



Managing GOD's Money

Theme for August: Choices

Life is about choices. Often unconsciously we choose between important matters such as working rather than loafing, eating instead of starving, sleeping rather than staying awake. Nobody tells us which to choose because these responses either are inherent or come by experience. Not so with other choices where ignorance and cowardice often hold us back.

This month we will look at some choices that result from inaction:



Heaven or Hell: Doing nothing is a powerful decision

Truth or Tolerance: The high ground or the easy way out

Success or Failure: How high must I reach

Christianity or Religion: The Person or the rules

Topic for August 1-7: Heaven or Hell



Matthew 5:29-30

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

When we lived in Japan in the early 1990's, my wife attended a training program for potential counselors for a Billy Graham

crusade in Tokyo. During one session the instructor mentioned hell while discussing a specific Scripture passage. As the session ended, excitedly, the host church's pastor rushed to the presenter. Don't mention *hell* in my church again, she said firmly. She continued: *We don't use that word here. A kind, loving God doesn't punish people that way.*

Her outburst showed vividly, her desire to please people and her ignorance of God's Word. Earlier she told me her church was inclusive and did not want to offend anybody. How unlike Jesus whose focus always was to do His Father's will, not to please others!

Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount to believers in

Matthew chapter 5, is the setting for this week's Bible Study. Here we see several important lessons. In verses 1-12 Jesus talks about the Beatitudes in which He highlights key traits of a surrendered heart.

Jesus encourages us in verses 13-16 to become *salt and light* and be different from the world. Then in verses 20-28 He reminds us about the Scribes and Pharisees' hypocrisy, and the need to guard our thoughts: we sin not only by actions but also by thoughts.

Continuing in **Matthew 5:29-30** Jesus cautions us about sin's conduits as He describes graphically, its eventual result for the

nonbeliever: *everlasting damnation in Hell.*

To explain His message Jesus uses dramatic word pictures such as verse 30b: It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell! He doesn't expect us to cut off our arms or to pluck out our eyes; He expects us to place these precious avenues of enticements to sin under His control. *His basic message:* we sin by thought, word, and deed; don't be like the Pharisees who focus on the external only. For example, we commit adultery not only by the physical act, but also by lustful thoughts (**Matthew 5:27-28**).

Jesus isn't telling believers that when we sin we will go to Hell. That's contrary to His Word that assures us that we who believe in Him have eternal life. His hyperbole merely stresses the need to take radical measures to avoid sin.

Apostle Paul in **Romans 3:23**, reminds us that even when we believe in Messiah as Lord and Savior we sin: *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

But we have Good News; Jesus' death and resurrection paid for our sins. He gives believers the Holy Spirit to help change us gradually to



Memory Verse

Psalm 55:22

Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

become more like Him (**Romans 6:15-23**). This causes us to be more sensitive and alert to sin—the Holy Spirit warns us before we sin, and shows us the way out (**1 Corinthians 10:13**).

Each person must choose. Do I let my sin nature that came from Adam's sin in the Garden rule, or do I surrender my life to Messiah Jesus?

Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, Israel's teacher, in **John 3:1-21** about the need to be born-again. He tells us through these verses that a spiritual birth is the only way to prevent our sin nature from ruling us. Do you believe this?

Rejecting this spiritual birth is a choice, often by default, that leads to everlasting damnation in Hell. Accepting it leads to everlasting life in Heaven. These are the only two choices. We might not like them, but that's it.

God's plan is that all who believe in His beloved Son would be saved. Jesus' death and resurrection provided the path to fulfill that plan; He came to save the world, not condemn it (**John 3:17**).

The story of the rich man and Lazarus in **Luke 16:19-31** shows the outcome of ignoring this critical decision. As well, **Matthew 18:1-3** and **2 Thessalonians 1:8-9** underline the urgency to accept Jesus' invitation to go to Heaven. **Matthew 18:1-3** highlights our infancy in Messiah:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Think About This: Jesus is a perfect Father who loved you and me so much He died for us. Will you choose to become His child?

Heed 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9:

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Think about This: All it takes to avoid everlasting destruction is a decision—respond to God’s prompting, accept your need for a Savior and believe in Jesus (**Romans 10:9**).

