

## CHOICES

### I Corinthians 3:1-9

#### Intro

A few weeks ago we read the opening of I Corinthians. It was in those verses that we heard Paul crediting the Corinthian church as 'not lacking any spiritual gifts'.

And then it shifted...dramatically.

Yes, Paul very much sees himself in a parental relationship with the Corinthians. But what we are about to hear takes that level of care all the way back to nursemaid as Paul says that he fed these infants with Christ via 'spiritual' milk and not solid food because they weren't ready for it.

Paul then doubles down and says, by way of using the examples of self-division that have been described to him as existing within the church, that clearly they still aren't ready for solid food.

Infant: here's your milk. This is, clearly, all you are able to handle.

Anyone who has ever taken part in parenting gets the analogy.

But what does that mean for those who are reading this letter as the God breathed Word of God that it is? Listen for verse 9. It's a reminder of who we are in God: emphasis on the 'we'. The scripture reads this way.

### **I Corinthians 3:1-9**

<sup>3</sup>And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, <sup>3</sup>for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? <sup>4</sup>For when one says, 'I belong to Paul', and another, 'I belong to Apollos', are you not merely human?

<sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup>So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup>The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

### **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

#### Intro

Our second passage comes to through the voice of Moses as he speaks to the people just prior to entering into the promise land: an entrance that he himself will never make. His hope for the people is wonderfully concise: choose life.

This is an action and it is not achieved passively.

As you think about your walk with God, what are you choosing? The scripture reads this way.

### **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

15 See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup>If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup>But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup>I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup>loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

### **'Choices'**

A few years ago we journeyed through a spiritual growth campaign entitled '10'. There were five 'steps' to this program. Anyone remember them?

Read the Bible (10 minutes a day).

Pray (10 minutes a day).

Connect with (10?) other people walking in the faith.

Be good stewards (where we talked about tithing or the giving back to God of the first 10%).

Being tenacious (I know, that one was a stretch). But its' point was no less true: taking the faith that you have been feeding (through the previous four steps) and then put that faith into action, ...which in turn ends up feeding your faith.

The reason that I bring this up is because each one of these areas of focus, even though we are able to see their value and worth (and in so many ways say, 'yup, those are things that are valuable'), end up being pushed to the side or, never fully implemented because we end up doing what?

Making choices, which thereby establish priorities that lead us in directions that, while not necessarily bad, aren't necessarily of God. All of us, all of us, are able to recognize more than a few of these sorts of examples in our own lives.

The question that I would like to ask is this: when we recognize that we are moving in directions that are not necessarily of God, what, if anything, do we do?

Now mind you, I'm not asking what should we do...but rather, what do we do?

My hunch is, that until we have some sort of 'make or break moment', we don't end up doing a whole lot. We live in the space of, 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' and we move passively along.

I know that I have very much felt this in my own life.

And again, it probably isn't an emotional space where we are intentionally walking away from God, ...we just recognize that we aren't walking all that closely with the Almighty.

Our two scripture lessons have two variations on this theme.

In the first case, we have the Corinthians who have set up a space in their community where dividing lines have been drawn. Even though they believed in God, they made choices that led them away from God.

In the second case, we have the Israelites on the verge of finally entering into the Promised Land. Sounds like a good day...and it is!

But it is also the moment when God speaks through Moses via the choices that the people will have in the days that are to come, to remind the people about where they, and their ancestors, have come from in regard to their walk with God (which has been more than a little bumpy). A quick look through Exodus reveals how time and time again and time again, the Israelites meandered, walked, and outright sprinted away from the Almighty, as well as the many ways that God pleaded with, encouraged, and punished the Israelites back into something that resembled a closer walk with Him.

Again, there is a belief in God...and yet there are actions that show that this belief was not (always) followed through on.

Now, even though the specifics might not match up to our own experience, we understand that the choices that we make reflect the priorities (even momentary ones) that are nudging us to make the decisions that we do.

