



**Glenn Brown**

June 2014

441 ½ Lark Drive

Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

telephone 970-434-1377

## **LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS – PART 2**

Last month we looked at life's three most important decisions: (1) Christ (2) Mate (3) Church. Let's look deeper into those decisions:

### (1) **CHRIST**.

The Bible says that everyone knows there is a God. They don't know Him personally, the way you know a friend, but they know deep inside that there is a God. About 50 years ago I heard a missionary tell the following story: He went with a translator to a remote tribe in Indonesia. He was the first white man they had ever seen, and they knew nothing of the outside world. They worshipped the mountain on which they lived. He told them the good news about Jesus, how God loved them so much He sent His Son to die for their sins. An old woman without any teeth started laughing and talking excitedly. The translator said, "This woman says she always knew there was a God like that, but she never knew His name." Jesus came so that we can know His name.

The Bible explains that everyone knows there is a God by the following:

- **Nature.** Psalm 19 says, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of His hands. Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge.* Romans 1 says, *For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*
- **Conscience.** According to Romans 2, the law of God is written in the heart of man and he has a conscience that accuses or excuses his actions. All people have a sense of right and wrong and feel guilt when they do wrong. They sense they need forgiveness. I read about a Christian lady who watched the televised scenes of the terrible tsunami in northern Japan a few years ago. Her heart was deeply touched at the suffering and loss of life of so many thousands of people. She cried out, "Oh, God! Those poor people. They were raised in a land where they never heard the gospel. They didn't even know there is a God." She was surprised to hear God's voice speak clearly to her heart, "They knew!" Note again that Romans says that every person will be "without excuse" when they stand before God. Every heart has enough inner knowing of God that they can start seeking Him. And God declares, "*If you seek me, you will find me.*" He is listening for the cry from any heart, and He will respond to every one who reaches for Him.
- **Eternity.** *God has placed eternity in the hearts of men.* This means that all people have an intimation that their lives do not end in the grave but are ongoing.
- **Judgment.** In John 16, the Lord tells us that *The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.* People know deep inside that they will be held accountable for their decisions.

Dr. Maurice Rawlings documents the words of a patient at a hospital awaiting surgery: "Blackness...then it was light. I awoke and knew it was real. In front of me I watched my whole life pass by. Every thought, word and movement I had made in my life...Every detail, right up to the present time. It all took place in what seemed to be a fraction of a second, and yet it was very vivid." Bill Wiese, who wrote a book about his near-death experience titled 23 Minutes in Hell, reports that hundreds of people across the world have written during the past seven years sharing similar experiences of death and judgment or their visions of heaven and hell.

I have had a comparable experience twice during my life – of a portion of my life passing before my eyes. In both cases God was showing me how sinful and disgusting certain areas of my life were, and He was giving me the opportunity to repent. Thank God that, because Jesus was my Savior, God showed me this scene in this life so that I could choose to turn away from it - - rather than at the end of my life when the opportunity to repent had passed!

- **Heaven and Hell.** The Bible teaches clearly that this life is fleeting, *“Like a mist that appears for a brief moment,”* and that the choices we make in this life determine our destiny. The future the Bible describes is either heaven, in the presence of a loving Heavenly Father; or hell, in His total absence. While we may wish it were not so, the Bible clearly describes hell as a place of darkness and torment that is endless. The perennial question we all have is: How could a loving God sentence His creatures to such a horrible fate? The answer to that question, as I understand the Bible, is that God has given us free will, and actually we determine for ourselves where we will spend eternity. Yes, God passes the sentence, but He is simply confirming the choice we have already made. Consider the following teaching from Dallas Willard’s book, Renovation of the Heart (paraphrased in part):

“Lost persons are the ones who mistake themselves for God. They are delusional. Their god, as Paul wrote, is their ‘belly,’ the feeling center of the self. They are willing slaves of their feelings or appetites. If they don’t get what they want when they want it they become angry and depressed, and are a danger to themselves and others. They are self-idolaters. Each is a god unto himself.

Thus no one chooses in the abstract to go to hell or even to be the kind of person who belongs there. But their orientation toward self leads them to become the kind of person for whom away-from-God is the only place for which they are suited. It is a place they would, in the end, choose for themselves, rather than humble themselves before God and accept who he is. There are limits beyond which the human will cannot bend back, cannot turn or repent. (Remember Esau, Jacob’s brother, who *“could not repent, though he sought it with tears.”*) One should seriously inquire if to live in a world permeated with God and the knowledge of God is something they themselves truly desire. If not, they can be assured that God will excuse them from his presence. They will find their place in the outer darkness of which Jesus spoke. But the fundamental fact about them will not be that they are there, but that they have become people so locked into their own self-worship and denial of God that they cannot want God.

Hell is not an “oops!” or a slip. One does not miss heaven by a hair, but by constant effort to avoid and escape God.”

