

Eternal Choices

In most all of our high school biology classes, we're being taught that we human beings are a part of the "animal kingdom". Yes, we are of the highest order of the animal kingdom, but nonetheless, we are still just an "animal". But is that so? Are we that simple a creature? Just because we share some similarities in our DNA, does that reduce us down to the same level as an animal?

There have been many arguments and assertions about such things over the centuries, but there is one thing that is for sure. We human beings have some attributes that really do differentiate us from all those other creatures that we call "animals"?

In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, we are told that during those first days of creation, after God had created all the various kinds of animals, that He also then created mankind, a man and a woman.

And there in verse 26, we read that God very intentionally created the man and the woman in a very special way, that He created the man and the woman in His own "image", a very important distinction that needs to be clearly understood, else we will miss out on a very important understanding about ourselves. Listen to those words!

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

These words tell us something about mankind that is not said about the other creatures. Here, we are clearly told that we, mankind, men and women, were created in the "image of God". Like God in most ways. Not "as He is". He is God, and we are not gods! But we are like Him, with many, many of His ways and attributes and characteristics.

And there are so many things that can be said and understood about that description, the "image of God", but for our instruction here today, may we consider just one of those attributes of God's image that can be said of you and me, for all of mankind, an attribute that clearly sets us apart from the animals.

By our being made in His image, we human beings are able to think, to consider, to rationalize and to “make choices”. And of utmost importance, we are able to make “moral choices”, “choices” that are of an eternal nature, choices that have eternal consequences.

And that is what the Lord Jesus is teaching us about here today in these few short words of our scripture passage. Listen, beginning in verse 8 of Luke chapter 12, Jesus said,

⁸ . . . I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. ⁹But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8-9)

These words speak clearly about choices, moral choices, choices that only a rational human mind is able to make, choices that have eternal consequences, choices that carry with them a stern warning about making a choice that is wrong. And we need to take heed.

And further, it's also as the words of John chapter 3 warn, we can make those eternal choices even when we don't verbalize those choices that we make. Listen, verse 18,

¹⁸ Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:18)

This simple truth given here in these words of John chapter 3 clearly tell us that those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus are already denying Him simply by their unbelief. And every unbeliever need to take warning.

But folks, unfortunately it is also true that it is not only the unbelievers who deny the Lord Jesus, even we who have Christ as our Savior can also deny Him, and often without our even realizing that we are doing it.

Implicit within these words of the Lord Jesus, is a warning that we must never permit unguarded thoughts and conversations and behaviors to take place. That we are to always take great care, being intentional in all our decisions, to intentionally “choose the ways of Christ” in all that we think, and say, and do.

Sadly too often, within those crucial moments of choice, our thoughts and our intentions can become confused. And we can make choices that we should not make, choices that have far ranging and eternal consequences that we did not intend.

We have only to look back at the naïve choices that were made by our first parents, Adam and Eve. During those first beginning moments of time, they were not at all aware that the choices they would make would prove fatal, not only to their bodies, but also, especially to their souls. And then also, and tragically so, even fatal to all the souls of all men and women throughout all of time.

But it was not as if they had not been fully warned against such things. Even though Adam and Eve were completely innocent and pure in their character, God knew that there would come a time when they would be compelled to make those “moral choices”, the choice between right and wrong, good and evil, between obedience and disobedience, the choice to obey Him or to deny Him and His Lordship over them.

And so He gave them a clear command and warning against making the wrong choices. In Genesis chapter 2, we read,

¹⁵Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:15-17)

This warning and command is clear. And Adam and Eve knew it well and should not have had any problem understanding its meaning, and its consequences.

However, along with all of the many other attributes God had built into men and women was the mysterious attribute of “free will”. And with that attribute, the ability to make “free will” choices, a powerful and overwhelming force rose up within them, and especially so as satan added his beguiling temptation into the mix.

Listen again to this first command of God, and note also that these words have a very similar ring to the ones given by Jesus in today's passage. Those words in Genesis 2,

¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

Because of the built-in presence of "free will" within the souls of men and women, this and most every other command of God has inherent within it the element of choice, the opportunity to choose to accept and to honor the Person and the authority of God, or to reject and to deny Him and His authority in favor of their own.

Sometime later on, after having received this command from God, Eve was presented with the opportunity to make the choice that God had warned about. Satan cleverly beguiled her with what seemed on the surface to be reasonable choices. And "beguiled" is such an appropriate word in that it involves confusion and "misdirection" in its purposes and intentions.

In her confusion, Eve did not comprehend the full extent of her actions, that yes, on the surface, some of the things this strange fruit had to offer appeared to be good. But things are not always the way they appear to be.

Listen carefully to these words in Genesis 3 and take them to heart, because such beguiling takes place on a regular basis within each of us, every day and all through our day. Listen to these words given in Genesis chapter 3.

¹Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

²And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

⁴Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷Then

the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. (Genesis 3:1-7)

Surface words and behaviors are seldom ever to be taken at face value. Hidden beneath the surface are almost always other, far deeper motivations and desires. And that is obviously so in this circumstance and choice that Adam and Eve made concerning God.

Here, the surface choice and decision was to simply enjoy some fruit and at the same time become more knowledgeable. In today's modern manner of speaking, we would call that kind of decision "A win-win situation" and a "no-brainer"! Enjoy good fruit and at the same time get knowledge, who wouldn't make that kind of decision, so why not do it?

But the real choice and the real decision lay below the surface. The real choice was whether or not to obey a command given by God, to honor and to respect and to obey Him and His authority, or to instead reject Him and to "deny" Him and His commands and His authority in favor of their own.

