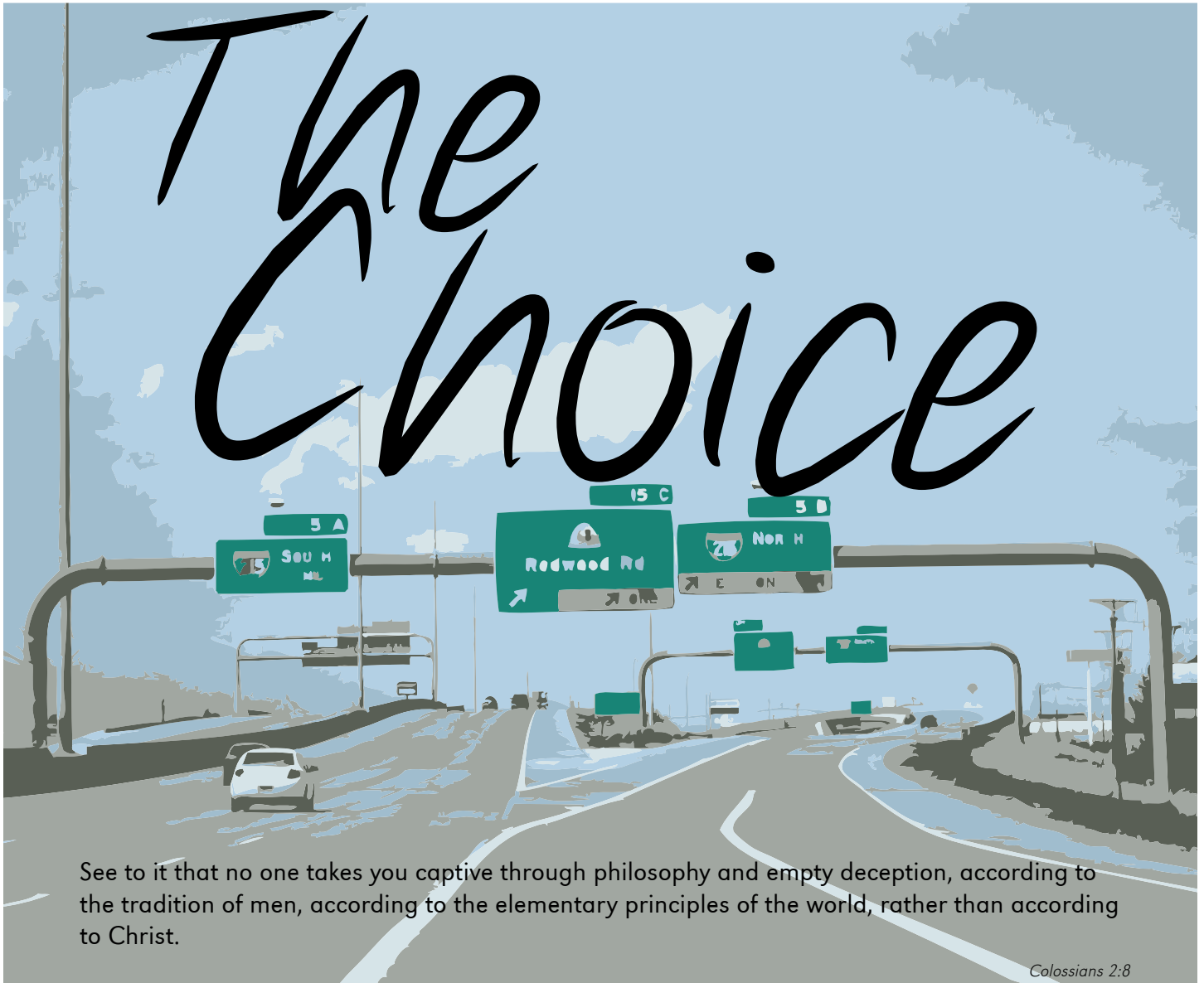


Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

The Choice



See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Colossians 2:8

The moment comes for each of us. It will; it is inevitable for every human being on the face of this earth. There will come a moment when we must choose:

Will it be the world, or will it be Jesus?



