

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

CHOICE

by the Rev. Douglas Taylor

Moses gave a beautiful speech to the Israelites before he died. He urged them over and over again to follow the Lord, to do His Commandments. If they did that, he promised, they would be happy, really happy. If they did not obey the Lord's Commandments, they would suffer all sorts of unhappiness. Instead of blessings, they would bring curses upon themselves.

Everything Moses said was from the Lord. The Lord told him what to say. So it was really the Lord speaking, by means of Moses. And one of the most important of all these wonderful things that the Lord said was that He was giving the Israelites a clear choice, a choice between heaven and hell. "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil" (Deuteronomy 30:15). "Life" means *heavenly* life, life in heaven. "Death" means no life in heaven, killing your chances of living in heaven. It does not mean the death of the body, as we usually think of death. It means living in hell to eternity.

"Life" is good. "Death"—a life in hell—is evil. And the Lord allows us to choose whichever one we like. If we want to live in heaven, we can choose that. If we really want to live in hell, we can choose that, too. We are free to choose.

But we should know what we are choosing. Heaven is good. Hell is evil. The people in heaven are angelic people. They love to help one another. They are kind to each other. Each one treats everyone else as he himself or she herself would like to be treated. So they are deeply happy. And their happiness goes on forever.

But in hell they are always quarreling, always fighting, always struggling to get on top, always trying to rule over everyone else, always using other people for their own selfish purposes. They hate each other. Everyone there looks on everyone else as a rival. Each one loves only himself or herself. No wonder the Lord said in the Word, "There is no peace...unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). Compared with the people in heaven they are miserable. And their misery lasts forever. Why? Because they keep on adding to it.

Now, I can almost hear you saying, "I want to choose heaven. I don't like the sound of those people in hell. It would be terrible to live with people like that forever. So, I choose heaven." Well, that's good. Because that is what the Lord wants you to choose. So He said, through Moses: "Therefore, choose life."

But, you know, you don't make that choice in one day, once and for all. You make it every day—in fact, every moment of every day. All day long the Lord sets before you "life and good" (or heaven), and "death and evil" (or hell). But He urges you to "choose life," to choose heaven. He doesn't want you to go to hell. He knows that you will be happiest in heaven. So He urges you to choose heaven, all day long, everywhere, in any company.

For example, you may be tempted to break some of the rules your parents or teachers have made. These rules will eventually make you happy even if at the time you have to obey them, you don't feel very happy. But as you grow older, you will see that they are wise rules. But you may think that you are wiser than your parents. Perhaps you want to ignore these rules of happiness, and please only yourself, doing only what *you* want to do. If you do that, you are choosing hell: death and evil. You are killing your chances of going to heaven. You are training yourself for hell, programming yourself for hell.

But you don't have to be like that. You are free to choose heaven. You are free to obey the rules, and program yourself for heaven. Perhaps you feel that you are always in trouble, always being punished, always having your parents and teachers finding fault with you. You don't have to be like that. You can choose to do the right thing, every time, so that everyone is pleased with you. If you live like that, you are choosing heaven, not hell.

Have you gotten into the habit of telling lies? If so, you are programming yourself for hell. But you don't have to do that. You are free to choose life rather than death. You can decide every time to tell the truth, even if it seems to hurt you for a little while. If you go on lying, it will hurt you for a long while. It will hurt you forever. So, choose life, choose heaven, and be honest. Become the kind of person that people can trust.

Have you gotten into the habit of using bad language, words that you know you should not use? You can break that habit. You are free to choose to have heaven speaking through you, not hell. Choose life.

Have you drifted into the habit of making jokes about certain parts of the body, especially the hidden parts? Or, do you encourage others by laughing at their filthy jokes? You don't have to. You are free to choose heaven. You can have a clean mind, just as you obviously want to have a clean body. Choose life.

Are you sometimes lazy? Is it too much of an effort to help people? You don't have to be like that. You can choose heaven. You can come to love helping people. You can learn to live, not just exist.

Are you ever mean to other people? Do you make people unhappy? You don't *have* to be cruel like that. You are free to choose to make people happy. That is what they do in heaven. You can choose life.

Is there someone you hate? If so, you are choosing hell, where they all hate each other. But you can stop that. You can choose heaven. You are free to look to what is good in other people, concentrating on their good points.

Do you like to get even with those who are nasty to you? If so, you are choosing hell. It is quite in order for you to stop them from making you miserable. But it is hellish to be revengeful. Choose heaven, and be forgiving, if you yourself want to be forgiven. Let the Lord be the judge of the other person.

Are you sometimes scornful of other people, contemptuous of them, looking down on them? You don't have to be. The Lord has given you the power to be humble. You can choose heaven all day long.

If you do that, you will be truly free, free from punishments, free from being lectured, and free from the evils of hell, free from the curses and miseries of hell. If you keep on choosing heaven day after day, you will be prepared for heaven. Only then will you be truly free—free to do as you like. You see, only angelic people can do just as they like, because what they love to do is the same as what the Lord wants them to do. He doesn't have to block them or stop them in any way. They are free because on earth they chose life all day long.

So remember that everyday the Lord says to you: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil... Therefore, choose life.”

Text: Deuteronomy 30:9-20