led to the slaughter, his pain and anguish was made that much greater when Peter denied even knowing Jesus. This from one who claimed his love and allegiance for the Lord would never waver, even in the face of death. One has well said that Peter's problem was not that he was willing to die for the Lord, but that he was unwilling to live for him. This was a pivotal moment in the life of Peter, a moment which could fortify his faith or crush it completely. Peter had a choice to make—either repent for denying the Lord and resolve to live for him with all he had, or allow the shame and pain of these events to turn him away from the Lord forever. What would he choose?

Peter chose to repent of his wrongdoing and allow the Lord to use him as an instrument of righteousness. He was humbled rather than hardened. Peter's life was changed by godly sorrow rather than the sorrow of the world (2 Corinthians 7:10). One who repents after a godly sorrow will never regret his repentance. What exactly is godly sorrow? Godly sorrow is seeing sin as God sees it. A proper view of sin from the eyes of God will help the Christian truly to repent when one falls short of His glory. Godly sorrow is in opposition to the sorrow of the world. Worldly sorrow may bring temporary relief to the sinner, in that he/she escapes the guilt and shame he feels by admitting wrongdoing, but in the end it leads to permanent spiritual death.

The spiritual mind seeks God and godliness. It hates the things of the flesh knowing that death is the sure fate of the carnal mind. Just as right thinking people physically prefer pleasant and good things over the unpleasant and ugly, the Christian seeks that which edifies and strengthens. The spiritual mind dwells on God and enjoys prospects of life and peace (8:6). The spiritual mind subjects itself to God, but the carnal mind cannot function in that way (8:7-8). The eternal hope of the spiritually minded is a glorious resurrection (8:11).

### **The Relationship With Christ Results in Sonship and Heirship (8:12-25)**

Those who walk after the Spirit are called "sons of God" (8:14). Sonship results from our relationship with Christ. When He becomes our elder brother, His Father becomes our Father! What an exhilarating thought! To think that Jesus is my Brother and that His Father is my Father is literally beyond human comprehension.

Beyond the thought of Sonship is the fact of Heirship; I am heir to a fortune that excels a million-fold the fondest imaginations of my heart. The collective creation travails as it longs for the perfection that will some day be realized in Christ. The individual creature eagerly but patiently desires the change that will some day come. Tribulation now; glory later!

Like the souls that cried out under the altar in the book of Revelation (6:9-10), the heirs of God cry, "How Long, O LORD? How long?" Some day the purchased possession will be claimed by the Father and the hope of creation will be realized. Until then Paul and those of kindred faith are "... eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23). Sonship and Heirship — Blessings that exceed our abilities to imagine!

### **The Relationship with Christ Results in Special Work by the Spirit (8:16,26-28)**

We know that Christ becomes our Brother and His Father becomes our Father, but what of the Spirit? The chapter under consideration

## Revelations from Romans (9 of 12) The Revelation of a New & Living Relationship with Christ (Romans 8)

Jim Bullington

Condemned! What an ugly word, and feeling, and future!! There is nothing good that condemnation brings to mind. On the other hand, justification is about things that are all good. There is no “down side” to justification. Romans 7 speaks the dark and foreboding words of condemnation; Romans 8 turns the spiritual tables and declares bright and wonderful blessings that result from obeying the Gospel of Christ!

### The Relationship with Christ Results in the Spiritual Mind (8:1-11)

“No condemnation!” What a contrast to Romans 7. Every fiber of one’s being under the law screams “Condemnation!” In Christ, the message is exactly the opposite. Hear the relief in Paul’s voice as he writes, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” (8:1-2).

The one who knows no condemnation is the one that walks according to the Spirit. As used in this context, it is clear that Paul contrasts 2 systems (i.e. the system of law delivered by Moses vs. the system of grace delivered by Christ). This type of contrast was clearly spoken of by John when he wrote, “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17). From the outset of the book of Romans, Paul labored to show that salvation only comes through the gospel (1:16). He has clearly proven his case in the intervening chapters; now he tallies the results. One result is the spiritual mind that comes by following Christ and turning away from the carnal ordinances of the Law of Moses. The detested result of the law was death; the glowing result of the gospel is life.

