

CHOICES

“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong” (Ex. 23:2)

People obviously have the ability to make choices. Otherwise the inspired commandments in the Bible would be useless. You do have a choice! You do not have to follow the crowd in doing wrong!

To help us understand man’s ability to make choices let’s go back to the beginning. God created Adam with the ability to make choices. He was different from all others creatures. God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden **“to work it and take care of it” (Gen. 2:15)**. Fortunately, Adam chose to obey. The garden was well organized because God is not the Author of confusion. Therefore the Bible explains: **“Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.” (Gen. 2:8-9)**.

As we have said, God placed Adam in the garden to work and take care of it. To this very day we can also choose to be laborers together with God (1 Cor. 3:9). As we have also said, Adam was unique in his ability to choose for only man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). The heavens declare the “glory” of God but not His “image”. The skies proclaim the “work of God’s hands” but not His “image” (Ps. 19:1). Only man was created in God’s image. God is free to choose, and so is man. The stars do not make choices. The trees do not make choices. Even animals, birds, and fish cannot choose to disobey God. Only man can say “no” to God and make choices that involve eternity. In all of creation only man was created in the image of God.

So God planted two special trees in the Garden to make clear what kind of a man Adam was. **“In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9)**. God planted these two special trees in the middle of the garden so that Adam would encounter them every day. **“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:15-17)**. Every day Adam would have to choose whether to obey God or not!

HOW SIMPLE! HOW PROFOUND!

So every day Adam had to choose whether to obey God or not to obey God. So do we! Every day we are faced with the same choice that Adam had. God designed the Garden of Eden to teach us something. **“For everything written in the past was written to teach us” (Rom. 15:4)**. Sadly, as you know, Adam chose to disobey God! Not only did Adam die, as God promised, but through him death passed upon all men. **“Therefore, just as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned”**. (Rom. 5:12).

As mankind multiplied on the earth so many people chose to do wrong that **“every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, ‘I will wipe mankind from the face of the earth – man and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of**

the air – for I am grieved that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:5-8).

Mankind didn’t have to follow the crowd in doing wrong and Noah proved it! Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord and so can we (Gen. 6:8).

Joshua also found favor in the eyes of the Lord. He chose to follow the true God rather than false gods. Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem and said: **“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Josh. 24:15)**

We too can choose to serve the Lord just like Joshua did! You do not have to follow the crowd in doing wrong!

FOLLOWING THE CROWD

Our text: **“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong” (Ex. 23:2)** was written 1,500 years before Christ. This is when the Ten Commandments were given. These inspired words are still relevant today. Riots may be occurring all around you, but you don’t have to follow the crowd to do wrong.

Consider this chronology:

- The Ten Commandments are recorded in Exodus 20:1-17.
- The warning about following a crowd to do wrong is in Exodus 23.
- In Exodus 32 3,000 people died because they chose to follow the crowd in doing wrong.

The warning about following the crowd in doing wrong was given at a time when 3,000 people died for following a crowd in doing wrong. Remember! Their rebellion happened while Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights receiving the Ten Commandments (Ex. 24:18). **“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him” (Ex. 32:1).**

The Israelites had only been out of Egypt a few weeks. They were “out of Egypt” but Egypt was not “out of them”. Illicit Sex, as you may know, was an integral part of Egyptian society. It was even an integral part of their worship. The worship of their gods and goddesses such as Bes, Hathor, Isis, Nephthys, Meskhenet, and Heqet all involved sexual orgies. Religious prostitutes even held prominent positions in society and were treated with courtesy and respect. The Hebrews knew better than to worship these pagan gods. Moses specifically asked the Pharaoh for permission to go three days journey into the wilderness to distance the Israelites from the evil environment of the Egyptians and to worship the One True God (Ex. 5:1-3). Pharaoh denied them this request until the tenth plague took the life of his own firstborn son. Now that they were liberated from Egypt, 3,000 Hebrews used the delay of Moses as an excuse to commit fornication like the Egyptians did. Even Aaron was involved in this idolatry (Ex. 32:1-6). Remember! **“The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).** Consequently, these

3,000 rebellious people died as they result of their sin (Ex. 32:27-29). The Lord was also angry enough with Aaron to kill him too, but God spared his life because Moses prayed for him (Deut. 9:20).

Please do not follow a crowd in doing wrong!

CHRIST BRINGS HOPE TO SINNERS WHO FOLLOW THE CROWD

If you have followed the crowd to do wrong, do not despair! If you come to Christ He will forgive you. 1,500 years after Moses warned about following the crowd to do wrong, Christ was on trial for His life before Pontius Pilate. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and wanted to release him. Pilate's wife even pleaded with him not to condemn Jesus whom she knew was innocent (Matt. 27:19). Since it was a custom to release a prisoner at the Passover, Pilate gave the mob a choice of releasing a guilty murderer and thief named Barabbas, or an innocent man named Jesus. Jesus, as you know, never killed anyone or stole anything. **“But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed” (Matt. 27:20)**

Please note that this wrong decision of the crowd was not spontaneous. It was orchestrated by the chief priests and elders. The same is often true today. Even today evil men are still persuading crowds to do wrong. Before joining a riot it is wise to know the motives of the people who created the riot. In Ephesus, for example, some idolators started a riot for the specific purpose of destroying the Apostle Paul (Acts 19:1-41). Soon the whole city was on an uproar but **“most of the people did not know why they were there” (Acts 19:32)**. Sadly, many today are also involved in riots without knowing why they are there.

At the trial of Jesus the chief priests and elders were successful in manipulating the ignorant crowd. The crowd foolishly cried out for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Christ. They even dared to say about Jesus **“Let his blood be on us and on our children” (Matt. 27:25)**.

Fifty days later Peter preached to these people at Pentecost. He confronted the crowd for their foolishness and said: **“Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘brethren, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is to you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call’. With many other words he warned them; and pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation’. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:36-41).**

EVEN THOSE INVOLVED IN THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST COULD STILL BE FORGIVEN IF THEY WERE WILLING TO REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED!

THE SAME IS TRUE TODAY! GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH BUT THAT ALL COME TO REPENTANCE! (2 PET. 3:9).

A TREE OR A WAVE OF THE SEA

You have a choice!

- You can be like a tree planted by streams of water (Ps. 1:3).
- Or you can be like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind (Ja. 1:6).
- A tree planted by the water does not vacillate. It produces fruit. Its leaves do not wither. And whatever it does prospers.
- By contrast, a vacillating double minded man is tossed to and fro like waves of the sea. He is unstable in all that he does.

The point is, you don't have to follow the crowd in doing wrong. You have a choice! John the Baptist didn't follow the crowd. He was like a tree instead of a reed shaken by the wind (Matt. 11:7). You can choose to be like John the Baptist and not be like Judas Iscariot. Jesus didn't follow the crowd to do wrong. He always did what God wanted Him to do. He never created a riot (Matt. 12:19). When the crowds came by force to make Him their king He withdrew to a mountain and prayed (Jn. 6:15). You can choose to be like Jesus! Remember! The "fruit of the Spirit" is "self control" (Gal. 5:23). With the help of the Holy Spirit you overcome every addiction and choose to do what is right even if you have to stand alone. With the help of the Holy Spirit you can say "no" to those who want you to follow the crowd in doing wrong. With the help of the Holy Spirit you can be **"quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires"** (Ja. 1:19-20).

Whatever you do, **"Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong"**!