

Choices and Consequences

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace World Outreach located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

It is so pleasant to be around an optimist and so draining to be around a pessimist. A pessimistic person will usually blame his attitude and situation on his genes, his upbringing, or his circumstances. What his mother or father did to him still governs his life, and negativity is his point of reference. He chooses to stay in his selfish predicament instead of applying the Word of God to think his way out of negative cycles.

Really, it all comes down to choices. We are the product of our decisions. No one in the Bible illustrates this more fully than Solomon. Born a son of King David and gifted with wisdom that the world has not seen or heard since, this king of Israel grew into an old pessimist. Wrong choices left him seeking things outside of the will of God. The consequences were war and the forfeiture of much of his kingdom.

In this booklet, we look at the devastation caused by wrong choices. However, we will also

see how the momentum of right decisions can bring us to understand that everything God does is beautiful and stands forever in our hearts. What's more, we will find that He will take the wasted places of our lives and make them beautiful.

Chapter One

THE PROPERTY OF OUR VOLITION

“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

“That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

“I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

“And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

“For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (Ecclesiastes 1:14-18).

The book of Ecclesiastes expresses the dis-

satisfaction of a life that has strayed from God. At this stage of his life, Solomon, the author, was extremely pessimistic. This was so because of the wrong choices he had made. Pessimism develops because of wrong decisions. Yet, I believe that when we hear the Word of God frequently and are consistent in fellowshiping with God's people, the inclination toward pessimism disappears.

It is crucial for us to recognize that Solomon's pessimistic inclination grew out of his boredom, frustration, familiarity, and arrogance. He lived a life of academic lust and power lust, and he could find no thrill or happiness in his faith because of his own spiritual complacency. Any man who searches out the answers to life's meaning through human resources, no matter how intellectual he is, can never go beyond the limitations of human understanding. He can never rise above the level of a man.

Christ's Worldview

As a Christian starts to grow, he should become a spiritual optimist. He may not be a positive thinker, naturally speaking, but he can develop positive-thinking faith. A real positive thinker bases his thoughts on faith in the Word

of God.

Each of us must learn that we are the property of our volition. When we start following God, we enter into a new worldview. We begin an adventure of faith that will continue as we carry on with Christ. We do not live in the property of our environment or the consequences of our circumstances. Rather, we live in the consequences of our choices. Even people who live in nations where wicked governments deprive them of freedom, they too are responsible for their choices.

So many individuals search for happiness that they can never find apart from God and the Cross. They are deceived by the offer of empty promises. A deceived person doesn't know he is being deceived because he enjoys the benefits he gets when temporal pleasure takes the place of integrity. For example, a married woman becomes secretly flirtatious with no fear of God. Though she has a decent husband, she falls in love with a single man. She has been deceived.

Any situation such as this represents total deception. It is never right, under any circumstance. Any woman or man who enters into this kind of situation has been deceived by Satan.

Forsaking the Source

When a person leaves the Source and starts playing games with what he has heard from the precise Word of God, he slowly declines in receiving the truth of the Word. He becomes familiar with it and does not purpose to hear with an attitude of meekness. This person has exalted himself above the Cross, and he will make statements such as, "It is not easy for me to be around other Christians" and "I don't have any friends at church."

This person is thoroughly deceived. The reason he has no friends is because he has not shown himself friendly (Proverbs 18:24). He puts conditions on potential friendships. He does not lay down his life, because he does not love with Christ's love. He does not make himself available from the viewpoint of the Cross.

The problem is all with that person—it is not the fault of the church.

We have an amazing church family, filled with disciples who live with eternal purpose and develop scriptural frames of reference. Calvary is our point of reference. Anyone who enjoys the privilege of this kind of fellowship knows how to prosper with Resurrection life.

Solomon entered into so many areas of searching, and he became pessimistic, going from negative cycles into a negative syndrome. In the Book of Ecclesiastes he complained, "There is no profit in anything I try." He could find no meaning in his academic adventures. He found no meaning in the many wives and servants he possessed. His silver and gold gave him no satisfaction. The ivory palaces, the sixteen thousand horses and chariots—all that he had acquired failed to supply any meaning.

