

There is a famous song by the progressive rock band Rush entitled Free Will. In the song there is a line that says.

“If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice.”

In life we are constantly faced with making choices, weighing the alternatives, and considering the consequences. Throughout time, this truth has been the subject of songs, of writings and of moralizing.

We must choose our friends and whom we spend our time with. It is to be hoped we choose well because our choices say a lot about us. Those with whom we surround ourselves will influence us greatly and will in great part determine how others see us. An old saying “by their friends you shall know them”, or, more colloquially, “birds of a feather flock together”. These sayings represent a lot of truth and wisdom. After all, we tend to be most comfortable with, and spend most of our time around, those with whom we share common ideals and aspects of life.

If we chose poorly and surround ourselves with people who participate in evil or even merely tolerate evil, who sin voluntarily, and who disregard others, then it is highly likely that we ourselves will do those very same things. On the other hand, if we spend much of our time with others who value a principled life, who respect other people, who try to live according to the laws of God, then we are likely to emulate them and to live the same way they do.

At some point in our lives most of us choose a job or career. Our life’s occupation, too, will say much about us. Whether we are good at our chosen task, whether we are dedicated to our work and how we treat our co-workers will impact how others see us.

If we are on time to work, and learn our tasks well, performing them to the very best of our abilities and furthering the goals of our employer,

then we are likely to do well and enjoy our work. If, on the other hand, our work is lazy and careless, if we are negative about our work, and if we try to find any possible excuse not to go to work, others will most likely have a negative opinion of us, we will not be happy and we will not feel fulfilled.

Similarly, we must also choose whether to accept and live up to what God commands of us or if we should reject them. Do we choose to only obey the ones that are easy, or do we strive to obey all of God's laws? God has commanded us to *"love one another."* We are to hold each other in esteem, we should respect and honor one another, and we should be kind to one another. *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* This commandment is pretty straight forward but as humans we tend to rationalize and make excuses rather than simply to obey.

This commandment, the second of the Great Commandments, as our Lord explained to the Pharisee who questioned Him,

*"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"*

Jesus told the man, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."*

Will we choose to obey this commandment or will we not? Jesus reminds us that this choice has consequences. If we choose to follow God's law, then we may face criticism, envy, opposition, and even hatred, from those who do not follow His law. This can be painful, and, sadly, it causes some to fall away from God as they choose to follow some other path. It is not easy sometimes to "love your neighbor" and to pray for those who want to do us harm or slander us.

Just as we may face ridicule because we choose to surround ourselves with people who share our values, we may face ridicule for choosing to follow God's law. Those who do not live principled or lives of integrity, often resent those who do. Perhaps they do not realize the seriousness of salvation or want to learn about God and often it is human nature to reject things we do not understand.

Just as being a good worker can draw criticism from those who are not so dedicated, showing your dedication to God's commands can make us subject to criticism for earnestly trying to follow God's will in our lives.

In today's world, if we choose to follow God's law and explain clearly and honestly why we cannot instead blindly follow the mandates of political correctness, of popular opinion, or of current whim, we are dismissed or called radical. Our honor sullied, our motives are called into question, and we end up under a microscope as those, who do not choose to live God's way, try to find some fault in those of us who embrace God's commandments.

Jesus knows all about this, and He offers us comfort for those times when we face such trying pressure from the world:

*“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”*

If then, we face the negativity of the world because we refuse to go along with the crowd, we can at least draw comfort from knowing that we walk beside our Lord. He faced the wrath of the world before we did, and He defeated those forces of evil. If we remain faithful, we too will be victorious with Him.

As our Lord proclaims, if we followed the ways of the world, then the world would love us. If we shared in evil, then the evildoers would rejoice in our falling as well.

But if we refuse to be drawn away from God, if we remain steadfast in our love of God and His laws, then the world, which faces certain calamity, will probably dismiss and have hate for us. The world faces this calamity because so many do not know God and do not follow Him:

*“But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me”,* says Jesus.

It is not that they have not had the opportunity to know God. Jesus dispels that claim to innocence, pointing out that He has come to show them the truth.

*“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.”*

Sometimes we must choose, and these choices have consequences. One of the consequences of our choice to follow God is that we may face discrimination, disrespect, misunderstanding, opposition and even hatred while we are here on earth. But our Lord will not leave us to face those things alone.

He gives us His reassurance,

*“But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.”*

Every day we will face choices. Choices to stay strong in our faith and choices about how we treat others. Each Sunday we make the choice of should I come to worship in the house of the Lord or stay home. It is critical that we make the right choice, that we choose to remain faithful to God and His law and to continue to be His servants in the world. The end results of our right choices are everlasting life and salvation. That is worth choosing!

The Lord be with you,      Let us pray.

Dear Lord, You have chosen us to be your followers in this world. We are in the world, but not of the world. In this time we face hatred and evil because we chose to stay with You. Keep us always strong to remain so dedicated to Your will and Your way that we may never be shaken, deceived, or deterred from following You. As we were saved by Your precious death and Resurrection, let us not now waste the gift You have given us. This we ask in Your Holy Name. *Amen.*