

Who Chooses Whom?

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I've never been to a church who didn't give me the choice, "Choose God or die in your sins". They don't always say it like that, sometimes it's much gentler: "Won't you choose the gift that God has so graciously offered?" And sometimes it is much harsher: "If you don't make the right choice you will burn in Hell for all Eternity!" But what does scripture actually say about the choice we have?

The things I am about to show will seem to contradict church teaching, but I encourage you to be like the Bereans¹, to search the Word of God and make sure I'm telling the truth.

THE VINE

John 15:1-5 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

In this passage, Jesus is talking to his apostles and explaining to them that they are clean because of the word Jesus has spoken to them. He tells them to remain in Him and promises that He will remain in them. He compares them to the vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit if it is not in the vine, neither can they (Jesus' apostles) bear fruit unless they remain in Christ, for He is the Vine and they are the branches. If any man remains in Christ and He in him, he will bear much fruit. In other words, apart from Christ, we can do nothing.

This teaching is taught in most churches today, that if we abide in Christ we will have the fruit (In other words, the good works we do) to show that He indeed abides in us. The next several verses in chapter 15 continue showing us how and why to love each other. Jesus tells His followers to love each other as Christ has loved them, and that *"greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* Jesus teaches us what it is to be a true friend!

But then we come to verse 16 of the same chapter. *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."* Did any of Jesus' apostles come up to Him and say, "I choose you!"? No,

¹ Acts 17:11

not one of them did that. On the contrary, Jesus chose all twelve, and one of them betrayed Him, as it says in John 6:70...*"Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"*

At the Passover Feast before He was crucified, Jesus washed the apostles' feet.² The apostles didn't understand why He was doing this, and Peter voiced their question to Him. Jesus explained to them what He was doing and also told them that they wouldn't understand until later. He said in John 13:10, *"A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."* Jesus was referring to Judas Iscariot when He said "not every one of you," as we read in the next verse: *John 13:11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.*

After He finished washing their feet, Jesus gave them a lesson in servitude. Then in John 13:18, Jesus tells them that He was only referring to *those He had chosen*. Who was Jesus referring to? Who are the chosen?

THE CHOSEN

There are several passages in the bible that talk about the chosen. Jesus Himself was chosen by God to be the Sacrifice to end all sacrifices:

*Mt 12:18 "Here is my servant whom **I have chosen**, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations."³*

*1Pe 2:4 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but **chosen by God** and precious to him—*

The apostles were also chosen, including Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles:

*Lu 6:13-16 When morning came, he called his disciples to him and **chose twelve of them**, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

² John 13:1-15

³ Quote from the prophet Isaiah, Isa 42:1-4 "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. Isa 42:2 He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."

*Ac 1:24-26 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two **you have chosen** to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot)*

*Ac 9:15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is **my chosen instrument** to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."⁴*

The people who got to see Jesus after His resurrection were even chosen by Him:

*Ac 10:41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom **God had already chosen**-- by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*

God chose Abraham and called him out of the land to be the father of the children of Israel, His chosen people:

*Ac 13:17-19 The God of the people of Israel **chose our fathers**; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance.*

*1Pe 2:9-10 But you are **a chosen people**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

And last, but not least, He has chosen us:

*Eph 1:4-6 For **he chose us in him** before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

*2Th 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning **God chose you** to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*

⁴ The story of Paul's conversion is found in Acts 9:1-20

One thing to remember, however, is that not everyone is chosen, as Jesus said in the gospels⁵. But don't lose heart, we will find out who is.

HE LOVED US FIRST

We must first understand that He loves those He has chosen.

1John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

John, who was loved by Jesus⁶, is teaching about Love. And it is not about us loving God, but it is about God loving us so much that He sent His only Son as an atoning⁷ sacrifice for our sins. John 3:16 says, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" God loved us before we even knew who He was!

When Jesus said in Matthew 7:20, "*By their fruits you shall know them,*" He was comparing the fact that a tree is recognized by the fruit that it bears with a person who is chosen by God doing the will of God. His will is that we love one another. God's greatest commandment was for us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind.⁸

THE ONLY WAY TO GOD

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Many people have the belief that if they live right, be nice to their neighbors, and stay out of trouble, they'll hopefully go to heaven. But unless they believe that Jesus is Lord, and that God has raised Him from the dead⁹, it doesn't matter how many good things they do. They are lost.

Jesus says that the only way we have a chance is through Him. And the only thing we have to do is confess our sins to Him! And remember, confession is just stating the facts. *1John 1:9 If we*

⁵ Matthew 22:14; Mark 13:20

⁶ John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20 ...Note in these verses how the writer never uses his own name, only that he is the one whom Jesus loved. Spurgeon puts it this way, "With true modesty John conceals his name, but with fond remembrance of his Master's favor, he uses a title dearer to him than the name his father gave him. To be "that disciple whom Jesus loved" was greater honor than to be an emperor."