More than a king, Solomon was a brilliant entrepreneur who made multimillion-dollar transactions habitually. He began a shipping business with Hiram of Tyre, and its success lasted six hundred years.

Yet, none of those accomplishments helped Solomon to have peace. With all of his searching, he failed to choose God's life.

Chapter Two

WASTED MOMENTS, SCARRED LIVES

Men I know have given up happy marriages, wonderful families, and successful businesses for other women, for drinking, and for carnal pleasures. Their marriages died, their businesses failed, and their relationships with God suffered severe damage.

Some of them have repented and God has restored them by grace. Still, many lives were scarred as a result of their sin and the wasted moments.

We really have no idea what living through our impulses and making wrong decisions can do to our lives and the lives of those around us. A gambling addiction left one man \$40,000 in debt. He had been an effective pastor for several years, but his losses cost him his marriage and his relationship with his children. He lied and was able to borrow money for a period of time,

but every cent went into searching for fulfillment through a demonic addiction to gambling.

It is such a sad thing to see young men and women go off to college and get caught up in parties, sex, and drugs. They go on to lose their values in an effort to find happiness.

Solomon made decisions out of weakness, said things without love, explored things without purity, and did things without relating them to God. He established himself in a worldly philosophy apart from God. But any search for happiness without God will never result in success.

Empty Pursuits

"I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

"So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

"And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

"Then I looked on all the works that my

hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:8-11).

Solomon had wisdom. Even when he was on top of the world, vain flattery did not bring him down. He still prospered. Then, he sought knowledge from the world, and soon he went after the pleasures of the world.

Our search should be after the Lord Jesus Christ and His mindset. We should pursue His nature with all of our hearts. We must guard our hearts carefully (see Proverbs 4:23). It is necessary that we learn to think properly and establish ourselves in a purpose before our God. Pleasure will not do this for us. Barroom encounters do not make people happy. Entering relationships that are not established in God may gratify the flesh, but they will never bring real happiness.

Solomon sought after riches and security. But when it was over, there was nothing left inside of him. Of all that he gathered as a result of his pursuits, there was nothing he wanted.

We should thank God that Solomon was inspired to write Ecclesiastes. By it, we can learn and know what is right.

Individuals live and die. They get old, sick, and suffer diseases. They also prosper and live in abundance. But apart from God, all of it is meaningless.

Sensual Attachments

Solomon also played games of political expediency. In 1 Kings 11:1-2, he chose daughters of heathen kings to be his wives. He wanted to know what it was like to have sex with the heathens, as if that would bring him happiness. As a consequence of these relationships, he left God. He would not allow Bible doctrine to have a part of his life. He thought that somehow sensuality would fulfill him.

Sensual attachments can happen in very subtle ways. I remember a couple that was so involved in serving God at one time. Then, they joined an exercise club, and it grew into an obsession. We all need to be physically fit, but isolated people immerse themselves to the point that they leave the will of God. Soon, that husband and wife were missing church services. Today, they are divorced. The woman ended up marrying an ex-convict and the husband married an unbeliever. Their children are caught in the midst of a broken family. It's a shame, be-

cause it didn't have to be that way.

I have seen this happen too many times. First, people withdraw from hearing the Word of God. Then, they blame the pastor and the church. Accusations are made and they draw nearer and nearer to the world. Fulfilling the lusts of the flesh brings enjoyment—but only for a season. Eventually, resentment enters in and the result is almost always divorce.

Wrong choices bring devastating consequences. In marriages, often it is the children who pay the highest price.

“And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice,

“And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded.

“Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

“Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son” (1 Kings 11:9-12).

Solomon's son Rehoboam also entered a life of power lust. He determined to raise taxes and he oppressed the people of his kingdom. That choice cost him tremendously. The people hated him and they rebelled. He did not take care of the inheritance his father had left him, and in a matter of months, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel had forsaken Rehoboam. He was left with only Judah and Benjamin.

In every generation, each person is faced with choices that will determine his outcome. Though we may be predisposed to certain outcomes, the choices are still ours. Rehoboam could have chosen a different path, but he did not. He reaped the consequences that God, in His foreknowledge, had declared to Solomon.

The choices are ours, but the consequences are God's: therefore, choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Chapter Three

RESTORED BY RIGHT CHOICES

“For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.