When one is confronted with sin, he can either choose to sorrow after a godly sorrow, or sorrow after the world. Too many choose the latter. Too many feel guilt and shame when they are caught in sin, but would continue in such behavior if they could do so unnoticed. When caught “red-handed” it is easy to cry “I have sinned.” Too many “repent” for being caught, not out of remorse for transgressing the will of God. We can find examples throughout Scripture of those who repented after a godly sorrow, and of those who “repented” after the sorrow of the world. David was one who was led by godly sorrow to repent of wrongdoing. When David’s adultery is pointed out by Nathan, David repents and returns to the Lord (2 Samuel 12:1-25). Judas is an example of one who was influenced by the sorrow of the world to feign repentance. He was ashamed and felt great guilt at having betrayed Christ into the wicked hands of his accusers (Matthew 27:3). However, these emotions did not lead him to repent and seek to do better. Instead, Judas hanged himself in an attempt to free himself from the burden he bore (vs.5). Peter could have easily given up because of the great shame and guilt he felt. Had Peter sorrowed after the world, he would have crawled under a rock, never to be seen in service to the Lord again. However, Peter saw his sin from God’s viewpoint. He was not simply sorry that he had been caught in sin, but he was sorry that he had disappointed the Lord. This led Peter to genuine repentance.

Peter’s choice to repent allowed him to be of great service to the Lord and His kingdom. After his humbling experience, the Lord directs Peter to feed His sheep (John 21:15-19). Would Jesus have given this command to Peter had he failed to repent? Peter is allowed to open the doors to the kingdom of heaven on the day of Pentecost by his preaching the gospel message of salvation (Acts 2:16-38). On that day 3,000 precious souls were added to the Lord’s church. What if Peter had not repented? Peter is allowed to preach the gospel message to Cornelius and his household, who would then become the first Gentiles converted to Christ (Acts 10). What if Peter had stubbornly refused to repent? Peter also becomes an elder (bishop/pastor/overseer/shepherd) in the Lord’s church (1 Peter 5:1). I have no doubt that numbers of souls were converted to Christ and many Christians remained faithful due to the faithful oversight of the eldership in which Peter served. What if Peter had not been led by godly sorrow to repent? The books of 1 and 2 Peter bear the name of

this great servant of God, and have been very valuable to God's children throughout the Christian age. What if Peter had sorrowed after the world? Although the Lord's church would have survived had Peter not chosen to repent, many faithful saints from ages past may never have come to Christ had it not been for Peter. Thank God for Peter's decision to repent!

## ALMOST PERSUADED: THE CHOICE OF AGRIPPA

A. J. Cox

When Porcius Festus replaced Felix as governor of Judaea the apostle Paul had already been a prisoner in Caesarea for two years (Acts 24:27). While in Jerusalem Festus was informed concerning Paul and agreed to give his accusers an audience upon his return to Caesarea (Acts 25:1-6). Though the Jews could not prove their accusations Festus desired to do the Jews a pleasure by sending Paul to be judged in Jerusalem (Acts 25:7-9, 14-20). This miscarriage of justice left Paul with no alternative but to exercise his right as a Roman citizen and appeal to Caesar's court (Acts 25:10-12, 21, 25; 28:17-19). This unexpected development left Festus with no small predicament; "How can I send a prisoner to Caesar and not signify the crimes laid against him?" (Acts 25:25-27). After certain days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to congratulate Festus upon his recent appointment (Acts 25:13). To Festus, Agrippa's visit must have been viewed as very advantageous. King Agrippa was a Jew and, unlike the governor, was expert in all customs and questions which were among the Jews (Acts 26:3). "Perhaps," thought Festus, "Agrippa could be helpful in finding a solution to this embarrassing problem" (Acts 25:26). Once Agrippa expressed his desire to hear Paul the stage was set for one of the most interesting encounters to be found anywhere in the Bible; the meeting of the apostle Paul and King Agrippa II, the last of the Herodian line.

### A Powerful Defense

While Paul was certainly being judged, it was really his teaching that was on trial (Acts 26:6,7). Thus, his defense is more of his doctrine than of himself. He begins with a brief record of his past conduct. Paul had lived as a Pharisee and had zealously persecuted the

that David was innocent of any wrongdoing or that he was not accountable for his actions because he tried to cover up what he did. David knew what he had done was wrong and that is why he tried to hide it.