Today many churches like the church in Tokyo I mentioned earlier, no longer teach about Hell. But this doesn’t detract from its reality. These teachings merely mirror the state of the world: Many preachers are tickling their congregations’ ears. This isn’t a new phenomenon; read these words from Apostle Paul to Timothy from **2 Timothy 4:2-5**:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Become like the Bereans in **Acts 17:11**, check everything preachers and others teach with truth in the Bible.

Application



Luke 16:19-26

“Now there was a rich man, ... joyously living in splendor every day. “And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, ... the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. “In Hades [Hell] he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. “And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’ “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. ‘And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’

In **Joshua 24:1-15**, Joshua recounted their history to the Israelites. He highlighted their many blessings and then urged them to turn away from false gods. In verses 14 and 15, he says:

“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

Life is about choices, and doing nothing is a powerful choice. I suggest nothing you do or plan to do could be more important than choosing whom you will *serve*. Doing nothing chooses other gods rather than Jesus. Then Hell rather than Heaven becomes your choice location for eternity.

Sure I know this is neither a pleasant thought nor an easy decision; but ignoring it isn’t the answer. In **John 14:6**, Jesus says, I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So you see, *not all roads lead to the same place*.

Several years ago, I was on a plane going home from a business trip. As usual, I sat in my seat, prayed, then started working on my computer. This

time I was writing a story for my grand children.

It was my worst flight. During the entire five hours the weather was bad and the plane bounced around—alternating between losing and gaining altitude. The man beside me kept glancing at me. After a while, with a disgusted look, he exclaimed: *How can you be working like nothing is happening?* I replied, *I am a believer in Jesus and when I am on a plane, I expect one of two results: Either I will go home to my wife if the plane doesn't crash, or I will go home to my Lord if the plan crashes — these were two great alternatives and I could do nothing to changed them.*



Puzzled and distraught, he said, *I'm a Moslem, I believe in Jesus, but I believe also that all roads lead to the same God.* I repeated my two alternatives and asked him about his assurance of a future in eternity.

Dejectedly, as the plane continued to bounce, he said, *I am scared, that's all I can say.* Then he added, *I still don't understand how you can behave like everything is normal.* I repeated, *Only because I have*

Jesus as my Lord and Savior; on my own, I would be scared.

The plane landed, I gave him my business card and asked for his, but he refused. He went his way, I went mine.

Later that evening he phoned me at home and asked me to come to visit and pray for his sick cousin with whom he was staying. These were his exact words: *If your God could give you that peace on the plane, I know he can heal my cousin.*

That night, my wife and I visited his cousin. We prayed according to God's will for my new friend, his cousin, and other family members.

The following day, Sunday, they attended our church. Later he told me his cousin had healed and he credited it to *my faith.* Again, I pointed him to Jesus. Sadly, he chose to continue in disbelief, though he yearned so desperately for peace with God.

If you do not know Messiah Jesus, I pray you will recognize your need for Him, and you will ask Him to control your life.

This is a life changing decision; a crucial choice for Heaven. It is not a decision about choosing a denomination, church, or other religious organization. It is a decision to obey a perfect Heavenly Father.

His Holy Spirit is waiting to guide you on a journey leading to eternal life in Heaven. When you call on Him today, He will answer. That's a promise.

Considering the month's theme, and the period's topic, daily reflect on verses on the left. These questions might help your reflections:

1. Who is talking to whom, about what, and in what context?
2. How do these verses apply to me today?
3. What lessons from these verses can I start today?

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Daily Reflections



August 1:
Acts 17:11;
Matthew 5:1-16

August 2:
Matthew 5:17-30
1 Corinthians 10:13

August 3:
Matthew 18:1-6;
Matthew 23:29-33
Luke 16:19-26

August 4:
Mark 16:15-16;
2 Thessalonians 1:5-9

August 5:
2 Timothy 4:1-5;
Romans 3:23;
Romans 6:15-23

August 6:
John 3:1-21;
John 14:6;
Romans 10:9

August 7:
Joshua 24:1-15; Psalm
55:22