If you are not living a life of repentance, accepting the suffering and crucifixion of the flesh that is necessary in order to be transformed into the image of God, and a life that is filled with joy that you know the majestic Creator and that He knows and loves you, it may indicate that you don’t really want God as your King and you don’t really know or trust Him. Read again the Parable of the Ten Servants, Luke 19:11-27. It ends in a scary way: *And as for these enemies of mine who didn’t want me to be their king – bring them in and execute them right here in front of me.*

One other point: Unless there is the real possibility of souls being eternally lost, then Christ’s death on the cross was a charade, and those godly men and women who lay down their lives for the lost are fools indeed.

- **Futility and Frustration.** The whole book of Ecclesiastes, as well as Job and countless teachings in the Old and New Testaments, describe how pointless and empty life is without God. Obviously this is true. How could it be otherwise when we are born to die? We and those we love and everything we value is crumbling to dust before our eyes. I read an interview with Tom Brady, the quarterback of the New England Patriots. He said that people think his life is perfect – he is successful, a multi-millionaire, married to a beautiful model. But he said there is something missing that he can’t identify. Yes. There is an emptiness, a God-shaped hole inside, and Jesus came to give His life to fill that empty place.

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## (2) MATE.

Last month I said that deciding whether to marry and whom to marry is another super important decision we make in life. I warned that it is very easy to be deceived and marry a wolf in sheep’s clothing which sets people up for a lot of misery. But how can we really know a prospective mate so that we don’t make a big mistake? I asked for help from Leslie Holzschuh, director of our Marriage Ministry, and we have come up with some guidelines:

- (a) Don’t date anyone who is not a candidate to be your mate, because: “Whoever has your heart has you!” Dating leads to romance, which leads to other things, including marriage. The Bible teaches, *“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”* God put that in the Bible to protect His kids from a lot of pain, but if someone has your heart, you will find a way around that warning. You may “hear” God tell you to marry the person in order to lead him/her to salvation. But the Bible never tells us to engage in marital-evangelism.
- (b) Take your time. Don’t be hasty. Take at least a year of getting to know the person and/or dating before even speaking of marriage. Pray for wisdom and discernment. Ask the Lord to help you see this person as He sees them.

- (c) Listen to that intuition, that still, small voice within. Don't ignore that voice. So many people have told me, "I knew something was wrong, but I wanted him/her, so I didn't listen."
- (d) Keep the relationship pure and honoring to the Lord. (I Thes. 4:3-7) When sexually intimate before marriage, a relationship of disobedience develops.
- (e) Allow others who know and love you to spend time with the person. Listen to their insights.
- (f) Look for obvious signs of fruit of the spirit (kind, gentle, patient, not easily angered, spends time in the Word.)
- (g) Marriage is more about our relationship with Christ and becoming the person He desires you to be than about your happiness. If you think this wonderful person was created in order to make you happy and fulfill your every need, and if he/she thinks the same about you, you are headed toward a collision and probably a divorce. Do you love this person enough to give yourself selflessly to him or her?

Most who read this newsletter are already married. Christian marriage starts with a covenant between the couple. This means that God is a part of the marriage. They are making a covenant with Him. They are asking His blessing and His help, because marriage is difficult and only God can make it into the blessing He desires it to be. "*God hates divorce.*" That is in the Bible. And "*Wives are to respect their husbands.*" And "*Husbands are to love theirs wives as Christ loved the church and laid down His life for it.*" God certainly never intended for marriage to descend into acrimony, hatred, cursing, and even physical abuse. I have dealt with these very things for the 41 years of my inner healing ministry, and most of these people were church people. It breaks my heart. Just imagine how it wounds the heart of God.



### **(3) CHURCH.**

Last month we looked at the warnings in the New Testament about false prophets, false apostles, and false teachers and pastors. I don't mean to suggest that we can find a perfect church – churches are filled with fallible people like you and me. Nor can we find a church with perfect doctrine. Think about some of the issues that divide churches and denominations: women's place in the ministry; music; baptism; gifts of the Holy Spirit; place of Jewish practices and feasts in the church; acceptable foods; replacement theology (Israel & the church); NIV versus the King James bible; Christian school, home school, public school or reform school; six-day creation versus extended ages; divorce and remarriage; etc. If my mentioning some of these things made your blood pressure go up, you may need to ask the Lord if your heart is right toward other believers who hold a different view than you. I am not saying that none of these issues are important. We can and should be "*convinced in our own mind*" (Rom. 14:5) about them, but they are not issues that should divide believers.

Last month I listed the beliefs that Christians hold to be fundamental: Jesus Christ was the Son of God, born of a virgin, died on the cross for our sins, etc. According to Mike Minter, in [A Western Jesus](#), the reason we argue about all the other things is that we don't have a wartime mentality. The persecuted church in China and India and in Muslim lands doesn't have time or energy to argue about such issues.

Having said that, I reiterate that the New Testament warns us to watch out for false leaders/pastors/ prophets/apostles. The teaching we receive from our church week after week does have a profound effect on what we believe and how we live.

