



"If you look down at someone for not being as spiritually mature as you are, then you're not as spiritually mature as you think."
—Anonymous

19-Nov-21

Making the Right Choice

A quotation recently struck me as timely: "Your journey is not the same as mine, and my journey is not yours, but if you meet me on a certain path, may we encourage each other."

[God](#) says to His people in [Deuteronomy 30:19](#): "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live." God gives humanity the power of choice, but we do not all—like a box of yellow pencils, identical in form and function—think alike. We may hold a variety of opinions. We agree that we must follow God's clear commands, but a Christian stance on some issues may be harder to determine, which means we must learn to make our own judgments.

Each of us has a responsibility to live in a way that glorifies God, conforms to His Word, satisfies our consciences, and brings [peace](#) and prosperity to our families. But every person in the church has a different background. God's elect may be men or women, young or old, rich or poor, healthy or sickly, first-generation [Christians](#) or descended from a long line of baptized members. We like different foods, music, colors, and styles. Some of us are

college-educated, some have advanced degrees, and some left school early to support their families. Some work 9-to-5 jobs, some are self-employed, some unemployed, and some retired. We are all different with distinct points of view, but we are also all members of the same heavenly Family.

An event from God's Word may help our understanding in this area. [King David](#) gave his son, Solomon, the plans for building the Temple, which God had directly given to him (see [I Chronicles 28:11-19](#)). When Solomon started construction, the white limestone blocks were not hewn on the building site but precisely cut and shaped elsewhere ([I Kings 6:7](#)). They were then brought to the Temple location where they were laid in place, fitting perfectly together.

God is doing exactly this with each of us. We are the stones He is using to construct His spiritual Temple (see [I Peter 2:5](#)). He has known us since before [the world](#) was ([Ephesians 1:4-5](#)), and He is preparing us for a position in His Temple ([Revelation 3:12](#)). It is a cooperative effort ([Philippians 2:12-13](#)). He is perfectly specifying our proportions (see [Ephesians 4:7-16](#)), and by our choices, He is shaping us to fit perfectly into our pre-ordained place in His Temple. [Jesus](#) said He went to prepare a place for us in His Father's house ([John 14:2-3](#)), and as Head of the church, He is likewise preparing us for that place.

With this understanding, notice Paul's teaching in Romans 14 (*New International Version*):

Accept the one whose [faith](#) is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. . . .

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. . . . So then, each of us will give an account of

ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ([Romans 14:1-4](#), 10, 12-13)

Paul instructs that vegetarianism does not break one of the Ten Commandments or any "lesser" laws. In fact, he says that he would join his vegetarian brethren if it meant their salvation. In [I Corinthians 8:8](#), 13, he writes, "But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. . . . Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

On the passage in Romans 14, Matthew Henry insightfully comments:

Differences of opinion prevailed even among the immediate followers of Christ and their disciples. Nor did St. Paul attempt to end them. Compelled assent to any doctrine, or conformity to outward observances without being convinced, would be hypocritical and of no avail. Attempts for producing absolute oneness of mind among Christians would be useless. . . .

Let not the Christian who uses his liberty, despise his weak brother as ignorant and superstitious. Let not the scrupulous believer find fault with his brother, for God accepted him, without regarding the distinctions of [foods]. We usurp the place of God, when we take upon us thus to judge the thoughts and intentions of others, which are out of our view. . . . We are all apt to make our own views the standard of truth, to deem things certain which to others appear doubtful.

The Bible is dogmatic about certain core doctrines like salvation by grace, the place of His law, the divinity of Christ, God's election, and other teachings we must follow, but we are left to decide how to understand other issues—especially modern ones that the Bible does not address—with principles we glean from His Word. God provides His ministry to give knowledge and direction, but within their guidelines, we are to make decisions and live our lives in the best way possible. We will reap the results

of our judgments, good or bad, throughout our lives. We hope our choices—and thus our lives—set a godly example that helps others live properly before God.

Over its modern history, the church has encountered issues on which the Bible does not contain a "thus says the Lord" scripture: fashion, makeup, vaccinations, voting, smoking, healthcare, and a slew of others. Some of these the church has ruled on, yet others remain personal choices. On these latter issues, not all within our fellowship come to the same conclusions despite using the same biblical principles. Notwithstanding, we must allow others the space to decide for themselves.

We may have strong beliefs about such disputed matters, but we cannot condemn a brother who believes strongly in a direction different from our own. Paul warns us to "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" ([II Timothy 2:23](#)). We need to be aware of the fine line between [James 5:19-20](#), which tells us that, if we turn a brother from the error of his ways, we will save him from death, and Jesus' words in [Matthew 7:1](#), "Judge not, that you be not judged." Often, the best play is to persuade others, not by argument or ostracism, but by setting a good example and leaving the changing of their minds to God.

Each of us must examine the principles God lays out for us in His Word and make the best choices possible, which is our God-given privilege to exercise. God uses the decisions we make to shape and prepare us for our specific positions in His house. He alone has the [wisdom](#) to see the results of our judgments, and He uses His sovereignty to guide us by His Spirit to prepare for the office He desires us to inherit. During times of controversy, every member must make decisions based on his or her understanding and not condemn the decisions of others. In so doing, we will allow our Savior the greatest room to bring all of us to eternal life in His Kingdom.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Choosing the New Man \(Part One\)](#)

by Charles Whitaker

The Bible describes many men, but one of the most important is the new man. What is this new man? Charles Whitaker explains that the new man is a creative effort of renewing our minds in cooperation with God.

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