The truth is, this moment presents itself twice for the Christian. Some of us have made that initial choice; at some point in our past we made the decision to trust in the saving atonement of Jesus Christ. We turned away from every other imagined and inventive path for salvation and were transformed from hell-bound sinner into heaven-bound sinner. We realized that in our own flesh, in our own efforts, an eternity with God was a hopeless goal. Only in Christ, because of His atoning sacrifice on the cross, would we ever reach that goal—not by our own effort, but by His.

Yet for every Christian, every follower of Christ Jesus, the question must be answered a second time:

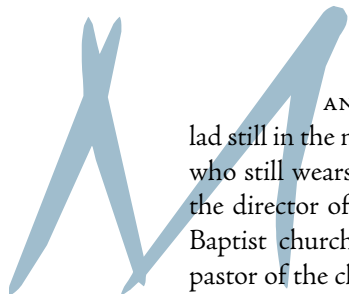
Will it be the world, or will it be Jesus?

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Empty Deception



ANY, MANY YEARS AGO, a fresh-faced lad still in the navy but newly wed to the woman who still wears my ring, I was asked to become the director of the youth choir in a downtown Baptist church in San Diego, California. The pastor of the church at the time happened to be the man who married my mom and dad, back in the 1940s when he was pastor of the First Baptist Temple in Marshalltown, Iowa.

Small world.

So at the ripe old age of nineteen or twenty, barely out of diapers myself, I was directing the youth choir at this church. At some point in this perilous relationship Linda and I invited the choir to our home for a social evening.

Now, I have always had a library of books, but in these early days our “library” consisted of various and sundry volumes filling a rickety, slide-the-pieces-together contraption that could hold no more than an armload of books. And in that collection were a few paperback copies of books by and about the very late Edgar Cayce, a subject that had piqued my interest at the time.

Edgar Cayce was called the “sleeping prophet,” the “father of holistic medicine,” and the most documented psychic of the 20th century. As an adult, Cayce would put himself into a state of meditation, connecting with the universal consciousness and from this state, came his “readings.” From holistic health and the treatment of illness to dream interpretation and reincarnation, Cayce’s readings and insights offer practical help and advice to individuals from all walks of life, even today.

from the Edgar Cayce web site

One of the older teenage girls in the choir spied those books on the shelves during that social event and, confronting me about them at a subsequent choir rehearsal, was literally in tears over the fact that I would dare possess such heretical material. At the time I dismissed her hysterical response to my reading material as little more

than the rantings of teenage angst.

But the truth is, she was right.



In his farewell address to Israel just before he was to die, Joshua answered the question we all must—only in his case his choice was Yahweh.

“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 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 24:14-15

If from the day you repented of your sins and confessed Jesus as your Savior you never looked back, never looked side-to-side, but kept your focus resolutely on Christ, then blessings are upon you.

May your tribe increase.

But most Christians take a more bumpy, circuitous route of sanctification. Some of us even take an exit here and there, only by the grace of God making it back onto the freeway after He has graciously hauled us back. The “old man” within us can be a nagging, tenacious foe to the “new man,” doing everything it can to short-circuit our walk with Christ.

Whether your road toward an eternity in heaven has been smooth or rough, there either will or already has come a point when you realize that you must, once and for all, answer the question:

Will it be the world, or will it be Jesus?



This isn’t about salvation. You already made that decision some time earlier. You already decided

that with respect to where you will spend eternity after your earthly death, there is no other way to heaven than through Christ Jesus. If you are one of the called—if you are, as the apostle Paul puts it in his first letter to the Corinthian church, not one of “those who are perishing,” but one of “us who are being saved,” then that is *fait accompli*.

Done. Finished.

But there are two parts, or stages, to salvation. There is the first part that includes all the necessary components. In order of occurrence: election, the call, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption and the first aspect of sanctification—that is, set apart, consecrated to the Lord. These all comprise the process of becoming “saved,” being “born again.”