Choice #6 "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Samuel 12:13). David's previous decisions were wrong, bad choices, awful decisions, but in the end he made the right choice. David confessed his guilt and repented of his sins and the Lord forgave him. Although the Lord forgave him, there were grave consequences to the choices he made. Uriah was dead and the child that was conceived with Bathsheba would also die (2 Samuel 12:14). The moral to this true story is that while our wrong choices can be forgiven, they still have consequences.

David made a series of bad choices and he would have to live with the consequences (fear, shame, guilt, depression) for the rest of his life. Despite his foolish and often wicked decisions, the Lord forgave him because he made the decision to come to God for mercy. We too have made many choices we regret to this day, but there is hope for us because God has not given up on us. Just as we chose to disobey Him, we can choose to obey Him today. We can come to the cross and lay our burdens down at the feet of Jesus for Him to bear (Matthew 11:28-30) as we confess our faith in Him (John 8:24; Matthew 10:32-33), turn away from our sins in repentance (Luke 13:3) and submit to baptism into Christ for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-3; Galatians 3:21).

The choices we have made in the past have brought us to this point in our life. The choices we make from here on out will determine where we will be in eternity. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve....as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

*Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem*" (2 Samuel 11:1). We are not told why David chose to stay in Jerusalem instead of going to battle, we are only told that he stayed home when he normally should have been in battle. This choice was seemingly insignificant at the time, but the consequences of this decision would later prove fatal.

Choice #2 *"And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself and the woman was very beautiful to look upon"* (2 Samuel 11:2). We could readily argue that David accidentally saw this woman naked, he did not choose to see her bathing. However, it is implied that after David saw her, instead of turning away or going back inside, he chose to look upon her closely. He examined her enough that he saw how beautiful she was. It may have been an accident for him to see her, but he chose to continue to look.

Choice #3 *"And David sent and enquired after the woman, And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam:, the wife of Uriah the Hittite"* (2 Samuel 11:3). Had David chosen to go back inside and forget what he had seen he could have saved himself from great misery. Unfortunately David did not forget, but chose to inquire further about this beautiful woman he had seen. What happened previously may have been an accident but this was a choice he made.

Choice #4 *"And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house"* (2 Samuel 11:4). We can presume David's innocence in the first three instances, but his next choice is indefensible. David, apparently consumed by lust chose to send for and commit adultery with Bathsheba. David knew she was married, he was married and he knew it was a sin, yet he chose to do it anyway.

Choice #5 *"And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die"* (2 Samuel 11:15). As horrible as his previous actions have been, his next choice is purely evil. It cannot be argued

followers of Jesus (Acts 26:4, 5, 9-11). Agrippa no doubt wondered, "what made him change?" Anticipating his unspoken question, Paul proceeds to relate to the king the events leading to his conversion and his subsequent obedience to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:12-23). Agrippa heard Paul concerning repentance, obedience, sanctification by faith, forgiveness of sins, and inheritance (Acts 26:18-20). He had Paul's eye witness testimony of the resurrection of Jesus in conjunction with the testimony of Moses and prophets, which he believed (Acts 26:22,23,27), Agrippa had all the information he needed to become a Christian. Now it was left to him. How would he respond?

### A Poor Decision

There is disagreement on the exact meaning of Agrippa's response recorded in Acts 26:28. Whereas the King James Version renders it "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," the American Standard Version has "With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian," The latter lends itself to the belief that Agrippa spoke ironically. If this is correct Paul did not respond in kind (Acts 26:29). This writer believes that Agrippa was literally "Almost persuaded." Why did Agrippa not obey? Based on the context and what we know about Agrippa II we can hypothesize as to some of the possible reasons behind his rejection.

(1) Agrippa may have viewed his obedience to the gospel as an indictment of his family's conduct. Agrippa's great-grandfather, Herod the Great, had attempted to kill Jesus while He was yet a babe and slaughtered the innocent children of Bethlehem (Matthew 2). His great-uncle, Herod Antipas, had beheaded John the Baptist and mocked Jesus (Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 23:6-12). And his father, Herod Agrippa I, murdered James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12). "If I obey the gospel that means grandfather Herod, uncle Antipas, and my father were lost!" So many today let the decisions made by family members keep them from obeying the truth.

