

## ***HIS CHOICE TO LOVE***

It is not so easy to choose to love. To make choices and sacrifices which reflect a love for God and His holiness. It is easy to suppose that we are being asked to do all of the giving in the exchange. It is too easy to ask, what's in it for us? This is a typical human response when approaching any relationship. In this one, we are asked to separate ourselves from the values, and to some degree, the pleasures of the world, in order to demonstrate our love. But what do we gain from it?

A better question would be simply, what have we lost by it? If we live purely for God and abstain from smoking, drinking, drugs, ungodly influences, fashion, immorality, etc., what have we lost? Well, we lose the opportunity to destroy our health. We lose the chance to destroy relationships. We lose out on spending incredible amounts of money and time that we will otherwise squander on our families and our children. We are obviously being facetious. The truth is, the benefits of doing our best to live for God are tremendous while we yet breathe. The retirement benefits, as a sign once read, are out of this world.

Striving to live holy also carries its own incredible reward of protection. Isaiah, chapter 35 contains an incredible promise. When God comes back to save His people, blinded eyes will be healed, deaf ears opened, crippled limbs restored, and water will spring up in parched places. And also in that day, there will be a highway, a way called the "highway of holiness". The unclean will not pass over it, no lion or ravenous beast shall be there, but the redeemed alone will walk upon it and return to Zion with everlasting joy. Having trouble with a roaring lion seeking to devour you? Having a tough time dealing with those who are unclean? None of these can trouble us on that highway. Lost your way back to Zion? There is a highway that God promises will lead you there.

If all of that is not enough, then consider the debt of love we owe. What can we exchange for what has already been given to us? What can we give in return for the choice He made? The Bible at one point describes Jesus as the second man Adam. Adam was a type and shadow, a forerunner of the presence and the purpose of Jesus Christ. Adam was created as the visible image of an invisible God. He was created to be eternal. This first man was born without sin and miraculously conceived through divine means. He was given a bride that was created from his side, leaving a wound for eternity. And he dearly loved that bride and desired to be with her for eternity. Then 1 Timothy tells us that the woman, being deceived, fell into transgression. But Adam, not being deceived, still partook of the fruit. Knowing that he would die, he ate of it. We have often wondered why Adam, knowing the promise of God that he would surely die, did not eat also of the Tree of Life before it too became forbidden. It was a simple choice. He could live in his beautiful home, alone for the rest of eternity, or he could join his beautiful bride in sin and in death. With his eyes wide open, Adam chose to love.

So did Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In His eternal home, He was lonely. So He created a companion for Himself, a bride called mankind. But that bride was deceived, leaving Him with a choice. So God was made flesh and Jesus Christ, called the second man Adam, was created. Born without sin, His birth was also miraculous. From the water and the blood that flowed from His wounded side, a bride, the church of God, was created. And He loved her. After all, it was ordained

from the foundation of the world that He would die for her. He could have chosen to dwell in heaven alone, but He would have been without His bride. So with His eyes wide open, He also tasted of sin and death. For us, He chose to love. The difference between Adam and Christ is that Christ can take us back with Him. So we choose to make our decisions, to base our choices to every degree possible on the world He died to bring us back to. When we get there, we want to fit in. We want to be a bride He will be proud to present to His father. Worthy of His love.

It is hard to comprehend the degree of that love. We are humbled by all that He gave up for us. It is horrible to think of a holy God having all of the degradation of the history of the world heaped upon Him at the moment of His death. Worse, every time we choose to sin, we add to the load that He carries on the cross. Struggling to comprehend divine love, we desperately conclude that no sacrifice or accomplishment on our part can come close to evening the score created by that one unparalleled act of love. At the least, we can honor Him with our choices for our lives.

As we get older, we find it easier to turn our backs on the value system of this world. We realize that we are not of this world anyway. It will pass away, but we won't. The choices we make to please Him are the only choices that bring us real joy. His approval is the only one that brings lasting satisfaction. C.S. Lewis once wrote, "If I find in myself a desire which nothing in this world can satisfy, the most logical explanation is that I was made for a different world". We understand. The values of this world are meaningless when we weigh them against our eternal home. Giving them up for a deeper and stronger relationship with our eternal lover is one of the easiest decisions we will ever have to make. When we are with Him, they do not seem much like sacrifices. They are simply expressions of love.

### ***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Have you ever felt like your relationship with God was one sided?
2. Have you ever known anyone to turn their life over to God and then express regret over not having smoked one more cigarette or having had one more beer?
3. What can you list that you regret missing out on by your choice to live for God?
4. What do you think is meant by the "highway of holiness?" Can you think of dangers that you might risk by leaving the highway of holiness in certain areas of living? In other words, what are some of the ways that holy living protects us?
5. Do you believe that the highway to Zion, or holy living, can actually point toward or help us find our way to God?
6. How do you feel about receiving gifts you can never possibly repay?
7. How does having someone love you when you know you don't deserve it make you feel?
8. What are some similarities between Adam and Jesus Christ?
9. Have you ever wondered why Adam, with free access to fruit that God tells us would cause him to live forever, did not taste of that fruit after the transgression, but before God came?
10. If you were married, and your husband or wife contracted a deadly, and highly contagious disease, maybe even AIDS, as a result of a mistake they made, what would you do? Would you leave them to face the consequences alone? Love them the best you could from a safe

distance till they died? Hold them and love them just as before, knowing that you would quickly die also? What if you were Adam?

11. Sin so disgusts God that He compared people going back to their sin to a dog eating its own vomit. What was in the cup that Jesus feared and wanted to pass from Him? In the yearly sacrifice for sin, what was placed upon the head of the scapegoat?
12. Is it really possible that Jesus experienced every sin ever committed by anyone who had ever lived or would ever live while on the cross? Why did the Spirit of God leave the flesh called Jesus to die alone?
13. If every time you sinned, you caught a glimpse of a dying and bloody man on a cross, wincing under the additional load, would it affect the way you live your life?
14. Even if you don't care for the results, does it please you when those you love try to do things that let you know how much they care?
15. Is it hard to do something small for someone you dislike? Is it hard to do something big for someone you love?
16. Do you find a hunger in you that you can not find satisfaction for, or something seemingly missing that nothing can fill?