And while yes, satan's words were beguiling, the choice that Adam and Eve made was ultimately their own. And in their choice, they rejected God and they denied His authority over them.

How do we know that the choice was ultimately intentional and not just a mistake during a moment of confusion? We are told so in 1 Timothy 2:14.

¹⁴And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Timothy 2:14)

While yes, Eve was far more deceived by satan's beguiling, Adam was not, his involvement was intentional. And with the choices they made, they did as Jesus warns us about here in today's passage, they both "denied God" and fell into transgression and God held them both accountable.

But unfortunately, their transgression did not end there. It became a part of their basic character and would be passed on through their DNA into every man, woman and child that would be born after them, a curse that would plague all mankind.

And so, beginning there with Adam and Eve, throughout all of time since, men and women have been making these same kinds of “moral choices”. And yes, like Adam and Eve, the surface reasons for making the decisions we make might seem to be innocent enough, but the underlying reason is a moral one, the kind of choice that always inevitably involves rejecting and denying God and His authority over us.

For you and me, as we live within the culture that surrounds us each day, we seem to be caught up in the rush of a crowd, all moving in the same direction along a “broad path” like that spoken about in these scriptures.

And the crowd we are caught up in earnestly believes in the mandates of a “work driven”, “success oriented”, “ambitious” lifestyle that is measured by standards not found in these scriptures. Its measurements are found in the clothes we wear, the size and location of our homes and in the entertainment we enjoy.

And as part of the crowd, we will go to any lengths to reach for and to possess any and all of those things.

In this “driven” culture that we live in, there is very little room left remaining for God and for His commands for righteousness.

And no, the average person does not deny the Lord Jesus by overtly shaking his or her fist in His face and saying to Him, “I don’t believe in you!” They instead “deny Him” by simply turning their heads and their backs, and by their actions say to Him “You don’t really matter to me! You don’t have a place in my life, in my behavior, in my decisions!”

Those thoughts remind me of one of the warnings given to the church in Laodicea in the Book of Revelation. There, God warns,

¹⁵“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. (Revelation 2:15-17)

This warning is to people much like you and me, and our friends, and our neighbors. Here in the South, many, many of us are church goers, sitting in pews each Sunday listening to the preacher preach, never openly and intentionally rejecting God and His authority over them.

But within their hearts, that is about all they do. They don't openly reject God, they just do not have much time for Him. They are "lukewarm" in their love and in their zeal and in their diligence toward Him.

And folks, God really will not accept such a mediocre kind of relationship. In His admonition to us concerning faith, God tells us in Hebrews chapter 11,

⁶ . . . without faith *it is impossible to please Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

And note the words, "who diligently seek Him". Not lukewarm, not half-hearted, not liberal theology, but "diligence".

To those who are lukewarm, and not diligent, He will "vomit" them out of His mouth. But to those who diligently seek Him, He will give great rewards.

As a loving father to my children, I must tell you that when I see a lukewarm, half-hearted response of love towards me, it is heartbreaking and saddening to my soul. It does not anger me, but it does sadden and grieve me, even breaks my heart. And so it is with God, our Father.

In another place in these scriptures we are told about the "wrath" of God. And yes, for those who fully deny the Lord Jesus and refuse to receive Him as Savior and Lord, His wrath will surely come.

But thankfully, for those of us who have received Christ as our Savior, our denial and our rejection of Him does not immediately bring on His wrath. He still loves us and He is still merciful.

And as a loving Father, God is still at work to reclaim us from our "lukewarm" condition. He is still that loving father, waiting in the doorway, looking out into the distance for His prodigal sons and daughters to return to Him.

And in response to His love, you and I must truly do as that prodigal son did, and we must be willing to turn from all those wrong choices and begin to make right choices.

We must turn from our intentional and unintentional habit of making choices that reject and deny Him and His authority and Lordship over us.

And I use these words “intentional and unintentional” because we, like Eve, so easily get confused and beguiled by our “surface” understanding of a matter. We see things that seem good for us, and on the surface are good, but underneath are fraught with possibilities of corruption . . . certain jobs, certain purchases, certain relationships, and on and on.

We don't seem to be able to think past the end of our nose when a co-worker of the opposite sex, starts to pay special attention to us. And without realizing what is taking place, we find ourselves attracted to them.

Or in our quest for personal enjoyment, we buy a new house or a new car, only to find later that we have encumbered our finances to the point that both mom and dad have to work extra leaving the children to raise, and to parent, and to discipline themselves.

And we might argue, what is the sin in wanting a better provision for our family. Perhaps none, but an underlying sin can be the same as was committed by Adam and Eve and is present within the words of Jesus in our passage for today. Listen to these words again!

⁸ . . . I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. ⁹But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8-9)

Folks, in these words, Jesus is telling us that within everything we think and say and do, we are in some way confessing Him or we are denying Him. And within our fast-paced modern lifestyle, we need to be very careful and very intentional.

We need to intentionally confess the Lord Jesus within everything we think and say and do, within every attitude, within every behavior, within our lifestyle, else we will find ourselves drifting into a condition of denying Him. And as with the people of Laodicea, having nothing more than a “lukewarm” affection for Him.

When we do not intentionally “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”, we are in danger of doing exactly as Jesus is warning against in these words. We are rejecting God and His Lordship over us.

Those words of the Lord Jesus again and we'll close.

⁸ . . . I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. ⁹But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8-9)

Let's pray.