

Personal Choice within God's Sovereignty
Lesson 4– Focus on Personal Choice
February 22 & March 1, 2015

A. Introduction and Main Theological Points to Consider:
Focus on Personal choice

What are the implications of our poor or bad “personal choices”? As a Christian, how does this affect our part of fitting in “God’s Active Plan and Witness”? Do poor decisions affect our ability to “walk in the spirit”? If so, to what limit?

The closer our relationship to God and growth through the Sanctification process, the better we understand and gain God’s wisdom. We begin to see more of God’s direction and opportunities for our lives. Our personal decisions begin to be more in line with God’s desired choices.

Imagine a scale of “Walking in the Spirit” or “Spiritual Growth”;

- At the lower end of the scale; personal decisions leading to rampant sin and self, not relying on the Holy Spirit
- Upper end of the scale; personal decisions, thoughts, ideas almost become symbiotic with the Holy Spirit; A closeness, oneness, direction and influence where you cannot begin to differentiate the two; Unachievable with our current sin nature, but our goal in total sanctification none the less.

To help us better understand the context of Paul’s letter with respect to our topic of personal choices within God’s Sovereignty, our **feature text is 1 Corinthians 3:1-23**. First it is important to have some background understanding on the Corinthian church:

- Commercial center of Greece; known for pottery, stone, bronze
- One of the most important cities in the Roman Empire
- Metropolis of more than 500,000 people
- Teeming with business activity and shipping; important sea route
- Home of many different nationalities and cultures
- Famous for its lax morals, pagan ritual sites
- Religiously, honored place for many different religions
- Letter written to address certain questions arising in the church at Corinth and to deal with other problems that came to his attention through other sources
- Christians at Corinth were succumbed to various teachers, teachings and making poor choices
- This letter is written to fellow saved Christians

B. Main Study Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

1 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? 4 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? 5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. 9 For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building. 10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation

as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.** 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. 18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; 20 and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." 21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 – Immature Christians and Wisdom

Paul's ministry in Corinth involved an emphasis upon the basic ABC's of Christian Faith. He was trying to feed them milk as opposed to solid food at their level of understanding. They were still unable to develop a deeper understanding of the gospel.

Paul's concern was for the correct understanding of wisdom. Some of the Corinthian Christians were living on the basis of human wisdom. They lived as fleshly or immature persons with a self-centered rather than God centered life. While they were saved, the fleshly part of their nature was dominated from sin rather than the spirit of God (Romans 8:12, 2 Cor 10:2). They were babes in Christ, spiritual kindergarten; they were in Christ but not growing up. They possessed the Holy Spirit, but were not yielding fully to the spirit.

Even with this situation, Paul continues to refer to them as brethren of Christ. Theologically Paul had not broken fellowship with them as the family of God, but he is unable to refer to them as spiritual men. Spiritual men can only be applied to those who 1) those who possess the spirit of God and 2) Show growth in spiritual understanding. They have the ability through God's gift to become spiritually mature.

Genuinely spiritual is the person who lives by the spirit of God (Romans 8:4,12-14, Gal 5:16-26).

Men truly united in Christ are not disunited by strife. Factionalism is not the work of the spirit, but of man.

1 Corinthians 3:5-17 – Apostles and Wisdom

What characterizes Apollos and Paul is not a race for superiority but a dedication to the God given opportunity to serve him. Efforts to establish any kind of party loyalty or sides, endangered the basic commitment of the Corinthians to Christ. No revelation or philosophy apart from Christ is adequate, only Jesus is required. Apollos came to Corinth and preached there after Paul had left (Act 18:24-28).

They were not competing, but were team members for God with different skills. Each servant has a God given task to fulfill, involving meaningful and necessary labor. Spiritual growth or success is a gift from God. For those who have labored by doing their part, they can only wait for growth and cannot produce it, so it is with spiritual growth.

God produces the results and we are judged by our choices, not the ultimate results. Did we contribute? All who serve in God's fields are fellow workers, not competitors, but allies. Persons with varying abilities add to the quality of life of the church. In God's time, the quality of each contribution will be revealed; fire will

test what sort of work each one has done. There is no hint that this reference to fire serves a penal, disciplinary or purgative purpose. Those who build on Christ will receive a reward, this is not a doctrine of saving works.

Those who build feebly, will not receive a reward, but they will receive their salvation, even while they suffer loss of reward. The words “will suffer loss”, is better translated “will lose it” or “will be punished” Very important to remember that this refers to our labor in the church and not personal faith or character.

Their problem was that they are not allowing the Spirit of God to drive them; as evidenced by strife, division, factions.

1 Corinthians 3:18-23 – Wisdom of God

No man can boast that he has arrived with God’s wisdom on his own.

Wisdom of this world is folly, because it is an effort to save oneself as opposed to by God. Our acceptance of God-centered wisdom is solely revealed through Christ. The stoic philosopher Seneca, contemporary of Paul had a very different view of wise men; “He believes that the mind of the wise man is master of all things and that all things belong to them”

Let no man boast of men, since no man possesses true wisdom except as a gift of god

C. Additional Scriptures Demonstrating Personal Choice for the Saved:

Revelations 17:17

17 “For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the best, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

- God directed these kings to give their allegiance, even their very kingdoms, to the control of Satan himself, until the words of God will be fulfilled.
 - The kings believe that they are acting by their own initiatives and choices, they think it is their own ideas and purpose
 - God gave them that choice; he made them share a common purpose, controlling their decisions without them realizing it
- These verses confirm not only God’s sovereignty over demonic forces, but also shows how God’s Sovereign Will rules men’s lives.
- Difficult example of God’s directive and control resulting in sinful decisions and choices; Remember that God is not the author of sin
- Did these men have a chance to object how God decided to use them? Did they even understand in the moment that God was in control and not them?

Proverbs 3:1-8

1 My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, 2 for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. 3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. 8 This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

Revelations 3:14-19

14 *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. 19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent*

D. Personal Choice Models Discussion:

Visual Model to try and integrate:

- God’s Sovereignty
- God’s influences, controls, plans, limits, restrains, directs
- Personal Choice; Godly verses Sinful
- Visualize how we can understand personal choice synonymous with God making choice

E. Questions for Small Group Discussion:

1. As saved Christians, discuss how our “poor” personal choices affect our ability to understand God’s plan or “personal will” for our lives?
2. Discuss verses 1-4 and what this means relative to unity, strife or disagreements. Where are these prohibitive and allowed within the church?
3. In verses 12-15, discuss Pauls’ use of the word “fire” and “burned up”, what do these refer too? Are they damnation and separation or referring to rewards due to our “tasks and decisions”? Remember that these verses are addressing saved Christians.
4. Can those that are saved be “removed” from God’s active plan and will on earth through poor choices? Compare your answers to Paul’s response to the Corinthians in verse 15.
5. With respect to Revelations 17:7, discuss how this is an example demonstrating God’s Sovereignty. How do you rationalize that the King’s decisions were sin and against God? Think back to our previous lessons on sin and evil within God’s will and plan.
6. Can you begin to spiritually discern how we can make a “personal choice”, yet it can still be made by God or directly influenced? While this seems to be mutually exclusive, are they symbiotically the same for a Christian?