“For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

“And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.

“Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon” (1 Kings 11:4-7).

As a consequence of his foray into sensuality with the heathen, Solomon sanctioned idolatry. His many wives influenced him to introduce

their idols to Jerusalem. Solomon learned the hard way, and when he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, he knew what he was talking about.

It is important for us to recognize the dangers of idolatry. Putting something—*anything*—ahead of God is idolatry. Choosing subjectivity over the objective truth of the Word of God is idolatry. I once counseled a person who said God told him to stay away from church. God *never* told him such a thing. That would be contrary to Hebrews 10:25: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

Some people let one small thing keep them from hearing the Word of God. I heard of a case where a church member canceled an appointment with a businessman, so the businessman said he didn’t want to come back to the church. He had been coming to church faithfully for more than ten years. Yet now, he lives in idolatry to his business. He has no comprehension of categorical doctrine and thus no spiritual perception or divine capacity.

Solomon had been led astray. He went the entire route with the religions of his wives. He tried religions from every kind of viewpoint.

“What is that religion like? What is this religious philosophy? Which religion is best? That one might be exciting. Perhaps it would be better to take in a little bit of all of them.”

These are the thoughts that may have been running through Solomon’s head.

This man, Solomon, was King David’s son. His father was one of greatest teachers who ever lived. The book of Proverbs, also written by Solomon, illustrates the great things he had been taught. He was raised by Bathsheba, one of the greatest mothers of all time. But now he had entered into worldly religions.

Solomon’s choices led him down the road of vanity and emptiness. He tried it all and was left to say, “It is all empty. It is all meaningless. None of it has any purpose. Maybe I should never have been born.”

Turning Back to the Lord

Solomon had reached the end of himself. This amazing man was old now. He had been handsome, but he had lost his good looks. His drinking, his womanizing, and his life of sin left him bored with life. He became so familiar, so proud, and so arrogant. He even began to doubt the value of wisdom. The wise man and the fool

end up in the same place, Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3:20. "All go unto one place: all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

There he was. His choices brought bitter consequences.

In Ecclesiastes 3, however, we also see how Solomon's heart began to turn. The Holy Spirit went to work on a broken man. Soon, he began to express things from a viewpoint that revealed how God gives us the things of the world to enjoy. The work of repentance began as he realized, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Slowly, God's viewpoint began to take over Solomon's thinking again. He recognized the chastisement God brought upon him, and finally he could comprehend its value. Great things and great wisdom were entrusted to Solomon, and he now saw what had become of it all. His choices proved costly.

God Makes All Things Beautiful

Now, Solomon started down a new road; he was choosing to think with God. The final ten chapters of Ecclesiastes represent important instructions to us. He is at last looking at how God makes all things beautiful in His plan.

“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The word “world” is not the correct translation from the Hebrew text of this verse. It should read, “He hath set *eternity* in their heart.” Solomon realized what God had done for him, and he was so grateful. Even with all the sins he had committed, God still placed eternity in his heart.

Solomon returned to being a great instrument of the Holy Spirit. Ecclesiastes became part of God’s canon of Scriptures because it reveals what man’s choices will do to him.

At the end, Solomon related his experience to the fact that no man can search out the work of God, which He ordained from the beginning. Self-assertion and self-centeredness left him empty. He finally understood that nothing amounts to anything unless it is done through God.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

CONCLUSION

Solomon was never content with his wealth, riches, and fame. The women, the music, the servants—none of these fulfilled him. Fulfillment only came when he let God put eternity inside of him. Nothing could compare to the work of God in his heart.

The problems Solomon endured were products of his volition. He chose to pursue what was not of God. It all left him with a distorted value system. When he returned to the Lord, Solomon understood that a man should simply eat and drink and enjoy the good of all of his labor. He meant this in a good way. So damaged was Solomon's life, he could never even enjoy a meal with his family.

His message to us is this: Choose God and enjoy what He gives you, but do not abuse it. All that we have to enjoy are gifts from Him. Choose to let His Word supply you with a capacity for joy.

What God does is forever. When He saves, it is forever. When He loves, it is forever. When He forgives, it is forever. Choose what God has for you, and the consequences will last forever.