It happened with the Corinthians. It happened with the Israelites. It happens with each of us. Sometimes our choices lead us in life affirming directions...then there are those other moments.

So what does scripture teach us about those 'other moments'?

The first thing that we pick up is that, at some point, we will be held to account. For the Corinthians, we can safely assume that life inside the community of faith had become awkward, if not tense, and we can hear in Paul's letter to them that new choices need to be made. (Because remember, it's not like there was another church down the road that the disgruntled could go to!) The choices that the people had made, even though they may have been made from a place of trying to follow God more closely, ended up leading them away from an ever closer walk with the Divine.

Our second passage is preemptive accountability. Yes, it is based off of what has been, but it is letting the people know that there are consequences to the choices that we make.

So first, accountability always shows up. It might not be immediate, or even through an expected voice...but it will come.

The second thing we learn is that we need to own the consequences of our decisions. Too often, when accountability shows up, we end up blowing it off, saying whatever the missteps were weren't all that big a deal, or, the ever popular, it's not my fault.

God is saying through our passages, and through scripture as a whole, that if confession is not there (which is what accountability calls us to), then we are going to be perpetually stuck in a place of incompleteness because we are not walking as closely with God as we should.

Love God and love neighbor (those were the responsibilities put forward by Moses which spoke to the blessings and curses that he was articulating). When we are confronted with the reality that we are falling short of these calls, we need to own what is ours and, as the case may be, ask for forgiveness from one another and from God.

Accountability shows up and confession needs to be made.

The third step (which can be ridiculously difficult), is that forgiveness needs to be extended. Not only do we need to actually believe that God will forgive, we need to mirror that forgiveness in our own lives as well.

When we come before God owning the choices that have led us to a place where we are not walking as closely with Him as we need to walk, then we are forgiven. Jesus death on a cross was not just for some people some of the time, it was for all people every time. You are forgiven.

And yes, we need to mirror that in our own lives: forgiveness needs to be given when the confession is real. Otherwise, both the transgressor and the one who was transgressed against are left in a state of flux where neither one is able to heal...not really, not completely, and maybe not even at all.

And if you are feeling like you are unable to offer that forgiveness on your own, the reality is that you're probably right: you can't. And that's where and when we need to ask God in to work in us, and through us. We need to make the choice to ask God in so that healing might have the opportunity to take hold. It won't be overnight, but the promise has been made that if we lean upon the Lord, if we choose life, that He will provide, that He will begin to equip us in ways that let us thrive.

Finally, we need to actually walk with God. Forgiveness does not come without expectation. We recognize that in the midst of our liturgy every week where the summary of the law follows the prayer of confession and the assurance of pardon. We need to lean upon the priorities that are of the Divine to love God and neighbor, in order to make the choices that will lead us toward life abundant.

Get out of the rut, establish a new pattern, journey in a new way, journey with the God who has wanted you there beside Him all along. That's where steps like the spiritual growth campaign come in: they provide new options to the ones that left us broken.

And when you fall into those old patterns, own them, seek forgiveness, and move back to a place where you are making the choices that allow you to live abundantly.

The choices that we make will always affect us. Our choices will either lead us to be ever closer to God, or begin to drift away from God. Our choices will lead us to accept the wrongs that we have committed, or pretend that we're not to blame. Our choices will help us to forgive, or leave us in a place where we

believe such forgiveness is impossible or unwarranted. Our choices will lead us to a place where we can become that new creation in Christ, or that we are bound by the sinfulness that consumes us.

What will we choose?

Echoing the words of Moses: Choose life!

**After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, choices are always before us and some of those choices lead us away from You. Lord, when we are finally held accountable to be able to realize this, lead us in the choices that necessarily follow: help us to choose confession, forgiveness, and a walk that lead us to be ever closer to You. Lord, lead us to choose life! In Jesus' name we do pray. Amen.