

"Choices" | Upside Down Church
September 6, 2015 | Pastor Alan Platt

Well, good day to you, Valley Creek, it's my privilege once again, to be with you and share the Word with you. And speaking of football, I don't think the Texans used their hands last night. We have a moment of silence and I feel for you. But thrilled to be here. Everybody in Denton, you guys, God bless you, it's good connecting with you too.

And they gave me this t-shirt, they said if you wear this t-shirt, you can walk on water.

You know, when you will start walking on water, you make certain choices, not based on circumstance, but on what you're hearing the master say. And I want to share with you a few thoughts on the whole concept of choices, the decisions you make in life. This upside down church, empowers us as Christ followers, to make choices in a totally different way than we used to make those choices, when we were without Christ. In Christ, it repositions us to become Kingdom agents.

And now, in the Kingdom life, we make choices that are so different. It's Jesus that sent his disciples into the world, and He says, I'm sending you as lambs, amongst wolves. Amazing thought isn't it? If I was a disciple, I might have raised my hand and said, Jesus, can't we rather go as wolves amongst lambs? To feel like we're a little more in control. Now, Jesus was saying, I'm sending you into a confused, broken, damaged world. And where there's hatred, you'll come with love, where there's bitterness, you'll come with forgiveness, where there's greed, you will come with generosity, where there's selfishness, and self-centeredness, you will come with giving and sharing and laying down your life.

It's the upside down church, engaging a world in which we are trusting God that when we engage and we feel as if we are weak, we feel like lambs because we don't come meeting flesh with flesh, we come in the power of the opposite spirit, we are like Paul that said, when I'm weak, I'm actually strong. Because you see, I'm not functioning from the reality of what I think I could do in the flesh, I'm functioning within an alignment, to a new reference, the Kingdom of God in my life.

And it's within this context that we make choices, every day of our life, we're making decisions and choices.

And as we sit here, we really represent the sum of choices we've made in our life. And for some of those choices, we are grateful, and for some of them, we might have some regret. And the choices you make today, will deeply determine your life tomorrow. Because that's the power of choices. Choices have consequences. And when we make choices, we have to make sure that we're making these choices in alignment with God's intent for our lives.

Now, when I'm talking about choices, I'm talking about your everyday life. The choices we make about what we do, where we go, what we say, what we eat, what we read, what we watch, what we engage, how do we live, life? Are we living life from a reference of wanting to

walk on the water, or are we just looking at our circumstances, and are we being swallowed up by our culture and our world?

It's interesting, the Corinthian Church, the early church, so desperately wanted to align themselves for God's purpose for their lives, and so they wrote to Paul who was this father in the faith over this church, and asked him certain questions.

They said, Paul, we're struggling to know whether stuff that we're doing is right or wrong. And so they write to him about marriage and divorce, and other issues of their day, meat, eating meat that has been offered to idols, and what's their position regarding some of the temples and idols and the cultural realities that they are faced with as a people. And they're asking Paul to give them guidance. Now they knew Paul. Paul came to Christ out of the sect of the Pharisees. Now the Pharisees was the group of people that was the most committed to understand right and wrong within the Old Testament. These were the people that would make laws upon laws so that they can protect the original law.

It's quite interesting to watch what they did. They did that by asking lots of questions. My favorite one in the Pharisees' law book is about the Sabbath, because the law said, on the Sabbath, you make not labor, you cannot work on the Sabbath. So the Pharisees, not wanting to break that law, would ask the question, what does it mean, to labor? And so they would give definition to this concept of labor, and they would give list of things what this meant. One of the things that they identified was, to plow, you cannot plow, because that means you're laboring, which means you're breaking the law. But then they asked the question, what does it mean to plow?

And so they stopped making the list of all the things of what it means to plow. One of the things on that list is, is to draw a pharaoh. And then they asked the question, what does it mean to draw a pharaoh? And they make a list again. They went as far as to say, on the Sabbath, you are not allowed to spit, because maybe you spat so well, that you draw a pharaoh, which meant that you plowed, which meant that you labored, which meant that you broke the law. You can't better than that, alright?

More committed to make sure that you're keeping everything aligned in their context of right and wrong, you will not be able to beat. And here's this man, Paul, responding to their questions.