(2) Had Agrippa obeyed he would have been required to forsake his father's religion. Agrippa I had espoused the Jewish religion and had claimed to believe in the law of Moses. Agrippa II had been brought

up in the Jewish faith and, as king, was entrusted by the emperor with the oversight of the religious affairs in Jerusalem. He was intimately connected with his father's religion. How often it has been said, "My great-grandfather was this, and my grandfather was also this, and my father was also this, and if I am going to be anything religiously I am also going to be this." Indeed, it is difficult for people to forsake the religion of their fathers and obey the gospel. To do so is to admit that their loved ones were wrong religiously. This would not be pleasant for anyone.

(3) Agrippa, no doubt, was hindered by his fear of how others would react to his conversion, Remember, the most powerful and influential men in the city of Caesarea were assembled on this occasion (Acts 25:23). What would they think? Festus had just accused Paul of being mad at the mention of the resurrection (Acts 26:23, 24). What would the governor say if Agrippa was obedient to that preaching? In addition to provoking the Jews into a frenzy, word of his conversion would eventually come to the ears of the Roman emperor. What would he do? Sadly, people allow their fear of what others might think, say, and do to discourage them from becoming Christians.

(4) Had Agrippa decided to obey the gospel he would have had to sever, what was by all accounts, an unscriptural relationship with his sister Bernice. Their relationship was a scandal among the Jews and the Gentiles. Juvenal, the Roman satirist, referred to Bernice as "Agrippa's incestuous sister," And Josephus refers to the report that she had "criminal conversation" with her brother Agrippa. It would be necessary for Agrippa to repent and end this unlawful relationship before he could be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). A person does not truly repent if they continue in sinful activity. It has often been said that a person can no more remain in a sinful marriage or relationship after "repenting" than a car thief after "repenting," could keep the stolen automobile! Those who have entered into an adulterous marriage continue to sin as long as they are in that relationship (Matthew 19:9). There could be few deeds more painful than informing people that before they can become Christians, true repentance demands that they end an unscriptural marriage. Only God knows how many lost souls have gone away sorrowful because they loved their spouse a little bit more than they loved the Lord.

*male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:26-27). "And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely 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" (Genesis 2:15-17). "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Genesis 3:1-6). When God commanded His creation to abstain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He implied that man was capable of understanding the command and choosing to obey the command. When they ate the fruit it proved that Adam and Eve chose to disregard the command and warning of God. The fruit appealed to their lust and they made the choice to disobey God. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13-15).*

David was a great and wise king. On one occasion he was described as being a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Despite his many admirable qualities, David made a series of foolish choices that brought great heartache and grief into his life and the lives of those around him.

Choice #1 *"And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of*

## Choices We Make

Brandon Britton

*"I've had choices, since the day that I was born there were voices, that told me right from wrong. If I had listened, I wouldn't be here today, living and dying with the choices I've made."* The opening verse of this song echoes through the ages as a constant reminder that we are the product of the choices we have made in the past.

It has become popular and commonplace for people to excuse their behavior, and thus free themselves of accountability for their choices, based upon factors that are "beyond their control." Many of those with a drug, alcohol or gambling addiction dismiss their accountability by claiming they have a "disease", saying, "I cannot help myself." Whether or not an addiction can be labeled a disease is not for me to determine, but this one thing I know: the "disease" of addiction to these things is not triggered until a person CHOOSES to partake in these destructive vices. A person, who chooses not to drink, use drugs, smoke or gamble will NEVER become addicted to them. Every alcoholic, every junkie, every habitual gambler is what they are because they CHOSE to do these things. It is of vital importance that each of us understands that we will be held accountable for our decisions and will answer for them in the last day. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"* 2 Corinthians 5:10). Since we will give an account for the things we have done we must take great care that we make the right decisions.

