

CHOOSING GOD'S BEST

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The choices that Christians must make are often not between good and bad, but rather between the good and the *best*. Something may be *good* if there's nothing *bad* in it, and yet not be the *best* way to do— that is, it may not be what has the *most* good in it. That's why it's always grievous to hear a Christian ask, "Is there any *harm* in this?" or, "where does the Bible say that we *can't* do this?" Such questions are a *strong proof* that the person asking them only wants what's *good*, and isn't interested in the *best*.

Five times in the historical parts of the Bible, we find someone choosing the good rather than the best, and suffering spiritual loss as a result. Each one made the sad choice for his own particular reason. Let this warn and exhort us always to seek God's *best* for our lives and service, never contenting ourselves with less.

1. Moses chose the good rather than the best when God called him to lead Israel out of Egypt. God's best would have been for Moses *himself* to speak to Pharaoh and demand that he let Israel go (Exodus 3:10). But since Moses lacked the necessary courage, he asked God to send someone else (Exodus 4:13). God allowed Aaron to speak to Pharaoh in Moses' place (Exodus 4:14-16). Since Aaron was a believer and in agreement with bringing Israel out of Egypt, it wasn't *bad* to have him as Moses' spokesman. Yet it wasn't the *best* because God wanted *Moses* to be the one. Because of Moses' less-than-the-best choice, God's glory was tarnished and Israel suffered.

It's to be noticed that the plagues brought on Egypt when Aaron stretched out his rod (water turning to blood, frogs, and lice), didn't bring much relief to Israel, nor have much of an effect on Pharaoh. In fact, Israel also suffered from the first two plagues. And it's only when God sent plagues in response to *Moses'* stretching out his rod (hail, locusts, and darkness), that "things really got moving."

Also, Aaron gave his approval to Israel's making the golden calf (Exodus chapter 32), and he joined Miriam in criticizing Moses when they were jealous of him (Numbers chapter 12). That all shows that having Aaron as the one to speak to Pharaoh on God's behalf, though not *bad*, was not the *best* choice. God's will that *Moses* be the one, would have been the *best*. Therefore the first key to choosing God's best is, be of good courage.

2. God promised to give Israel a land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. He led them through the desert to bring them from Egypt to that land. There was also a vast territory that God purposed to give to Israel as *colonies*, to form an *empire* (Genesis 15:18) — which they possessed during the reign of Solomon. However, the land they were to consider their *own* was between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. Yet two-and-a-half tribes of Israel (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh) asked to be allowed to settle in an area on the *east* side of the Jordan (Numbers 32:1-33). Since that area was part of what God wanted to give to Israel as *colonies*, which they would eventually rule over, the request wasn't *bad*. Yet to settle in that area was not the *best* choice for those tribes because the area they asked for was not in the Promised Land *proper*. It is unmistakably clear that the Promised Land was on the *west* side of the Jordan River, by the fact that God told Moses that he would not enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12), and yet he *did* enter the territory requested by those two-and-a-half tribes (Numbers chapter 32).

The two-and-a-half tribes, who settled east of the Jordan, were extra vulnerable for enemy attack. Jabesh Gilead was in their territory, which Nahash the Ammonite attacked; and the people of Jabesh

Gilead had to send for help from the tribes on the west side of the Jordan (1 Samuel chapter 11). These two-and-a-half tribes continued to be more vulnerable to attacks from many enemies, not having the Jordan as a protection, and being separated by it from the other tribes, therefore having greater difficulty to enlist their help. We read of the Syrian king Hazael taking possession of those tribes' territory during Jehu's reign (2 Kings 10:32, 33). Also, when the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria because of its unfaithfulness, the two-and-a-half tribes on the east side of the Jordan were the first ones taken captive (1 Chronicles 5:26).

It was furthermore in the territory on the east side of the Jordan that Christ delivered the man possessed by a legion of demons, and that the demons asked Christ's permission to go into a herd of pigs (Mark 5:1-17). How is it that pigs were being raised in Jewish territory, when the pig was to be considered an unclean animal according to the law of Moses (Leviticus 11:7)?

Why did those two-and-a-half tribes ask to be allowed to settle on the east side of the Jordan River? The only conceivable reason is that they were in too much of a hurry to wait for the entrance to the Promised Land and the allotment of territory there. They found that territory east of the Jordan satisfactory for their cattle grazing, and wanted to settle there *immediately*. The second key to choosing God's best in our decisions, is therefore to wait for God's time.

