

CHOOSING PATHS

by Mark Huey

Life is all about choices: good, bad and indifferent. In fact when you think about it, at the end of your Earthly life, your experiences are the sum total of your choices *and* the results/consequences of those choices—given the variety of expected and unexpected circumstances you encountered, and what you personally chose to do with them. The foundational Biblical principle that you will reap what you sow (i.e., Hosea 10:12; Galatians 6:7-8) is as applicable as the laws of gravity, when it comes to the created order and how God has fashioned us in how we are to conduct ourselves within this sphere.

Some simple axioms make perfect sense when you trace the distillation of the basic Newtonian laws of motion, and how every action will have an equal but opposite reaction. Or, you might consider even more common sense truisms like how “You are what you eat” is a good summary of how one’s cellular makeup is composed of everything a person consumes via the mouth. The world is replete with other examples, but without belaboring the point I think that various freewill choices have resulted in humanity being where we are—despite some natural phenomena (i.e., solar flares, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, and accidents) that often interrupt our perceived paths and ways to conduct our lives. These events naturally at times bring challenges that require choices about how one is going to react, whether positively or negatively, as they stand beyond our physical control.

Thankfully for those blessed with the supernatural enlightenment found *only* in the words of the Holy Scriptures, it is profoundly evident that part of God’s plan for His Creation was to give people a freewill to make choices. While making men and women in His image (Genesis 1:26), He did not create robots that simply followed pre-programmed scripts to live their lives. Instead, he endowed Adam and Eve with the ability to choose right from wrong, good from evil, and just about everything in between as they evidenced in the Garden. Lamentably as witnessed in Genesis chs. 1-3 where their choices are reminisced, the poor choice to disobey God’s single command to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil resulted in them being cast out of Eden into a world brimming with thorns, thistles, and great temptation. In the First Century C.E., the Apostle John summarized in precise language exactly what fallen humanity has had to contend with outside of the close communion with God that Adam and Eve originally experienced in the Garden:

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:16).

The human race’s most difficult challenges—when it comes to making freewill choices and choosing paths to follow—have been inherited from our predecessors Adam and Eve, who we understand lost their innocence and became dead in their trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). *They were exiled from the presence of God in the Garden*, and all of their descendants since have had to com-

bat a base, fleshly human nature. We should not be surprised why the gospel message places a strong emphasis on the need to be born again from above (John 3:3), as people can be restored to communion with the Father by being inhabited by the presence of His Holy Spirit. By relinquishing our human wills to His perfect will—by walking by the Spirit and being led by the Spirit—can the temptations of the world only then be overcome. And, we will find that we will not be subject to the condemnation pronounced against sinners in His Law:

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law” (Galatians 5:16-18).

This supernatural enablement can endow the recipient with the wisdom necessary to actually make good and positive choices, walking a path of life that is beneficial and meaningful to the individual—as well as the family and community of faith. The Apostle Paul explains this process in writing to the Corinthians:

“Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM’ [Isaiah 64:4; 65:17]. For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM [Isaiah 40:13]? But we have the mind of Messiah” (1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

For those of us living today, who have been born from above and who have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit—equipping us with the supernatural wisdom, the ability to be spiritually appraised, and granting us the mind of the Messiah—we can only say “Hallelujah!” Praise the Lord that we have somehow gotten to a place in our lives that we have cried out for mercy and have received a new heart of flesh as anticipated by the Prophets via the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). Yet, several centuries prior to the prediction of the New Covenant, the imperative to make good choices was required of the Ancient Israelites by Moses as they were preparing to enter into the Promised

Land. In some of his final words, Moses pleaded with them to choose the blessings of God over the curses of God:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

This compelling command from Moses emphasizes how choosing God’s blessings requires one to love Him by obeying His voice and holding fast to Him. The result of choosing this path will be found a long life on Earth and great blessings and fulfillment. The Holy Scriptures are full of significant examples of people who were faithful to the Lord, by volitionally making the choice to follow and serve Him during their lifetimes. Classic examples include Job, Joshua, and King David:

“My foot has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:11-12).

