The Dignity of Decision

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radio programs
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A well-known story tells of a farmer who hired a man. He asked him to paint the barn, estimating it would take three days. The man did it in one day. Then the farmer asked him to cut up a pile of wood, which the farmer thought would take four days of hard work. The man did it in one day. The man was then asked by the farmer to sort a pile of potatoes. They were to be divided into three groups: one group would be selected for next year's seeding; another group would be sold at the market; and the third group of the most inferior potatoes would be fed to the hogs. This task, the farmer figured, would take only one day. Late in the afternoon the farmer checked on his laborer only to find none of the potatoes sorted into the three groups. Asking the man what was wrong, the farmer received this reply, “I can work hard, but I just can't make decisions.”

It has been said that history is made whenever a decision is made. The history of the world could be graphically presented by presenting the great decisions, or the failure to make decisions, which have changed the course of human affairs.

In no area of human concern is the power and necessity of decision more imperative than in man's relationship with God. Faith in God and willingness to be governed by Him requires conscious choice and willful commitment. Nowhere is this principle more openly declared than in the early history of Israel's life in Canaan.

Following Moses' death, and as God's people prepared to enter the land God had given them, Joshua was chosen as Israel's teacher. Through the next twenty-five to thirty years this valiant soldier and leader encouraged and directed God's people in conquering Canaan and establishing their own cities throughout the land of the twelve tribes. Now, at the point in the Bible where we read today's lesson, Joshua is presenting his closing address to Israel. The land is secure, the cities are built, the tribes are in possession of their own lands and their religious practices are in progress. But the aged and experienced Joshua senses a lack of commitment and an unwillingness on the part of the people to make a genuine decision for God. Listen, as he speaks: "Now therefore fear Jehovah, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt: and serve ye Jehovah. And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Joshua 25:14, 15).

This entire chapter is devoted to Joshua's final charge to Israel. He literally makes his farewell address. Toward the conclusion of this majestic and sober speech comes this gleaming principle that is the foundation of all human dignity — the power of choice — the dignity of decision.

There is a thrill about every choice man makes throughout life. One senses a power that quietly throbs in every human decision. And, of course, there are those decisions whose consequences scream at us and follow us all our days. But if man is unique in God's creation, and we believe very certainly that He is, it is this ability, this prerogative, of choice or decision, that creates his peculiarity above the remainder of the animal world!

Regardless of the desperate extents to which most of us go to escape decisions, they must be made. For
man at least, “the imperative of choice,” is a reality of existence. Just before Israel crossed the Jordan into their promised land, God made a further covenant with them, “in the land of Moab.” The essence of that covenant sets forth, by divine ordination, the necessity of decision in the lives of all believers. God said to His people: “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love Jehovah thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, that thou mayest live and multiply, and that Jehovah thy God may bless thee in the land whither thou goest in to possess it. But if thy heart turn away, and thou wilt not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish; ye shall not prolong your days in the land, whither thou passest over the Jordan to go in to possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed: . . . .” (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

Decision, God says in this passage, is the difference between life and death. Heaven and earth are called to witness the decisions we make, God states. The alternatives are pictured, but regarding the decision, there is no choice — one must decide!

Later in the history of Israel, the prophet Elijah finds himself almost completely alone in his refusal to worship Baal instead of Jehovah. After years of flight and persecution, God brings Elijah back to face the people with the following message. “How long go ye limping between the two sides? if Jehovah be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). The real tragedy on this occasion is described in the next words of this verse. “And the people answered him not, but said, ‘We will walk in thy ways.’” Then followed the well-known context between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in the presence of the people of Israel. The false god Baal did not answer his devotees’ cries and pleas to consume their animal sacrifice with fire from heaven. Jehovah answered Elijah’s similar plea, at which time, “when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, Jehovah, he is God; Jehovah, he is God” (1 Kings 18:39). Unfortunately, however, the opportunity to exercise their own choice in the matter had long since passed. There was no dignity left for a people who had been forced to a decision by a miraculous incident.