When God created man on the earth He created him with the ability to think for himself and make choices, Man is a self-governing (autonomous) creation. Like our Father, we are free moral agents with the capacity to make choices, whether right or wrong. Reading the Genesis account of the creation and early days of man proves this fact. *"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him;*

## A Plea to the Disobedient

Giving them one last opportunity Paul pleads with his audience to not only be "almost," but "altogether" persuaded (Acts 26:29). Whether none, some, or all of the above factors were instrumental in Agrippa's rejection one thing is certain, he savoured not the things of God, but the things of men (Matthew 16:23), His affection was set on things on the earth, not on things above (Colossians 3:2). Perhaps you have been almost persuaded to become a Christian, You have rejected the gospel call on every previous occasion. Will you fail to take advantage of yet another precious opportunity? If you do you run the risk of learning what Agrippa has already learned, "almost cannot avail; almost is but to fail;" almost is lost.

## THE CHOICE OF FELIX

LARRY G. REYNOLDS

In Acts 24 we read of accusations brought against the apostle Paul a servant of Christ by his enemies. He was accused of being "a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes and one that profaned the temple" (Acts 24:5,6). It is because of these accusations that Felix comes in contact with the apostle Paul. Roman history records that Felix was a freed slave, one who had risen from the lowest ranks in the most corrupt city at that time. He and his brother forced their way into power through a corrupt court system. Tacitus, a Roman historian said of him: "Through all cruelty and licentiousness he exercised the authority of a king with the spirit of a slave". When a slave would become free they always took on a new name; and this man's was named Felix, "happy". It seems that he was happy doing cruel and evil things such as receiving bribes, and making the court system corrupt. Felix is now going sit in judgment of the great apostle Paul. For two years Paul was in the custody of Felix, and during this period had opportunity to discuss many things with him.

Luke, the writer of Acts records an occasion when Felix along with his wife Drusilla, called for Paul to hear of him concerning the faith in Christ. Paul is going to preach to him a three point lesson, 1.) righteousness, 2.) self-control, 3.) and the judgment to come

(Acts 24:25). At the end of the lesson Felix and Drusilla will be called upon to make a choice. They will either make a choice to serve God or continue in their evil ways. In this article we will notice Paul's three-point lesson and then notice the choice Felix and Drusilla made.

### RIGHTEOUSNESS

First, the apostle Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness. Here stands a man with memory of the years of his governorship, of the cruelty, the wrong, the devilishness of the past, and now hears a lesson on righteousness. This was a lesson that this man needed to hear. We too need this lesson on righteousness. We need to understand that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also the Greek For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16,17).* In this gospel it tells of the good news that with Christ and his blood we can be made righteous. Because of God's grace and mercy we have a chance to be brought back into His fellowship and be whole again. *"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10).* Felix and his wife had a choice to make, either to submit to the will of God or continue in their evil ways.

### SELF-CONTROL

The second lesson that Paul presents to Felix and Drusilla is that of self-control. Again this was a lesson that these two needed to hear. They had allowed their fleshly passions to get out of control. Drusilla, according to Josephus, was a daughter of Herod Agrippa. She was a woman of remarkable beauty, the lawful wife of Azizus, king of Emesa, but was now living in an adulterous relationship with Felix. This too is a lesson that is truly needed today. Our land is full of adulterous relationships, and people do not even blush. Those who are living out of control need to understand that such living will destroy their soul in hell. *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry,*

*sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outburst of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19,20).* God made us with these desires, but expects us to keep them in control. The act of sexual intercourse is reserved for lawful married couples. God said, *"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).* We have like Felix and Drusilla a choice, either to do what God says or reject His word.

### JUDGMENT TO COME

The Bible speaks very plainly that we will all appear before Christ in judgment. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:10).* At this judgment we will not have a choice whether we want to participate or not. But when Felix heard about the judgment to come, he trembled and sent Paul away for a convenient time. We then find him heading back to Rome with his heart being hardened with time. We do not have a record of Felix ever obeying the gospel of Christ. He made the choice to send Paul away without surrendering to the will of God. Felix and Drusilla will some day stand in judgment to give account for the deeds they done in this life and for the choices they made.

May we learn a lesson from Felix and his wife that as we have opportunity to hear and obey that we will make the choice to do so without delay.

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