

Godly Choices For the Christian (Ephesians 4:1–6)

One of the most intense scenes in the Bible is depicted in 1 Kings 18. Elijah, with his commanding personality, was the spokesman for God on this occasion. God’s prophets were being murdered, and the pagan worship of Baal and Asherah, his “queen,” was being encouraged. Those who chose to follow Jehovah God were instantly targeted for evil abuse, and many were slaughtered. Adding to the bitter hatred toward God and His followers was a three-year drought that had been sent by God as punishment upon the idolaters. This was definitely not an easy time for anyone to profess loyalty to the one true God. Just when everything seemed hopeless, Elijah appeared and challenged the pagan priests to a contest (18:1–18).

The contest on Mt. Carmel began with one prophet of Jehovah God facing 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah (18:19). Before the contest began, Elijah stood and addressed the assembly: “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (18:21). Thus the contest began. Elijah demonstrated the power of the true God (18:30–38). Those witnessing the scene were convinced, and “when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God!’” (18:39). The people had made a decision, and this decision compelled them to action (18:40).

Throughout the Bible, God has asked people to choose to follow Him. Those who obey God find “life” (Deuteronomy 30:19; 32:47). The Scriptures teach that only those who establish and maintain the right relationship with God can

have this “life” (see Jeremiah 38:20; Amos 5:4; Habakkuk 2:4; John 3:15, 16, 36).

The Christian has chosen to follow God because he knows that eternal life is obtained only by obeying God’s will (John 5:25–29). The Lord stated that those who believe will pass from “darkness” into the “Light of life” (John 8:12). Your transition from darkness into light has occurred because you made a choice to believe and obey God’s commands for your life. This choice has had an impact upon your life—and now you choose to do things that formerly you would not have done! In becoming a Christian, you redirected your mind to choose according to God’s commands. This change is called a “renewal” of your mind (Romans 12:1, 2). Christians make drastically different choices than the unconverted!

In Ephesians 4 through 6, Paul discussed the dramatic changes that occur when a person is converted. Look carefully at Ephesians 4:1–6, and observe how the decision-making process is changed. These verses mention three critical areas in which becoming a Christian should impact your choices.

THE CHOICE OF CHRISTLIKE ATTITUDES

True conversion changes attitudes! Before conversion, one’s attitudes are dominated by selfishness and pride. After conversion, one’s attitudes are dominated by thoughts of bringing glory to God. Paul’s words reveal how his attitudes changed from a self-centered focus to a focus upon others. “I have been crucified with

Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The transforming power of conversion on one's attitudes is illustrated by Onesimus. This runaway slave had left the house of Philemon with self-centered attitudes that made him "worthless." When Onesimus heard and obeyed the gospel, he became "useful." In commenting upon this man's changed attitudes, Paul wrote, "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me" (Philemon 10, 11).

The greatest struggle faced by a new Christian is changing his attitudes. Instead of thinking only about self, he must begin thinking about others. This is why Christ said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

Three significant changes in attitude are highlighted in Ephesians 4:1–6. These attitudes result when one realizes that he has been consecrated to God's service (see Hebrews 10:20; KJV). These are truly attitudes of holiness.

First, Christians are to have "humility." A person who is trying to be like Christ does not demand that everything go his way; he tries to put others' interests before his own. The converted mind recognizes that others have good ideas. The haughty mind encourages strife because it is jealous and proud. The Scriptures often warn Christians that humility can be polluted by arrogant thinking (Philippians 2:3; James 3:14). Some people allow pride to replace humility. Pride causes one to stand back and say, "I am the one who told them that plan would not work, but they would not listen to me—and now look at the mess they have!" In contrast, the Christlike attitude encourages the humble mind and crucifies arrogant thoughts.

Second, Christians are to have "gentleness." This attitude results from humility. When one acknowledges that he is not the absolute authority on matters and that his ideas are not always the best, then an attitude of gentleness develops. This attitude causes one to be kind, helpful, serving, considerate, and sweet. Gentleness in-

cludes being sensitive to the feelings of another person (Luke 6:35; Romans 12:10; see Colossians 3:12). The genuine convert amazes everyone around him because he tries to replace the cold concern of self-centered living with the servant-heart of holiness.

Third, Christians are to have "patience." Some translations of the Bible render this term "long-suffering" (see the KJV). The term indicates that the new Christian is willing to "suffer a long time" to resolve a problem with another person or with a difficult situation. The Christian life is not an easy life; many problems and discouragements may arise. The one with a converted attitude is able to be longsuffering because he knows that the Lord God will take care of all things. It was this attitude that Paul demonstrated when he was told of the problems he would face in Jerusalem. The attitudes of those who journeyed with Paul allowed them to be tolerant of situations and confidently say, "The will of the Lord be done!" (Acts 21:14b).

These attitudes will help Christians to discover joy by overcoming selfishness, to enjoy the companionship of others by becoming more sensitive, and to endure troubles with the knowledge that God is in control! Such an "attitude adjustment" enables the Christian to find great peace! (See Philippians 4:4–8.)

THE CHOICE OF DEDICATED AFFECTIONS

The one central rule for the Christian's behavior is *love*. Remember that this is a sanctified love. It has become holy. This new love has replaced the old kind of love. Before conversion, love was for self and sought to pamper and satisfy self's desires. Before conversion, the object of one's love could be expressed by phrases like "I must take care of myself!" and "Look out for Number One!" After conversion, the center of attention changes dramatically: The object of love is not self but others! The new Christian discovers that self has been "denied," "lost," and "crucified" (see Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:24; Galatians 2:20).