“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

“Make me know Your ways, O Teach me LORD; Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day. Remember, O LORD, Your compassion and Your lovingkindnesses, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to Your lovingkindness remember me, for Your goodness’ sake, O LORD. Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. For Your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great. Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. His soul will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant” (Psalm 25:4-14).

By taking the time to simply flip through the Bible, looking through passages that describe the paths or ways of the Lord—we find many references to how godly people continually admonish their compatriots to choose a path of righteousness. Only by choosing the right path will anyone find a true place of rest and refreshment for themselves. The Prophet Jeremiah admonished the Southern Kingdom of Judah to return to the ancient paths, but sadly they rejected it:

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls. But they said, “We will not walk *in it*!”’” (Jeremiah 6:16).

Ironically, choosing the right path was always—and still remains—a continual problem for those who profess to know the Holy One of Israel. Each of us

needs to heed the words of the Psalmist, or adhere to the instructions of Proverbs. In both Psalms and Proverbs there are multiple instructions given regarding the wisdom of choosing the right path to follow. Just let these few excerpts encourage you to develop the discipline of reading these great words more frequently:

- “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).
- “Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice, and be gracious to me and answer me. *When You said, ‘Seek My face,’* my heart said to You, ‘Your face, O LORD, I shall seek.’ Do not hide Your face from me, do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; do not abandon me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up. Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me in a level path because of my foes. Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence. *I would have despaired* unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD” (Psalm 27:7-14).
- “Hear, my son, and accept my sayings and the years of your life will be many. I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths. When you walk, your steps will not be impeded; and if you run, you will not stumble. Take hold of instruction; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not proceed in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not pass by it; turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; and they are robbed of sleep unless they make *someone* stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them and health to all their body” (Proverbs 4:10-22).
- “The rich man’s wealth is his fortress, the ruin of the poor is their poverty. The wages of the righteous is life, the income of the wicked, punishment. He is *on* the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray. He who conceals hatred *has* lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool. When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is *as* choice silver, the

heart of the wicked is *worth* little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding. It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it” (Proverbs 10:15-22).

- “The way of the lazy is as a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway. A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother. Folly is joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight. Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed. A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word! The path of life *leads* upward for the wise that he may keep away from Sheol below” (Proverbs 15:19-24).

As you can read, the Psalms and Proverbs are abounding in examples of not only those who chose the right path, but they include encouragement in how choosing the way of the Lord is required for success and victory in life. This is why, down through the centuries, those responsible for tending to the flock of God’s people have often developed recommended reading studies for a consistent search of the Scriptures on a regular basis. Reading through the Bible in a year and reading a chapter of Proverbs for each day of the month, are two common ways to constantly inculcate your mind and spirit with the Word of God.

Of course within the Messianic community of faith, many people follow the age old methods for Scripture study that have been developed in Judaism. This includes following the annual Torah cycle, and is coupled with remembering the *moedim* or appointed times of the Lord each year. Currently this Spring 2010, many Messianics are diligently choosing to follow the command to Count the Omer during the fifty days between the Festival of Unleavened Bread and *Shavuot* or Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-16). This discipline can keep one focused on the daily need to offer up praises to God and whether we will really be ready for considering the significance of *Shavuot*.

Going through the annual Torah cycle and appointed times are excellent instructional ways to draw closer to the Lord, although it is also true that the Jewish Sages developed some other useful means to keep people focused on the Lord. There are special seasons of teaching throughout the Summer as *Shavuot* transitions into the months of Tammuz, Av, Elul, and Tishri to the Fall high holidays. The objective is to keep the tendency for how minds and eyes wander into other things, refocused on things of God. This is particularly a challenge if His presence is not enabling a person to be submissive to what is right, and rejecting what is wrong.

Whether a Jewish person is simply found urgently following tradition, or one is a Messianic Believer appropriating the benefits of a disciplined regimen of Scripture study—or whatever method of reading the Bible you employ to best seek God’s will—**there is one thing you will find for sure.** You will inevitably have to deal with the reality that the God of Israel is *the* omniscient, all-knowing Creator. He is intimately acquainted with all that you do *and even* all that you think. Everything that has or will occur around you—from the moment of your conception to your departure—is being monitored by the Almighty. Consider the

scope of God's knowledge and power, as Psalm 139 should instill within each of us a healthy fear for Him, and the assurance that He is always with us and looking out for us:

"For the choir director. A Psalm of David. O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is *too* high, I cannot attain to it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,' even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike *to You*. For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, *and* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them" (Psalm 139:1-16).