And the amazing thing is, Paul does not respond with a right or wrong answer. Paul avoids to say, that's right, this is wrong. But he starts sharing with them from a new grace perspective, a paradigm on how they can make decision about issues in life. And this paradigm is what will refer to, as the paradigm of good, and evil. Not right or wrong, but good or evil. You see, in Hebrews, the writer gives us an indication of this reference, when he says the following in Hebrews 5:12, he says, for though by this time, you ought to be teachers, you need someone

to teach you again, the first principles of the oracles of God.

And you have come to need milk and not solid food. You can see the writer here is writing to Christian people and saying, guys, you know, I'm a little upset with you, because you should actually be mature, you should be teachers, you should have grown in the Lord, but you're still asking for milk, you're still desiring the very foundational things, instead of coming to maturity. And then he says, for everyone who partakes only of milk, is unskilled, in the Word of righteousness, of understanding your right standing before God, of understanding your position and your identity that you now have in Christ.

He says, someone that is desiring milk, does not understand who they truly are. Now, he says, for he's a babe. But solid food, belongs to those who are of full age, that is, who by reason of use, have the senses exercise, to discern both good and evil. You see, when we function within a paradigm of right and wrong, we see, that's show the old covenant, the Old Testament, was functioning, it was right or wrong, that's the way it was. But now, in this new context, there's a maturity where we evaluate things from a different perspective.

You see when my son was young, he had to be led within the paradigm of right or wrong. And he did not like to brush his teeth. So I had to really encourage him, as a father, to brush his teeth, and he would say, "Why?" I'd say, "Because it's right." But then as he grew older, and realized that the girls in the social group that he was engaging with, are not just nuisance in his life, suddenly, he was spontaneously brushing his teeth. I asked him, why are you doing that? "Oh, it's good."

It's no longer a right or wrong, it's now a mature judgment call, that understands something in a different way. See, here's what we got to understand. When we talk about maturity in Christ, there can be things where you know it's right, you have the right, you can do it, if you work on the paradigm of right and wrong, you know, I am allowed to do this, it's right, I can do this. But in certain circumstances, it would be evil, not good. Although it's right, it's just not good, you don't do it, it's wisdom. The opposite could also be true. There could be times when something is wrong, but it could be good.

You say, Alan, please, please, don't go there. I'll give you an example, you smuggling bibles, you get to the customs office, the customs officer looks you in the eye and says, sir, do you have anything to declare? You've got a bag full of bibles. You're not allowed to take them into that country. You look at him in the eye and say, "No." How many of you know that's wrong? But it's good. And that's about the only example there is, alright?

Don't go looking for any others. It's this paradigm of maturity, where you could actually make a judgement call on the basis of good and evil.

And here, these people were writing to Paul, and saying, Paul, you've got to help us, because we've got to figure out whether we can eat meat that is coming from temples where idol

worship is taking place, and it seems as if the Christians were buying it because it was cheaper there, and fighting their friends, and now, it was a problem because the meat is now coming from a temple and has idols, and now, they're writing to Paul, and saying, Paul, is this right, or is it wrong?

Paul doesn't give them a right or wrong. He gives them a whole bunch of principles, that would help them to make the decision. And I've extracted those principles from the Corinthian letter, and put them into 5 questions for you. And this could help you as a grid, of making decisions, making choices to walk on the water, making choices to live this upside down life, in Christ, as a mature person, navigating the challenges that come our way.

So here they are. First one, is this question, does it lead to freedom or does it bring bondage? Paul makes this big statement. He says, all things are lawful to me, 1 Corinthians 6:12, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Here, Paul says, listen, you've got to understand that the moment you came into this new life in Christ, Christ became your master, and every other thing that had dominion, every other thing that had lordship, every other thing that controlled your life, has now legally been broken over your life. Let nothing be master over your life. Nothing. Not a leaf, not a grape, not a coffee bean. It's just a thought. Paul is not saying is it right or is it wrong, he's just saying, don't let it be your master. So anything that becomes this addictive reference in my life, whether it's chemical, whether it's non-chemical, the moment it lords over your life, the moment it has greater authority over your life than Jesus Christ, Paul says, it's no longer good, it's evil.