But no Biblical example of the imperative of choice or the dignity of decision is more convincing than that of Moses. The greatest leader of Jewish history did not become such accidentally. Moses’ life may be divided into three periods: his time spent in Egyptian royalty; his time in the fields and among the flocks of Midian; and the agonizing period of his leadership of the children of Israel. But the turning point in his unparalleled career came in the palaces of Egypt. Listen to the author of Hebrews, in the New Testament. “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked unto the recompense of reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Moses’ example says that decisions require maturity. “When he was grown up, (he) refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Moses’ life teaches that one must always consider the ultimate consequences of his decisions. “For he looked unto the recompense of reward.” Moses’ example tells us to properly evaluate the present. He would never have chosen “ill treatment with the people of God” instead of “the pleasures of sin” had he not properly approached the day’s dilemma.

The imperative of choice is necessary to the whole and healthy life of faith in God and moral conviction. James explains in his General Epistle that “the double-minded” must purify their hearts (James 4:8). He also suggests that a “doubleminded man” is “unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). Decision, James says, is necessary to the well-ordered life.

The power of choice is ours today in a unique way because of the decisions, directions, and purposes necessary for responsible living. You may have decided not to make a choice about God in your life. But I now suggest that your life will not be of complete worth. Decision to serve God. It is imperative for the balance, harmony, and meaning that your life must have, that you choose this day whom you will serve. And my prayer is that you will decide to follow God!

The Bible further amplifies the dignity of decision by picturing the live options presented man. There is the constant tension between the Spirit and the flesh that requires a decision. Paul warns, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7, 8). In the fifth chapter of the same epistle, the apostle encourages, “Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). The necessity of our deciding to follow either the flesh or the Spirit is explained in Romans 8, where we are told that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Our choice of God’s spirit as our guide through His Word and by His power assures us that we “are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth” in us (Romans 8:9).

The live options we face also include the “old” versus the “new” man. We are urged to “put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of decei1; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Ephesians 4:22-24). The choice lies between either life with God or life without regard to ultimate values and concerns. Man must also make a decision between spiritual life or death, according to Paul in Ephesians, chapter two. “you were once dead in your trespasses and sins,” the apostle writes, “but God made you alive in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:1-5). The decision to surrender to Christ as Savior and Lord assures us of God’s life, love, and forgiveness. Whether to become a Christian or not is a “life or death” choice!

In Romans, chapter six, the New Testament also presents our choice as one between sin and righteousness. “Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants you are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18). We serve what we obey, the apostle here explains. We obey what we choose to obey. Fortunately, for those to whom Paul wrote this letter, they had made the decision to serve God unto righteousness and thereby had escaped the domination of sin in their lives.

Life versus death, old versus new, flesh versus Spirit, and sin versus righteousness, these are some of the very real and very live options that you and I face today. We have already demonstrated what is a universally attested principle; that choice or decision is imperative for the well-ordered and properly balanced life. Here, pictured in God’s inspired word, are the choices we must make for eternal life, for spiritual meaning, for God’s righteousness, and a freshness of life that only He can create.
To assist us in our decision God demonstrated His love for us by giving His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). In the midst of all the complex and confusing decisions that one must make in today's world, “the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” looms brilliantly clear. Heed that call with an obedient faith (Romans 1:5). Answer God's invitation through the decisive commitment of repentance from all wrong (Acts 3:19). Choose Christ, who knocks at your heart's door right now, by openly and publicly accepting Him as your Lord (Romans 10:9, 10). Obey His request that you be baptized thus uniting with Him and receiving His forgiveness of your sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). This decision is unlike any other decision you will ever make in this life. The choice of obeying Christ and surrendering to God assures you of eternal life with God. No other decision will mean what your decision for Christ will mean, especially a million years from this very moment! Recognize and realize the dignity of decision by obeying Jesus now.

John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program. He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series. A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth. He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1965.