The second part or stage of salvation consists of two more components that remain part of our Christian experience while we still live on this earth: the second aspect of sanctification, and perseverance. As he offers counsel to help us answer that critical question correctly, Paul touches on this second stage.

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form...

Colossians 2:6-9

He writes this to believers, to those who have been “firmly rooted” in faith. Yet Paul cautions them against being led astray—even taken “captive”—by the philosophies and deceiving principles of the world. In other words, notwithstanding that you are already a Christian, Paul pleads with you not to choose the world over Christ.

Just as the Christian has his moments when the clamour of this visible and audible world is so persistent and the whisper of the spiritual world so faint that faith and reason can hardly stick to their guns, so, as I well remember, the atheist too has his moments of shuddering misgiving, of an all but irresistible suspicion that old tales may after all be true, that something or someone from outside may at any moment break into his neat, explicable, mechanical universe. Believe in God and you will have to face hours when it seems *obvious* that this material world is the only reality; disbelieve in Him and you must face hours when this material world seems to shout at you that it is *not* all. No conviction, religious or irreligious, will, of itself, end once and for all this fifth-columnist in the soul. Only the practice of Faith resulting in the habit of Faith will gradually do that.

C. S. Lewis



Mackenzie Thorpe

Right and Wrong

IN 1931, GEORGE BERNARD SHAW was asked what, in his opinion, was the most beautiful thing in this world. “Youth,” he replied, “is the most beautiful thing in this world—and what a pity that it has to be wasted on children!”

In a similar way, precisely at the time in our life when we are young and vibrantly active, precisely when our mind is more elastic and inquisitive, it is then that we are the most vulnerable to harmful philosophies—and the most prone to stupid mistakes in judgment. Lacking the maturity and discernment of age, we flit from one silly idea to another and, sadly, some of them remain.

Today I could read a book by or about Edgar Cayce (if I were remotely interested) and it would do me no harm. I would quickly dismiss it as bosh and nonsense, and move on. It would leave no harmful mark on my psyche. But when I was nineteen or twenty I was taking a dangerous risk by including such things in my reading material.

Years later, after my spiritual maturity had had more time to develop, I was seeing a therapist regarding some problems I had been experiencing. This psychologist, I am sure, would have considered himself to be a Christian, but he also believed in reincarnation and instances of deceased people speaking from the grave. During the course of one of our sessions he loaned me a couple of thin volumes purported to contain the words of famous individuals from “the beyond”—including those of Winston Churchill.

It just so happened that at the time I was reading a definitive biography of Churchill by the well-respected author and historian, William Manchester. As a result my mind was filled with images from the life of this remarkable British statesman, as well as a familiarity with his manner of writing and speaking. A week or two later I returned the books to the therapist, telling him I considered them to be rubbish, and that since I was quite familiar with how Churchill spoke, it was obvious that the purported voice in those books was certainly not his.



To this day I recognize that moment as a milestone in my relationship with God, because the experience did not weaken, but *strengthened* my faith. But how are we to know what is wrong and what is right? How are we to know when to reject the counsel of the world? How are we to know when it is wrong? The answer is easier than you might think, and the apostle John offers us a way to know.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 John 4:1-6

John MacArthur has a wonderful (and more succinct) way of stating it.

A Christian has no need of human philosophy... Where it happens to be right it will agree with Scripture, and is therefore unnecessary. Where it is wrong it will disagree with Scripture, and is therefore misleading. It has nothing necessary or reliable to offer.

This, of course, requires us to have more than just a passing acquaintance with Scripture.

Captain and Master

One way this world knocks us off-track is by trying its hardest to convince us that we are, and always will be the masters of our own fate. Even as Christians who have already claimed Christ Jesus as Captain of our soul, we can begin to believe the “wisdom” of this world that diminishes God at every turn. For many of us this began at our high school graduation ceremony, at which some well-meaning but hopelessly ignorant person chose to recite the loathsome poem, “Invictus,” by William Ernest Henley.