⁷ Dictionary.com describes atone: "to make amends or reparation, as for an offense or a crime, or for an offender (usually fol. by *for*): *to atone for one's sins.*"

⁸ Matthew 22:37

⁹ Romans 10:9-10

confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. We don't need an altar to kneel at. We don't have a list of 'thou shalt and shalt not's' to do to be saved. When God chooses us, He opens our eyes to the sin that we were living in. We realize that sin is wrong, confess it to the Lord, and walk after Him. Now, does that mean we can do whatever we want and not worry about it? Paul says in Romans 6:2, *By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?* He tells the Ephesians that we are God's workmanship, and He prepared good works for us to do now that we are saved.

Eph 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

When the Lord saved us, it was a gift from God. He didn't look down at us and say, "Oh look at Suzie there, she's working so hard, I guess I'll have to save her," or, "My my, Johnny built the biggest church I've ever seen...guess I'll have to save him too." Every human on this planet was born in sin, thanks to Adam.¹⁰ But God gave the gift of His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for sin.¹¹ Once we realize our salvation, then we focus on doing what the Lord wants us to do. Paul, who is the apostle to the Gentiles¹², gives us many examples on how we should live as a Christian in his letters¹³.

We are starting to see that God loves those whom He has chosen, and it is only through Jesus that His chosen can come to Him. But who is chosen, and how?

HE DRAWS US TO GOD

We saw previously that God has certain people that He has chosen. But what exactly does that mean? Well, we could almost compare it to picking up sticks and twigs. Let's say we're taking a stroll through the woods. There are sticks and twigs lying around everywhere; some long, some short, some bent, some straight, some fat...well, you get the picture. All kinds of sticks and twigs are lying around everywhere. You decide to collect a handful of them. Which ones to you take? You can gather a variety of shapes and sizes, or you can try to pick out sticks with certain similarities. It doesn't matter though, because it's your choice. It's the same with God. We are all a variety of sinful people and God will pick out a number of us to save from the devastation of Hell.

¹⁰ Romans 5:12-14; 1Cor 15:21-22

¹¹ Mark 14:24; Romans 6:22-23

¹² A Gentile is someone who is not Jewish.

¹³ The letters that Paul wrote are; Romans, 1&2Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2Thessalonians, 1&2Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

But when He chooses us, He doesn't "woo" us as some would have us believe. That "still, small voice" mentioned in the bible was an example that God gave to Elijah to show him that he would be able to accomplish more with a softer voice, but doesn't necessarily mean that was how the Lord would call us to Him.

*John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws** him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Jesus is not saying that the Father is softly calling you to come to Him. The word translated, "draws" is "helkuo" from the Greek. Strong's Greek Concordance gives this definition:

1670. ἔλκυω **helkuo**, (hel-koo'-o)
...to drag (literally or figuratively):--draw.

There are several verses that use the exact same word, helkuo, translating it as "draw":

*John 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will **draw** all [men] unto me.*

*John 18:10 Then Simon Peter having a sword **drew** it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.*

*John 21:6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to **draw** it for the multitude of fishes.*

*John 21:11 Simon Peter went up, and **drew** the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.*

*Acts 16:19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and **drew** [them] into the marketplace unto the rulers,*

*Acts 21:30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and **drew** him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.*

*James 2:6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and **draw** you before the judgment seats?*

Notice that in most of these cases, it's not a soft, tender drawing. It's done with some sort of force: Peter drawing his sword from its sheath; angry men drawing Paul and Silas into the marketplace, etc.

One of the most beautiful songs I've heard in church is, "Softly and Tenderly":

*Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals he's waiting and watching,*

*Watching for you and for me.
Refrain:
Come home, come home;
Ye who are weary come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!*

I've grown up singing this lovely hymn, but it is not at all scriptural. Again, these verses using the word "**helkuo**" shows that the word "draw" does not mean to "gently woo" or "softly call" but on the contrary, "*heave* the net full of great fishes" or "*swiftly draw* the sword and lop off the high priest's servant's right ear" or "*drag* Paul out of the temple". It paints such a different picture! We are literally *dragged* out of the sinful paths we were on and placed into the family of God, and we will be raised up at the last day.

THE FINAL QUESTION

How do I know if He chose me?

To answer that question, you must first ask these questions: Do I want to find the Lord? Am I seeking Him? If the answer to these is "yes", then He *has* chosen you. No one has a desire to seek the Lord unless the Lord calls them first. You are a member of the body of Christ!

Walking down the aisle, bowing at the altar, asking Jesus to be your personal savior...these are all unnecessary, as well as wrong to be teaching to others. If you have that desire in your heart to find Jesus, you are already His! Now the only thing left to do is to live like He wants you to. Remember, Jesus paid the penalty for all of our sins, but it doesn't mean we can go out and do whatever we want. The bible teaches us how to do this in Ephesians 4:22-32 as well as many other places in Paul's letters.

You as a believer should, as Paul says, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."¹⁴

NOW YOU KNOW

We see that it is God that does the choosing, not us. Because of what we believe in our hearts, we know that He has indeed chosen us. So when people or preachers ask if you have chosen God, you can now show them Who really does the choosing.

Pray for me as I pray for you, dear friends in Christ. If I never meet you here on this earth, I will see you in heaven!

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:1-2