Ex.: My friend, Lynne, was led to the baptism of the Holy Spirit about 40 years ago by a young Christian woman who was aflame with love and zeal for God and who had an impact on many people. After not seeing this woman for several decades, Lynne recently ran into her and was deeply disappointed to see that her fire had gone out. It seems that the man she married was uncomfortable with her "fanaticism" and that she compromised by attending a conventional, dead church - - and in time she died. (See article above regarding "Mate.")

Ex.: Some friends of mine left a solid Bible-based church because their teen-agers wanted to attend an exciting youth group in a church that taught that there is no hell, that everyone is going to heaven no matter how they live, and some other teachings that were clearly out of sync with the Bible. They did not agree with that "strange doctrine," but felt that their children needed to be in some church, and that their personal faith and doctrine was strong enough to ignore what they knew to be unbiblical teaching. Over a period of years they fell into agreement with what they heard taught every week and have become very strange and weird Christians. (Be careful what you hear, little ears.)

Ex.: I ministered to a young woman who had joined a "Christian" church. Over a period of time the pastor stole her life-savings of \$16,000, raped her, and when she said she was going to the police he broke her nose with a pistol and threatened to kill her unless she kept quiet. (This was an experience that happened in Mexico, but several different people have told me about a pastor here in Grand Junction that has a history of adultery with women in his congregation and a reputation of defrauding his members.) Remember, Jesus, Paul, and Peter warned about false leaders who "take advantage of you" and who are immoral and dishonest.

What do you do if you find yourself in a church with leaders that you believe are “false”? This is a big subject, and I suggest you read John Bevere’s book, Bait of Satan. If the issue is style or personal offense, you need to go to the pastor privately, and if the issue cannot be resolved you may need to leave the church and speak blessing over it. If the issue is something extreme, like the young lady who was robbed and raped, or pedophilia, you should go to the police. If the issue is one of a fundamental Christian doctrine, or if the leaders are becoming controlling and dominating, you should talk to the pastor and leaders, and if there is no resolution, run, don’t walk, to the nearest exit.

Finally, one other example: Several years ago I had the opportunity to preach and teach for eight days in a traditional denominational church in Montana. They were lovely people, but they had never seriously considered that the Bible was the infallible word of God and that faith in Christ was a life and death issue. I asked a dear man in his 80’s if he was sure he was going to heaven. He said he was sure he was. I asked him why he had that confidence. He said that for 60 years he had gone to their little church building every Saturday, cleaned it, and prepared the wood stove for Sunday services. I explained what the Bible teaches about salvation and led him to confess Jesus as his Savior but have no idea if he really heard and understood. NOTE: I know that you understand this, but I need to remind you that attending a “church” that doesn’t preach, teach, and demonstrate the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is worse than never going to church, because it gives the people a false confidence that they are saved and inoculates them against the life-saving message of Jesus.

One of the crucial decisions we make in life is the church we attend.

## **COLLATERAL DAMAGE**

*Then Simon Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest’s slave. But Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering the Father has given me?”* (John 18:10, NLT) Caiaphas, the High Priest, was an evil man. He was a traitor to his country and an enemy of God. He plotted with the other Jewish leaders to murder the Messiah, the innocent Son of God. Caiaphas was not even at the garden when the soldiers were sent to arrest Jesus. Judas was there. Judas was an evil man. He spent three years with the other disciples, stole money from the money bag, and sold the innocent Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Malchus was also there. He was the slave of the High Priest. He had nothing to do with the arrest of Jesus. He was only a slave following the orders of his master. Simon Peter, in righteous indignation, drew his sword and probably tried to cut off the head of the nearest man in that dark garden, and it happened to be the only innocent man in the group. Malchus ducked, and Peter nipped off his ear. Malchus was just collateral damage. Besides that, Jesus explained to Peter, the Father had planned and designed the whole scenario for His purposes. Peter not only hurt the wrong man, he was unwittingly trying to circumvent God’s eternal plan of redemption for mankind

It seems to be a principle that when people strike out at others in anger or retaliation the innocent are most often the ones that are wounded. Consider wars between nations and the pictures of the refugee camps. When America dropped the H-bomb on Nagasaki, we obliterated the largest Christian girl’s school in Japan. Think of the bombed out cities in England, Germany, and Japan. In a divorce, it is the children who pay the heaviest price. When people have a root of bitterness, they defile all those around them. (Heb. 12:15)

One time I prayed with a man in prison. He was in prison for murdering the man who raped his teen-aged daughter. He said that his daughter had grown up without a father or mother and had said to him many times over the years, “Oh, Dad! I need you so much. I wish you hadn’t killed that man. I have lost my father, and my kids have lost their grandfather.” Before we lash out in anger or revenge, consider the collateral damage.

God Bless

Glenn

**Note e-mail address** casabrn441@gmail.com

**WEBSITE:** [glennbrownministries.com](http://glennbrownministries.com)

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