3. God wanted to be Israel's King (1 Samuel 12:12). The statement in Judges 21:25 that everyone did what *he* thought good when there was no king in Israel, does not mean to say that a human king was necessary to prevent anarchy. The problem was that Israel didn't *recognize* God as King. However, Israel eventually *insisted* on having a *human* king (1 Samuel 8:4, 5); and God *allowed* them to have one (1 Samuel 12:13), though that was not His *perfect* will (verses 16-21).

Some kings of the Jews were good kings. David, Hezekiah, and Josiah were the *most* faithful, and the kingdom of Judah had some other kings who were good *for the most part* (Asa, Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham). The northern kingdom of Israel, however, *never had any* faithful kings. Whenever the nation had a good king, the spiritual life of the nation was quite good, at least on the surface. Yet when they had an unfaithful king, most of the people followed his evil ways, and very few had the courage to stand against him. For the most part, the spiritual life of the nation varied according to what kind of king it had. If the nation had *always recognized God* as King, its history would certainly have been quite different. Therefore, having a faithful human king was good, but recognizing God as the *only* King would have been *best*.

Why did Israel want a human king? They wanted to do "what everyone else was doing." They said to Samuel, "Establish a king for us to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5), and "we will have a king over us, so that we also may be like all the nations" (verses 19, 20). Therefore the third key to choosing God's best in our decisions is, "dare to stand alone."

4. God made an extraordinary offer to Solomon shortly after he was made king. He said to him, "Ask for whatever you want," apparently implying that He'd grant it. Solomon asked for wisdom to do a good job of reigning (1 Kings 3:5-12). God was pleased with Solomon's request because it was others-centered rather than self-centered. God commended him for not asking for a long life, wealth, nor the elimination of his enemies— because *those* requests would have been *self*-centered. Solomon's others-centered request was therefore *good* and good enough to receive divine commendation; but was it the *best* that he could have asked for?

There's no record that God ever made such an offer to David (Solomon's father); but no doubt is left as to what David *would* have asked for in response to such an offer. David wrote: "I have asked one thing of the LORD, that I will seek after, that I may live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to

see the LORD's beauty, and to admire His temple" (Psalm 27:4). *That* request would have been *God-centered*. A request that was others-centered was good, but one that was God-centered would have been best.

Because Solomon's request was not God-centered, he didn't always make the best *use* of the wisdom that God gave him in response to it. The very first case mentioned of his use of that wisdom was in settling a dispute between two prostitutes. His method of settling it *did* show keen insight into human nature; but his verdict was entirely wrong. God had ordered in the law of Moses that prostitutes were not to be allowed to live in Israel (Deuteronomy 23:17).

In Solomon's prayer of dedication

Furthermore, when Solomon gained more power, he became a despot, taxing the nation to the point of impoverishment to finance his great construction projects. When even that didn't provide enough funds, he borrowed from King Hiram of Tyre, and gave him twenty cities as loan guarantees, which he had no authority to do because God had given the land to Israel (1 Kings chapter 9). He eventually got those twenty cities back, doubtless when his loan was paid off (2 Chronicles 8:2); but it had been a very foolish gamble. As soon as Solomon was dead, and Rehoboam, his son, was made king, the nation complained to Rehoboam about how hard Solomon had made their lives, and asked him to be more understanding (1 Kings 12:1-11). That's a reminder that it takes a God-centered life even to serve *others* well. A vision that's limited to serving ones fellow-men, will eventually lead to serving only *oneself*.

Then, consider Solomon's flagrant unfaithfulness in marrying so many foreign wives, and worshipping the false gods that those wives had believed in (1 Kings 11:1-13). *That* was an *entirely self-centered* way to act.

Solomon made a less-than-the-best choice because he was spiritually short-sighted. His vision for what to make of his kingdom had originally been good *as far as it went*, but stopped short of what it *could* have been. Being others-centered rather than self-centered is good, but being God-centered is best. The fourth key to choosing God's best, is, enlarge your vision.

5. One further example of a choice between the good and the best, is found in the New Testament—the story of Mary and Martha, and their reception of Christ into their home (Luke 10:38-42). I would not say that Martha's *service itself* was less-than-the-best, but rather her limitation to service *only*. Service must certainly be done, but her concentration *exclusively* on service was less-than-the-best. Mary made the best choice (verse 42) by taking time to be with Christ and learn of Him. There are indications of what Christ *probably* taught Mary on that occasion, in my insight "What Christ Taught to a Hungry Heart." Suffice it to say here that Martha chose the good rather than the best because she was *too busy*. For that reason, she missed out on the rich teaching that Mary received, and that was probably what led to her act of devotion to Christ six months later (pouring out the precious ointment on Him). Christ so valued that act of devotion that He said it would be made known wherever the Gospel was preached (Mark 14:9). The fifth key, then, to choosing God's best, is, "take time to be holy."