There are so many things that we have to work against in our culture, that want to come and lord over lives, want to get an opportunity of our lives, and they're so subtle. And Paul says, watch out for that don't let anything control you, don't let anything manipulate you, don't take anything come and lord over your life.

In Romans 6:15, he says, sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, listen to this, but under grace. Listen to what he says, he says, listen, when we were under the law, there was this power that ruled over our lives, and all we could do is get forgiveness. But in the new dispensation, we're not just getting forgiveness for our sin, we're getting a release from the power of sin.

In Romans 8, he carries on and he says, for the law of the spirit of life, in Christ, has set me free, from the law of sin and death. Now when he uses this term law here, it doesn't relate to a law like in 10 commandment law, it's an authority, it's a governance that he's talking about. I mean if you get into your car, and you're travelling out here on the freeway, all across the freeway, there will be boards up with a certain reference that indicates the speed limit.

Now you might get into your nice American truck, and feel, I'm not going to subject myself to this piece of tin, telling me how fast I can go.

The capacity is much more, and you could push it to a limit where you feel comfortable. It will not be long that you will be welcomed with lights and flashing things. And there will be a friendly individual that will come your way and tell you, you have broken the law. Alright, you're fine. You can resist that and say, you are not going to subject yourself to this kind of intimidation in your life, and you can crumple up that fine and throw it away. If you do not respond to that reference, you will receive a letter in the post, I believe, that will invite you to an event.

And once again, you can say, you know, I don't go to those kind of events, I don't like them, I actually don't even like the people that are there. So you're not going there. If you do not go to that event, you get a friendly house call. They are coming to fetch you. Why? Because that's the effect of the law. The law has a government, has an authority, behind it. It's not just a piece of tin that is ruling our lives, that tin represent something else. So when you read about law here, you're reading about the authority, the governance. It says the following, it says, for the law, the governance the authority of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has set me free, from the law, the governments, the authority of sin and death. We are free.

This is something that's so important for us to understand, because if we understand this, we can make choices, good or evil. Well, second question, simply this question, what you're about to choose, does it build you up, or does it break you down?

Paul, once again makes this incredible statement, he says, all things are lawful to me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful to me, but not all things edify, not all things build us up. Actually, some things we engage in, that we choose to do, might even break us down. So here's when you're trying to navigate, what can I watch, what can I read, what can I give my time to?

Because people sometimes come to me and ask the question and say, Alan, just help me, is it right or is it wrong? Can I read 50 Shades of Grey? Can I watch the Kardashians, can I – I don't know. I don't know if it's right or wrong, but here's my question, does it build you up, or does it break you down? All things are lawful, but not all things will edify. And Paul says, if you become mature, you're no longer asking, is it right or is it wrong?

You're putting it through another grid. Is this building me up? Is it breaking me down? You see, Paul doesn't want them to make this choice on a legalistic basis, you know, here's a question, you know, right or wrong. No. It's your choice, ask the question. Because you see, grace empowers us, to live in a new way. It's not like the law. The law kept us captive, it kept us immature, it kept us children. But grace brings you to maturity. Listen to what Titus – when Paul writes to Titus about this grace revelation, he says, in Titus 2:11-14 he says, for the grace of

God has appeared that offered salvation to all people, now listen to this, and it teaches us to say no to ungodliness, and worldly passions, to live self-controlled upright, godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify himself, a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

That's what Christ does. Just listen to this, the exposure to grace, God's grace in our lives, it teaches us to say no to ungodliness, no to worldly passions, to live self-controlled, to live upright, to have godly lives in this present age, to live with hope as we await his glorious appearing, to redeem us from wickedness, to purify us for fellowship with Jesus, to make you feel that you belong as his very own.

To make you eager to do good. Grace is a better teacher than the law, because it empowers us to make a new choice, no longer, you know, you see, because the law, good or – the moment I speak right and wrong, I see how much I can get away with. But not good and evil, it's a different paradigm. When I make different choices, where his desires become my passions.