This converted love is the serving and giving kind of love (*agape*) that imitates God's wonderful love for us (Romans 5:8). It is this converted love that astonishes the world. When others look at the change in the new convert's

expressions of love, they are amazed. An old story tells of the conversion of a man who was known to be a drunken troublemaker. Of course, some in the town doubted the man's conversion. One day a loudmouth in town was ridiculing the church, the Bible, and God. He started talking about the conversion of the troublemaker. The son of the converted man was in the crowd and heard the ridicule. He stepped forward and said, "Please, don't say that my dad is only fooling people or not in his right mind. Ever since he became a Christian, he's been different. He doesn't use bad language. He doesn't hit anymore. He even says prayer at the dinner table. Mister, I don't want my daddy to be fooling anyone; but if he isn't in his right mind, then please let him alone—because the mind he has now is better than the one he had before!"

The new convert makes a choice to love differently! Now that you are a Christian, you are to love with the sanctified love of your Father in heaven. How do you demonstrate the fact that now, as a Christian, you have chosen to love everyone as God loves?

THE CHOICE OF SPIRITUAL AMBITIONS

What is your true ambition in life now that you are a Christian? What is most important to you? Paul is an excellent illustration of how ambitions radically change after becoming a Christian. In writing to the Philippians, Paul reminisced about this change. Before he became a Christian, Paul desired to attain worldly prestige, status, and honor. After becoming a Christian, he counted "as loss" these ambitions of the world. (See Philippians 3:4–8.) Paul had one new ambition: to live so that Christ would be glorified (3:7–14). He challenged everyone to share this purpose in life (3:17–21).

Paul showed this same ambition when he wrote to the Ephesians. He urged the Christians in Ephesus to live so that God and Christ would be glorified. This goal is emphasized by two phrases.

The Christian is to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" (4:1). Paul first turned his readers' attention to how the Christian's choices impact the world in which he lives. The gospel calls sinners to become Christians (2 Thessalonians

2:14). This is a call to leave the world and its standards in order to be placed into Christ's body and begin living according to the Lord's standards (Colossians 1:13). This calling is a tremendous privilege which brings great blessings. Those who respond and accept the calling have a responsibility to walk (that is, live) in a manner that does not bring reproach upon the Lord. For example, those who stole are to steal no more, those who lied are to speak the truth, and those who lived immorally are to be holy. Becoming a Christian requires one to set the new goal (ambition) of bringing honor and glory to God (Galatians 6:14). Since you are now a Christian, everything you do should bring a smile to God's face because your conduct is pleasing to Him. How can you bring honor to God at work? . . . at home? . . . in recreation? . . . with friends? . . . with coworkers? You chose to accept the Lord's offer of salvation when He called you through the gospel. That resulted in the duty to make a consecrated choice for your ambitions in life.

The Christian is to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3). Paul next described the way ambitions impact the Lord's church. Each member of Christ's church is obligated to maintain unity and harmony. Observe that not just any unity is commanded; the Christian must maintain the "unity of the Spirit." The unity of the Spirit of God is not the same as tolerance for every formula or expression of faith. In verses 4 through 6, Paul specifically listed seven basic points upon which the "unity of the Spirit" is to be established and maintained:

1. "one body"
2. "one Spirit"
3. "one hope of your calling"
4. "one Lord"
5. "one faith"
6. "one baptism"
7. "one God and Father of all"

These seven critical "ones" have been revised and redefined by man in attempts to provide a unity that does not agree with the Spirit's instructions in the New Testament. As a new Christian, you are obligated to help preserve the unity in religion that is taught in the Bible.

This ambition is to be foremost in your mind because you have made a choice to follow God's Word.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Man *and* God make choices! God has revealed what He has chosen. His choice is for those who obey and submit to the divine regulations to "live by faith" (Romans 1:17; see 2 Corinthians 5:7).

God expects His children to choose submission to His divine regulations. He has provided the incentives and explained the need to choose "life" by following righteousness. Sadly, not everyone will choose to follow God's way, and even Christians may fail to continue making the right choices. Such people are like Israel at the base of Mt. Sinai. Even though the nation had decided to obey the will of God (Exodus 19:5–8), some Israelite people chose to disobey. In a brief time, the nation that had vowed to obey God turned from Him and bowed to an idol.

When Moses discovered the treachery, he called out, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!" (Exodus 32:26). Israel had to choose once again to obey God or not.

Now that you are a Christian, choices have to be made. Each day, the devil will try to get you to renege on your choices and compromise them. Therefore, each day, you will need to renew your dedication and consider your choices. You are like Daniel and his three friends in Babylon. In the middle of a strange land, they were enticed to compromise their dedication to the Lord. These four young men chose to remain obedient to God, and they refused to compromise that choice (Daniel 1:8; 3:17, 18)! Another encouraging example is Moses. He determined not to compromise his godly principles in order to "enjoy the . . . pleasures" of the world. Moses' attitude, affections, and ambition urged him to make decisions that would honor God (Hebrews 11:24–26). Let us do the same!

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Old Self, New Self

In Christ, the old self becomes a new self. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 4:22–24: ". . . lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and . . . put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." That is a powerful statement. The old self is put away because we think differently than we did before. The secret between the immature Christian and the maturing Christian is the renewing of the mind. We have changed our way of thinking. We no longer think as natural men, lost men; we now think as the saved people of God.

When you and I became Christians, the transformation which God called a "creation" occurred. The same kind of word describes what God did in the beginning, when He created the heavens and the earth and man. In Christ Jesus, we are created in the likeness of God. We belong to the family of God and are taking upon ourselves the likeness of God; we are becoming like Him, living in righteousness and holiness. That is possible because we are in Christ. In our response to the gospel, there came the point when we were baptized into Christ. That made all the difference. We are new creatures made in the likeness of God.

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