

2. The Choices We Make (2Q 2019—Family Seasons)

Biblical material: Eph. 1:1–4; Matt. 22:35–37; Matt. 7:24, 25; Prov. 18:24; 1 Cor. 15:33; Eccles. 2:1–11; Joshua 24:15.

Quotes

- It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.”
J.K. Rowling
- Some people are pragmatists, taking things as they come and making the best of the choices available. Some people are idealists, standing for principle and refusing to compromise. And some people just act on any whim that enters their heads. I pragmatically turn my whims into principles. *Bill Watterson, Calvin and Hobbes*
- Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work and driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for— in order to get to the job you need to pay for the clothes and the car, and the house you leave vacant all day so you can afford to live in it. *Ellen Goodman*
- Attitude is a choice. Happiness is a choice. Optimism is a choice. Kindness is a choice. Giving is a choice. Respect is a choice. Whatever choice you make makes you. Choose wisely. *Roy T. Bennett*
- But until a person can say deeply and honestly, “I am what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday,” that person cannot say, “I choose otherwise.”
Stephen R. Covey
- We are our choices. *Jean-Paul Sartre*
- Friend or Foe? Our Shifting View of God... Most of us find that our view of God vacillates considerably. *M. Blaine Smith*

Questions

What do we base our choices on? While some choices are more important than others, how do we differentiate? What about choices like our life partner—how do we decide that? Most important of all, how do we decide on the kind of person God is? For would we want to spend all eternity with a God we didn’t like?

Bible summary

Eph. 1:1–4 reminds us that God chose us. The greatest commandment is the choice to love (Matt. 22:35–37). We need to have our foundation on the Rock (Matt. 7:24, 25). We have a Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). “Don’t be fooled: ‘bad company ruins good character.’” 1 Cor. 15:33 FBV. Solomon proved the futility of pleasure (Eccles. 2:1–11). Joshua called for the people to make a choice, but made his own decision very clear: “as for me and my family, we will worship the Lord!” (Joshua 24:15 FBV).

Comment

“I’m free to decide,” sing Irish band the Cranberries, in a statement of conviction that many philosophers would be proud of.

The trouble is that such a conviction does not square with the supposed reality of a deterministic world. In the popular metaphysical view that is usually called “scientific,” there is no room for a process of choice, and no logical way in which human beings could ever possess free will.

For if (and this is a colossal, cosmic ‘if’) the universe—and all in it—has arrived from physical processes governed by mechanistic laws ever since its origin (whatever ‘Bang’ that may be), then ideas of individual free will, ethics and morality are an illusion. Any ‘decision’ (if that is really what it is) is only a conditioned response to a set of stimuli, and the result is predictable, even predetermined. “Supposing there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking,” comments C.S. Lewis.

Such a fatalistic attitude challenges the individual in this modern, mechanistic world. For if I am simply the product of a variety of laws that operate in the physical, then I am a machine, complex though I may be. This is why some have argued that the concept of free will is false—that the very idea we are free to make choices is an illusion.

Most of us rebel against such an idea. Our own experience—even our consciousness of our self and our existence—tells us otherwise. Even here we have to make a choice. Either the universe is determined, or it is not. Either we are the product of the interplay of mathematical laws, or we are not. Either we have free will, or we do not. Theistic evolutionists, Deists, even Process Theologians—are attempting to bridge an unbridgeable divide and explain why we can have freedom in a universe that arbitrarily arrived just so.

My analysis? I *am* free to decide. My frame of reference, and my scope may be limited, but I still do choose, freely and without inescapable compulsion from my heredity, my environment, or divine intervention. And if I am right in my conclusion, then show me where this free will came from? I would rather accept a divine reason—the only explanation in my view, and be glad for such freedom—than to accept the alternative of moral and ethical pointlessness in a universe without meaning, objective, or purpose. God allows us our choices, and we all must take responsibility for the consequences of those choices. As Isaac Singer succinctly puts it, “We have to believe in free will. We’ve got no choice.”

Ellen White Comments

You will go through this world but once. Then do not choose as companions young men or young women who will lead you in wrong paths. Turn away from these tempters, for they are Satan’s helping hand, used by him to beguile souls to dishonor God. . . . Do not give the enemy any advantage. Study the history of Daniel and his fellows. Though living where they were met on every side by the temptation to indulge self, Daniel and his companions honored and glorified God in their daily life. They determined to avoid all evil, to refuse to place themselves in the enemy’s path. And with rich blessings God rewarded their steadfast loyalty. Each one of us is making his or her future. All who desire the life that measures with the life of God must take a firm stand against the depravity that is spreading its loathsome disease over the world. They must reject the wrong and choose the right, bravely resisting temptation in every line. They must overcome small temptations; then they will be strengthened to overcome large ones. {CTr 175.3}

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