

Choices and Consequences

THEY

CHOOSE TO LIVE

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

Matthew 16:27

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

Mark 8:38

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Luke 9:26

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Maybe you are like me. I look back in my life at certain events of which I am not proud. I barely prepared for a final exam in my major at the university. As a result, my grade average dropped from an A to a C. So you can guess what sort of mark I received on the final. A particular play in football haunts me even today. I gave up on the play and did not complete my assignment. What may seem so insignificant from long ago has been the driving force for me to this day to not give up on any activity or project. I am ashamed and regret that I did not come through for my teammates.

I could see the intense feeling of being letdown expressed in the eyes of my teammates after that play. The face of my professor revealed his disappointment when he handed me my grade. If we have pangs of guilt for failing to live up to the ideals and expectations of those in our everyday lives, how much more profound and deep will be our remorse before Christ when He returns. What we do today will have consequences tomorrow.

Your Bias Is Showing

As we have seen, perspective on Christ's exchanged-life teaching differs depending on your theological grid. The Reformed camp believes the paradox addresses heaven or hell. "Life," they assume, refers exclusively to heaven. Their conclusion is derived from their concept of working-faith that requires a commitment of

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life for saving faith. As a result the rich young ruler could obtain “life,” meaning eternal life or heaven, by commitment and obedience. Their consistency is admirable, but their interpretations are flawed!

On the other hand the Free Grace position comes from a different point of view. God saves us, establishing a relationship so that intimate fellowship with Him can be our experience—an enriched life in the present with future rewards in the kingdom. The exchanged life means making wise choices based on God’s Word, skillfully lived out and bringing into reality Christ’s words, “I came that they may have life, and might have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Also, Christ’s response to the rich young ruler deals first with eternal life and then focuses on real life, abundant life here and now.¹

Hopefully by now sufficient groundwork has been laid to demonstrate the error of the Reformed perspective on the exchanged-life passages. Deliverance from hell is not the subject. Rather, fellowship is the main point. Moving forward to clarify the exchange-life teaching, the paradox will be addressed from *only* the Free Grace view’s perspective.

Issue Six Paradox Clarification

A clarification of the paradox is found in Matthew 16:26-27; Mark 8:36-38; and Luke 9:25-26. Jesus taught,

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul [life]? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul [life]? For the Son of Man [Christ] is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds (Matt. 16:26-27).

Using a business transaction model, Christ explains the motivation for losing one’s life in devotion to Him. *Give up the world’s riches*

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and obtain spiritual treasure. This is an opportunity we should not refuse. Jesus does not force a believer to follow Him. Each of us must make a choice. Seeing through lenses soiled by concerns of the world, our spiritual compass has been demagnetized so we drift off to the ways of the world. Jesus, however, implores believers to walk in obedience by faith in a different direction with Him.

Notice the two options from the Matthew 16 text. *First*, to save one's life is to gain all that the world has to offer, and yet to forfeit true life. *Second*, to lose life is to give up the world's riches, but to obtain spiritual richness, a truly enriched life now. Future results come with each choice. Forfeiting the abundant life now brings loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. On the other hand, those who experience spiritual richness now will be rewarded in the future.

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Passing the Vision Test

You do not need a degree in economics to realize that the guarantee of riches and rewards is a win-win deal. So why doesn't every believer jump at the offer? Because he is lured by the visible, the world system. Physical, material gratification is readily available; it looks good, it feels good. Materialism is even a sign of one's importance. Christ calls for believers to follow Him in a different way, a radical way that we do not completely understand. Frankly, we are hesitant to leave the known. However, our perspective needs reorientation. Christ tells us that, as we begin to follow Him, our perspective will change. What is of real value will become evident

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and will be experienced. Life will achieve true meaning and real fulfillment, which before had been sought in all the wrong places.

Now Luke 9:25-26 shows us God's perspective. Jesus explained,

For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels.

The loss of spiritual riches for worldly gain is the principle in operation within the paradox. Note the two choices shown in the chart, *Reaping-What-You-Sow Principle* (page 195). Either we hold the

*Christ comes and
calls for believers
to follow Him in
a different way.*

world tightly, looking for gratification, or we hold the world loosely. The result for the former choice is to forfeit real life, not as we know it, but as Christ lived it. On the other hand, the latter choice allows us to embrace true richness. As a consequence of the former, we are an embarrassment to God in the world. On the other hand, if real life is embraced, God is honored and He will bestow honor at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

John had the same perspective in his first epistle. In 1 John 2:28, he wrote,

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

John addresses believers who have made choices that will affect their reaction to Christ at His second coming. They will face shame

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REAPING-WHAT-YOU-SOW PRINCIPLE		
Luke 9:24-26		
Choice	Result	Consequences
World Held Tightly (Gratified)	Forfeit Enriched Life	God Ashamed
World Held Loosely (Gratitude)	Embrace Enriched Life	God will Honor
Present		Future

or have confidence. Those who have not let go of the world will experience humiliation. On the other hand, those who abide in Christ and His Word (John 14:21, 23; 15:4, 10) will have confidence before Him and will receive rewards.

Got the Principle?

The life-exchange concept is, in fact, a simple one, at least simple to understand. You give up one life for another kind of life. However, working it out is the difficult part. My family and I lived in California's Silicon Valley during the semiconductor gold rush from the mid-70s to the mid-90s. A popular bumper sticker read, "He that dies with the most toys wins!" However, one who embraced the idea of the exchanged life was the twentieth-century-Christian martyr, Jim Elliot. He said,

*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep
to gain what he cannot lose!²*

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Let's not forget that our view of life is a matter of choice. You and I reach conclusions each day that affect not only tomorrow, but eternity as well. Believers must decide if they will follow Christ in discipleship. A wise person put it this way,

*We need to make good choices,
for the choices we make turn around and make us.*

If you are a believer, the decision is yours. Make it wisely, since it evidently really, really matters!

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Chapter 15, NOTES

1. As discussed in chapter 10, “Just the Facts, Ma’am!,” there are four major views of the rich-young-ruler passages. *Reformed theology* allows agreement with *only* the second view: unbelievers pursuing eternal life, requiring commitment. Conversely, *Free Grace theology* can agree with any of the other three choices: (1) believers pursuing rewards, resulting from discipleship, (3) unbelievers pursuing eternal life, requiring simple trust, or (4) unbelievers pursuing eternal life, redirected to pursue an enriched life. However, as explained by this author, the *best interpretation supports the fourth view*: unbelievers pursuing eternal life, redirected to pursue an enriched life.
2. Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty* (New York: Harper, 1958), 15.

