

INTRODUCTION



FREE TO CHOOSE

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Acts 20:29-30

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

SAYING WHAT IT DOESN'T SAY!

A display case at the Swiss National Museum in Zurich contains two items: a helmet and a sword. They are relics of the 1531 battle between troops of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Swiss, when the Roman Church embarked on a mission to eliminate Protestantism in Switzerland. In this battle Ulrich Zwingli, one of the leaders of the Reformation movement, was killed. Even though not as well known as Luther and Calvin, Zwingli played a major role in the Protestant Reformation. As a memorial to Zwingli's leadership and for sacrificing his life in battle, his helmet is on display. The large broad sword is said to have been used by one of Zwingli's men to behead an opposing soldier after he seized the Zurich battle banner. It is also included in the memorial display as part of the tribute to the Protestant defender.

Both Zwingli along with his soldier who defended the banner had chosen to stand against the Roman Catholic Church and its teachings. Both men played a hand in the establishment of the Protestant Church. As with Luther, they defended *justification by faith alone!* Most people in the Protestant Church have heard about Ulrich Zwingli, but who was this other man who wielded the sword? That man was my forefather, Adam Naf.

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Three centuries later my family had moved to America. During the 1840s my great-grandfather, John Neff, left Pennsylvania and traveled to Utah with Brigham Young. Leaving his Mennonite roots and crossing the vast American plains by covered wagon, he became an integral part of the Mormon community in the Salt Lake Valley. He built the first gristmill to supply flour for the new community. Mormon Church leaders recognized him for his contributions to the Church, and a canyon east of Salt Lake City was named after him.

Two of my forefathers made significant marks in religious history. Each made a choice. Each chose one church over another; one system of belief was exchanged in favor of something else. My earlier book, *HOLD FAST*, addressed decisions we all must make concerning what we believe about the relationship of saving faith and works. This current book tackles the critical distinctions between faith and works pertaining to present sanctification in the life of a believer.

Free to Choose

Just as my forefathers made choices, so do we. For example a couple of years ago my doctor informed me that I could develop diabetes if I did not lose weight and exercise. I had to make a

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choice: ignore his advice or make some changes in my life. When I learned of the many complications that result from having diabetes, I determined to heed the doctor's instructions. The exercise program began, and new eating habits were formed. I had to make a choice.

Often when we are told that lifestyle changes need to be made for health reasons, it gives a new perspective and meaning to life and is also a motivational factor

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for the evaluation of priorities. “Most people will only fundamentally change their diet and exercise routines after experiencing a catastrophic event—a stroke, a heart attack or a coronary bypass.”¹ However, statistics indicate that within two years after a coronary bypass “90% of people will revert back to their old diet habits.”² A catastrophic event can be the catalyst in a choice to change behavioral patterns, yet often old behavior and lifestyles are resumed after a period of time. All habits, whether good or bad, are the product of the repetitive choices we have made over our lifetime.

In Colossians 3, Paul addressed choices in the Christian life.

Put...aside [put off]: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech...Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside [put off] the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge....So...put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other.... Beyond all these things put on love (Col. 3:8-10, 12-14).

Since the old, unregenerate man has been *put off* at initial salvation (v. 9b), Paul commanded believers to *put off* behavior that reflects the old way of living (v. 8–9a). On the other hand, since the new man has been *put on* at initial salvation (v. 10), the command is for believers to *put on* behavior that reflects that new life in Christ (vv. 12–14). Commands can be obeyed or ignored, just as doctor’s instructions can be heeded or dismissed. Each is free to choose.

Confronting Myths

No matter how sincerely made, choices in the Christian life can be misdirected, becoming of little value, if not destructive. A misdirected Christian life can result from making the Bible say something it does not say. Let me explain. The Scriptures are the

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blueprint for the Christian life. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

The issue is never the Blueprint. Instead the issue is what is taught from the Blueprint. You have probably heard Bible teachers

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repeat the statement, “I teach only what the Bible teaches.” Remember, there is only one correct interpretation of any passage of Scripture. Therefore if interpreted incorrectly and taught in sermons, Sunday school lessons, Bible studies or lectures, what is being taught is not what God had in mind. My fear for the church is that *many people teach from the Scriptures concepts*

God never intended. They continue *Saying What It Doesn't Say!*

However heartfelt, choosing to follow any teaching that is biblically incorrect does not bring God's blessing. Wrongly directed, sincere choices are no better than wrong choices. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we cannot defer to our pastor, television teacher, or denominational leaders. It is the responsibility of every believer to read, study, and interpret the Scriptures for himself and then obey them. There will be no excuses when we meet Christ face to face.

Consider the following warnings to the church:

Ephesians 4

While in prison, Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:14 that the body of Christ is to grow up together in the faith and as a result should “no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”

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Acts 20

Speaking to the church leaders at Ephesus prior to his imprisonment (Acts 20:28-30), Paul warned these leaders to *be on guard* for false teachers who will both come in from outside the body and arise up from within the flock. “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

Galatians 5

Galatians 1-4 illustrates the problem wrought by Judaizers who came from Jerusalem and “hindered,” and were “disturbing,” and “troubling” the Gentile believers (Gal. 5:7-12). Even Peter was swayed by their presence and teachings, giving up his own freedom in Christ (Gal. 2:11-14; 5:1-12). As a result Paul confronted and rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy on that occasion.

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2 Timothy 2

Paul also identified Hymenaeus and Philetus as false teachers who arose from within the body of Christ (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Having “gone astray from the truth,” these false teachers were upsetting “the faith of some.” Followers follow where leaders lead. If teachers are moving away from the truth, it is not surprising that some of their followers go in the same direction.

2 Timothy 4

Following his release from prison Paul exhorted Timothy, whom he had left in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), to persevere in his teaching re-

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sponsibilities (2 Tim. 4:3-4). “For a time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”

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Conclusion

In Ephesians 4 Paul exhorted believers to move on to maturity so that they would not be tricked or swayed by erroneous teachings. The task of church leaders is to “equip the saints” (Eph. 4:11-12), thus preparing the church for attacks

from false teachers. Susceptibility of believers to erroneous teaching brings the strong possibility of their straying from the truth. Over the centuries many have chosen the wrong road.

Rejecting Myths

The church is not lacking in those who tickle ears and sway believers by crafty words. When coupled with a lack of sound biblical teaching, it is not surprising that the church is susceptible to error. Absolute truth is no longer absolute. True, many cults and false religions are presenting their false teachings from outside; but in addition the fox has made his way into the henhouse. The body of Christ is steeped in teachings that are myths and not truth, and spiritual impotency is the result. This book addresses myths that the church has assumed to be true, but in actuality misrepresent the truth.

Introduction, NOTES

1. *Fundamental Behavioral Changes Require Catastrophic Events* (www.emergencemarketing.com, August 6, 2008), 1.
2. Ibid.