Third question, does it feed the flesh, or does it bring glory to God? Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, he says, therefore, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. It's an amazing statement. Paul says, in the very mundane things of your life, everything you do, let it be done as if you're doing it to God's glory, respond to the challenges, respond to circumstances, respond to everything in your life, in a way, that's not feeding the flesh where it's not selfish, and it's about me, but it's about living my life to glorify God.

You know, one of the most incredible reference of this is where we read about Paul and Silas, they go on this missions, trip. They sensed God, he's calling them to go and spread the gospel. And Paul wants to go to a few places, but it's as if the door is closed.

And then he gets this vision in the night about this Macedonian call, and he realizes, that's where they need to go. And so they go to Macedonia, they start preaching the Word, have incredible impact, and then something turns, and the people grabbed them and beat them up, and throw them into the dungeon, chained them. And they don't know if they're going to live the next day. Here they are. And here, they have a choice, how to respond to their circumstance. Now, in my mind, I'm thinking, if I was Paul, I might have just had a little bit of a pity party. And I will just feel sorry for myself. Lord, you know, I did this on the basis of the vision.

And here I am, I'm pouring my life out, and look what's happened here now. It's hurting. I can just imagine Silas, I mean he came on the basis of Paul having this revelation, I can just hear him saying to Paul, "So much for your revelations." That's not what they did. The bible says, midnight, the darkest hour of their lives, crisis at its worse, they're singing praises to God. Why would I tell you – I think that's a little upside down. That's not normal, that's not something you

can explain logically, it's something that happens in your heart, it's something when you have been captivated by God's grace. You see, it's grace to be, it's grace to do, but it's also grace to go through.

Those crisis moments of your life, singing hymns. You see, we have this – we have this incredible capacity with the Holy Spirit being within us, that now, forms the fruit of the spirit in our lives, that we can respond in different ways. You see, while I'm speaking here, and I might be saying something that my brother in front here, doesn't like, and he decides he's going to respond to that by doing something socially very unacceptable. He's going to spit on me. You don't have to, it's just – he spits on me. And I fly off here, and really want to do something really bad to him and I get pulled away by the staff, and they say to me, what's up with you?

I say, this guy made me angry. He never made me angry, he made me wet. I decided to become angry. Listen, this is worth, just coming here this morning, because if you understand this principle, there is a new master, there is a new locust of controlling your life, there's a new authority in your life, you do not have to be subject to external stimulus, your external circumstances do not have to determine how you react. You respond now, from the knowledge that God, the creator of the universe is in you. And I choose. It's the ability to choose my response.

I'm not feeding the flesh, I'm bringing honor, glory, to God. Fourth question, are my actions selfish, or am I sensitive to the feelings of others? Paul says, let no one seek his own, but each one the other's wellbeing. This is amazing. You see, we get to sit free in our lives, firstly from the power of sin, and then secondly, from the power of self. Like the guy that took the girl out for a date, and after 45 minutes, he was just telling her all about himself, and what he's done, and how successful he is, and how, you know, everything about himself. And then he realizes that, he says, oh, we've just been talking about me. Let's talk about. What do you think about me?

Self. We need to be set free from self. Paul says, you, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, rather, serve one another humbly in love. Paul says at some stage, he says, listen, if eating meat will cause my brother to stumble, I won't ever, ever eat meat again. You can hear he's not a Texan, but I will never eat meat again, he says, because it's not about me. Maturity says, not, but it's my right, it's not right or wrong, it's good or evil.

Last question, will my actions, will my behavior contribute to non-believers, or will it put them off? Listen to what Paul says, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Paul says, whatever you choose, the way you conduct your life, you've got to remember your life might be the only bible some people read. Your choices, are key that will not only affect

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your life, but it affects so many people around you. May God raise up a generation that will make choices, on the basis of good and evil as mature people representing the Kingdom in this upside down church.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the privilege of living life in this new context of your grace over our lives, of understanding that we've been included in this glorious redemption through your son Jesus Christ. How we desire that our lives would reflect that. How we desire, Lord, that we would not be intimidated by the culture and the stuff around us, but we would walk on water, we would be the people that are responding to the very word, the function of the Spirit, the leading of Christ's life within us. That's why bless everyone, speak your life over every person that has heard this Word and we thank you. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. God bless you.