



"In the last analysis, we sin not because we have to but because we want to."

—Henry Jacobsen

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## Little Choices

Before the political left hijacked the term *choice*, its philosophical meaning was "an individual's freedom to determine the moral course of his own life." This is, of course, what theologians and philosophers call "free moral agency" or "free will." [God](#) gives us the freedom to choose our path, but it is clear from God's Word that He has a path that He wants us to choose to take. God commands us in [Deuteronomy 30:19](#) to choose life, but He sets before us both life and death, making us choose which way we want to go. As [Christians](#), we are to choose to overcome [sin](#) and to live a life of godliness and righteousness.

Despite what many Protestant churches preach in terms of grace—preachers so often minimize [the gospel](#) to say that Jesus has done it all for us—Christianity is by no means a passive religion. True Christianity is a religion of constant vigilance in a conscious endeavor—striving, struggling, and making choices—to do what is right to please God.

Consider that, if God has done it all for us, why is the Bible not just one verse long? All that would be necessary is "God so loved [the world](#), that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish

but have everlasting life" ([John 3:16](#)). All one would have to do is accept the sacrifice of the Son, and eternity would be assured.

Yet, look how thick a Bible is! It is over 1,000 pages long and absolutely packed full of instruction. Each word in the Book is pure—purified seven times ([Psalm 12:6](#)). It is written concisely; everything in it has value. And Jesus tells us, "You shall live by every word of God" ([Matthew 4:4](#); [Luke 4:4](#); [Deuteronomy 8:3](#)). The Bible contains many pages of words because there are many necessary instructions for us to learn and follow.

Why? The overall answer is that God wants us to conform to the image of His Son, to put on His mind and character, a goal that cannot be accomplished by fiat. Character is built little by little through the process of making right choices. We have to choose to conform to [Jesus Christ](#). God will not make the choice for us. He will make it clear what He wants us to do, and He will do His best to incline us in that direction, but ultimately, we have to choose.

In choosing God's way of life, each mental and physical activity to do good, or conversely, to forsake sin, begins with a choice. The choices that we make may be conscious—when we actually stop to think things through, getting out paper and pencil to jot down all the pros and cons and weigh them in the balance, as it were, before deciding what we should do—or they may be habitual and automatic due to consistent repetition in godly living. Whether we think about them or not, they are still choices.

So, if similar problems keep coming up and we just cannot seem to shake them, we should probably consider the choices that we have been making. Our choices have led to the repeated problems. Most likely, our problems have not come on us because God is angry with us, and [Satan](#) has probably not personally put a target on our backs to take pot-shots at us. We [love](#) to blame others for our problems, but the fact is that we make a lot of dumb decisions every day! Our choices lead either to the problems that ensnare us or to [peace](#) and happiness.

The Bible presents many illustrations of people making both good and bad choices. Abraham makes a good choice in leaving Ur, yet Lot makes a bad choice in settling in Sodom. Esau chooses foolishly in selling his birthright,

while Jacob wisely chooses to tithe to God. Saul decides to try to pin David to the wall with a spear, yet David will not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed. The disciples make good choices by immediately following Jesus when He calls them, yet others reject the same calling. For instance, [Mark 10: 17](#), 19-22 contains the story of the Rich Young Ruler.

Now as [Jesus] was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, ". . . You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Bad choice! Very poor choice! He had the same opportunity as the disciples, but in contrast, he blows his chance by making a wrong choice. He chooses his lifestyle of wealth, prestige, and influence over eternal life, which, from his own lips, was what he was seeking! Jesus gave him the precise answer to his question and personally invited him to discipleship. It was even plain that Jesus loved him! The door was wide open!

Yet, when he had to decide, he chose money and position over God. He chose his wealth and comfort over charity and service to others. He chose the status quo rather than rocking the boat. The contrast between the Rich Young Ruler and the disciples is stark.

This life-changing choice confronts a person only once in a lifetime, and the individual either answers God's calling or rejects it. Sometimes, though, after we make this right choice, we let down and begin to overlook the small, mundane, everyday choices: "Will I lie or not?" "Will I take advantage or not?" "Will I curse or not?" "Will I [gossip](#) or not?" "Will I indulge myself or

not?" We are all frequently confronted by such temptations to sin. Many are little things and some are big things, but every time we face them, we must choose.

It is in these choices that overcoming happens. These everyday choices make overcoming either possible for us or impossible. Think about it. It is far easier to make many little right decisions until they become a habit and firm, convicted character than it is to face a mammoth decision all at once with little or no experience in making smaller, correct ones.

Say, for illustration's sake, that we are given the job of cutting down a Giant Sequoia out in Northern California—with a steak knife. Now, if we make stroke after stroke, stroke after stroke, we could indeed, over a long time, cut that massive tree down. But, if the boss told us to fell it in an hour—in the analogy, this is the big decision that must be made right now—we would be unprepared and unable. The job would be far beyond us with our little steak knife.

So Jesus advises us, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much" ([Luke 16:10](#)). This is how to overcome sin and grow in godly character: by making those little choices every day.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[You Are What You Choose](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God proclaims in Psalm 50 that He needs absolutely nothing from us; His sovereignty and power over everything are absolute. Surprisingly, mankind refuses to acknowledge God in their daily dealings. Unfortunately, mankind will marshal their 'brilliance' and 'intelligence' in technology to nearly wipe life off the face of the earth. Young people (and all of us) must make a choice in favor of God's will. We have the freedom of choice to set our destiny, and must bear the consequences of our choice. The book of

Deuteronomy is perhaps the most important guide to godly choices. God has urged that we choose life (keeping God's commandments), requiring an act of the will as we are confronted with alternatives. Only those who choose to live life as God lives will live eternally. Life consists of a constant stream of choices, leading to the development (or destruction) of character. Young people must choose: (1) the right set of standards to live by, finishing high school, refraining from premarital sex, and staying faithful to their lifelong partner once they become married. (2) To work to develop a continuous relationship with God- the source of eternal life. (3) To develop a strong relationship with their parents, submitting in respectful humility. (4) Their friends wisely. (5) Carefully choose the occupation they will go into, making proactive preparations, choosing according to our talents, and (6) Have the right relationship with the opposite sex.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[How Does Temptation Relate to Sin?](#)**

by Martin G. Collins

In many ways, we have been called to a life of avoiding, enduring and overcoming temptation. Martin Collins explains the process of temptation, sin and their products, destruction and death.

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