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

This nonsense isn’t even true for the unsaved.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

No one is born spiritually neutral. No one is born a free agent. If you are not in Christ, you are in someone else—and that someone else is Satan, who is “the god of this world.” When we come to Christ, we are not converted from no allegiance to anyone, to an allegiance to Him; we are not converted from not belonging to any kingdom, to now belonging to His. For every one of us is born belonging to a kingdom—and it is not Christ’s.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13-14

Thus we are *never* the captain of our own soul. If Christ is not your Captain and Master, then Satan is your captain and master. But even if you *are* in Christ, you remain susceptible to the Siren song of this world so long as you walk this earth.



The Choice

HERE IS NO ESCAPING THE FACT that what we are talking about is, essentially, lordship—that uneasy word that means we are not our own. When we first come to Christ, He becomes our Lord.

Done.

But some of us take quite a long while to acknowledge this truth.

Here is one of the principal goals of progressive sanctification. After we are sanctified at conversion, we are then to spend the remainder of our earthly lives *becoming* sanctified. The apostle Paul refers to this as “working out” our salvation.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13

This, of course, is not working *for* our salvation, but making Christ’s salvation *real* in our lives. Life in Christ is more than just words, more than just credo, more than just agreement in principle—it is to encompass every aspect of the believer’s life.

That is lordship.

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.

Galatians 5:16-17

Just as we should be better at our earthly job today than we were yesterday, so we should be better today at walking with Christ Jesus, better at walking by the Spirit, than we were yesterday. We are to gain spiritual maturity, develop a heavenly perspective and insight, be more comfortable with heavenly things as we gradually

detach ourselves from earthly things.

That is progressive sanctification.



While we are learning how to walk by the Spirit, we are also to be immersing ourselves in God’s written word. We cannot follow someone we do not know; we cannot speak to others about someone we do not know; and we cannot worship and pray to someone we do not know. We come to know God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, through the pages of Scripture. During this later church era we do not listen to prophets speaking *ex cathedra*, but, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, we come to know God the Father through His Son, who now speaks for Him.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:1-3

The only way for us to “test the spirits,” the only way for us to recognize that something written or spoken is utter nonsense, is to know what God and the Son say about it. By studying and reading God’s word for ourselves, when we hear someone say, “You know what the Bible says: “The Lord helps those who helps themselves,” we can know immediately that that is not true, that it is just the *opposite* of what the Bible says. By studying and reading God’s word for ourselves, when we hear someone recite, “*I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul*,” we can know immediately that that is a black lie from the pit.



Living out our salvation while still on this temporal plane is not checkers; it is chess. It is not easy, for this fallen world is constantly doing its best to pull us off-track. This world—directed by its god, Satan—wants us to take the next exit. It wants us to leave the path God has ordained for each of us. It wants us to listen to its counsel and wisdom instead of that of our Lord.

We dare not mix the two. At some point in every believer's path of sanctification he must make up his mind, once and for all:

Will it be the world, or will it be Jesus? ♦

But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

1 Timothy 4:7-10

*Some say life is just a series of decisions.
We make choices, we live and learn.
Now I'm standing at a crossroad,
and I must choose which way to turn.
Down the one road lies all the world can offer:
all it's power, it's wealth and fame.
Down the other just a man with nail scars in His hands.
But there is mercy in His eyes,
and there is power in His name.*

*All my life I sailed the sea of reason.
I was captain of my soul.
There was no need for a Savior,
I could live life on my own.
Then I heard Him speak the language of compassion,
words of healing for broken lives.
When we nailed Him to the tree,
His love included me.
Now He's calling me to follow,
and to leave the past behind.*

*I choose Jesus. I choose Jesus.
Without a solitary doubt, I choose Jesus.
Not for miracles but for loving me,
not for Bethlehem but for Calvary,
not for a day but for eternity,
I choose Jesus!*



Robert Sterling