When you take the time to contemplate the intimacy that the Lord desires with us, and His omniscient understanding of all things, then a proper perspective of fearing Him should come into your thoughts. You turn to God frequently and feel the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit—asking Him to lead you in paths of righteousness. You sincerely desire to diminish *your human self*, in order that the One who has given you eternal life can have His Divine way with you. You passionately desire to be used by the Lord as you strive to serve Him and cling to Him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. As you examine the teachings of the Messiah Yeshua, you are in awe of His wisdom and the ability He has to communicate truths that surely build upon—but often go far beyond—what has been stated by Moses and the Prophets. And yet, when you reflect upon His words, you find how Yeshua is very succinct when He instructs which path is necessary to follow, and which gate is necessary to enter:

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there

among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! **In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it**" (Matthew 7:1-14).

After admonishing His listeners not to judge one another, Yeshua describes elements of what has become commonly known as "the Golden Rule": *doing unto others as you would have them do unto you*. For Yeshua, treating others appropriately and with respect was the basic thrust of the Torah and the Prophets. Sadly, though, the Lord is very clear that one must volitionally choose to follow such a narrow way, rather than the broad way that leads to complete ruin. The qualifying conclusion is that "there are few who find it." I think that when we all read this, realizing that we serve an omniscient God, He has the ability to know precisely what life path we each choose to take and is able to actually know why we choose such a path. So, are you choosing the right path—one that will lead to being in the presence of the Lord forever?

- Are you devoted to seeking and searching out the Holy One with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 4:29)?
- Do you love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:43)?
- Do you seek to know Yeshua, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings (Philippians 3:10-11)—so that your life may somehow *fully emulate* His?
- Are you spending your time wisely? Do you take time during the week to pray and meditate on the Scriptures (Psalm 1)?

Writing this article has been extremely convicting to me personally. Looking at these passages of Scripture and letting them have their cleansing and revealing impact on my own heart have been beneficial. I, like many of you, have choices to make with how I spend my time and with whom I spend it. *The choice is always before each of us.* We can spend our time with the Lord through prayer, meditation, study, and fellowship—or with a plethora of distractions that usually will appeal to our carnal inclinations.

Is it easy to choose the right path? What is required in order to enter into eternal communion with our Heavenly Father? Reflect upon what Paul wrote Timothy and the Believers in Ephesus:

"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means

of gain. But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. **But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.** I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Messiah Yeshua, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen” (1 Timothy 6:3-16).

Brothers and sisters: **keep your attention focused on Yeshua, our salvation.** Choose the path of eternal life via the narrow gate!

Until the restoration of all things...



PASTORAL EPISTLES BIBLE STUDY NOW AVAILABLE!



Unlike some of the other letters of the Pauline corpus, there has been no significant demand for a detailed, Messianic examination of the Pastoral Epistles of 1&2 Timothy and Titus. Many of today's Messianic teachers and leaders think that they already know what these letters mean, and so putting out the effort of analyzing them beyond a cursory reading or survey is thought to probably not be needed. Sadly, today's broad Messianic movement is largely unaware and uninformed of a literal factory of academic proposals and perspectives, from over the past fifty years, regarding 1&2 Timothy and Titus. Much of this scholarship has affected various trends present in evangelical Christianity, the clergy of the contemporary church, and the debate over complimentarianism and egalitarianism. It is time for our faith community to join into these discussions.

This lengthy study of the Pastoral Epistles will take into consideration much of what has been offered by various scholars, not only in terms of the ancient setting of 1&2 Timothy and Titus, but also with how these epistles should be accurately applied in a modern setting. It will be our intention, as we probe these letters, to weigh our Messianic strengths and weaknesses of them, in an effort to be a faith community that is no longer lacking an adequate understanding. What are the things that we have actually interpreted correctly from the Pastoral Epistles, and what needs to be improved upon? How might some Messianic congregations and fellowships look if we took a good, hard look at 1&2 Timothy and Titus, and made a few required changes?

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