



Covenant Choice

Does a Christian have the “Right to Choose”? (Student Guide)

Introduction

We hear it frequently when discussing abortion, sometimes from Christians:

“I would not have an abortion myself, but I defend the right of others to choose.”

“Right to choose,” however, begs the question, “Choose what?”

Standing all alone “right to choose” makes choice completely autonomous without regard to what is being chosen. No one has such an absolute autonomous right. We do not have the **right** to choose to run a red light or to smoke in a hospital or to intentionally harm someone. How absurd to say, “I wouldn’t run a light or smoke in a hospital or harm someone myself, but I defend the right of others to choose to do so.” No one has a **right** to choose to do a wrong thing.

The “what” of our choices is critically important; but for the Christian there is something even more important—the “context” of our choices. God said to His people in Deuteronomy, **“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live”** (30:19).

The “what” of this choice is clear. The context of this choice was the covenant God established with His people. This Bible study will explore this “Covenant Choice” and what it means for God’s people today especially in relation to the life issues.

Definition of a Covenant

“Covenant,” and sometimes “testament,” comes from the Hebrew word “birth” which means “to cut.” The Hebrews would often speak idiomatically about “cutting a covenant.” A biblical covenant was more than an agreement between two parties. It was a commitment or a pledge or a promise to do some prescribed action or fulfill certain conditions between two entities.

Here are some examples. Look up the passages and write down the covenant being described.

Malachi 2:14 –

Genesis 21:25-32 –

Genesis 31:43-55 –

The above covenant examples are between “equals,” but often times covenants were established between “unequals” with the more powerful dictating the covenant conditions.



As an example, look up Ezekiel 17:11-14 where the conquering king, Nebuchadnezzar, imposed a covenant upon the conquered, Zedekiah.

God's Covenants

The most important covenants in the Bible are of this latter type where God makes covenants with His people. He dictates the conditions of the covenant, but unlike Nebuchadnezzar above who made the covenant with his own best interests in mind, God's covenants are always made with the best interests of His people in mind. God's covenants are very one sided. He not only sets the conditions of the covenant, He is responsible for ultimately meeting those conditions. God's covenants reflect His love and grace for His people.

Look at the following covenants made by God. Note elements associated with the various covenants. Are there sacrifices, signs, promises, rituals, etc.? Also try to discern whether the covenant is unconditional, where God is responsible for all aspects of the covenant, or whether it is conditional, where His people are asked to participate.

Genesis 9:1-18 –

Genesis 15:1-20 –

Genesis 17:1-14 –

Exodus 19-20 –

Jeremiah 31:31-34 –

Hebrews 8:1-13; 12:24 –

God's Covenants and Choice

Now let's go back to Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and the choice His people were given. As we said, the choice was clear "life and death." Good and blessing will flow from the choice of life and curses and evil will flow from the choice of death. But dig a little deeper. Fundamentally, what was the choice about? (30:17)

What is implied in the phrases "turns away" or "drawn away"?

How did the people of God become the people of God in the Old Testament?
(Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

How did the people of God become the people of God in the New Testament?
(1 Peter 1:9-10 and Romans 6:1-4)



Now the critical question of this study. "Why can His people trust Him and thus choose life?" Answer: It was because of His _____! (Hint: It starts with a "C"!)

God never, ever, ever broke one of His covenants with His called and chosen people, not even a single promise involved in those covenants. This is the context in which we trust God and choose life.

Read Romans 8:32 and discuss how this verse relates to our context for making choices.

But given our sinful nature, isn't making God-pleasing choices difficult? (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

What is the key word in the above passage?

What "bonus" comes along with being chosen? (Galatians 4:6)

Choosing Life

We have learned that the *context* of our choices is God's covenant relationship with us. He has chosen us in Christ and called us to be His chosen people through the waters of holy Baptism. He will not forsake us. We can trust in Him, and in the commands and promises of His Word. Choosing life involves more than choices we make about the life issues. Nevertheless, it includes them. So, let's look at some examples of choosing life to apply what God's Word has taught us. Assume that the people involved are Christians.

In each of the following scenarios, identify and discuss:

1. The choice faced
 2. The Word of Command
 3. The word of the world—it's pressures and temptations.
 4. The Word of Promise
 5. The "covenant choice."
- A. Sally and Joe are definitely attracted to one another and seem like a good "match." They go out frequently, at first with their friends, but more and more are finding themselves alone together. The physical attraction is growing stronger. "Part of me wants to go further," Sally says one evening, "But should we?"
- B. Mary is sixteen and pregnant. Her boyfriend insists, "You've got to 'fix this.'"



- C. John, 56, suffers a sudden brain bleed that leaves him in a minimally conscious state. He maintains bodily functions on his own, but needs a feeding tube because he is unable to swallow. He seems to respond occasionally to family members, even smiling now and then. He is under twenty-four hour care in a nursing home. One day, John's doctor suggests to the family that John's suffering would all be over if they would just remove his feeding tube.
- D. The doctor spoke bluntly on the phone, "Mrs. Jones, I'm sorry but the tests reveal that your baby has Down syndrome. When would you like to come in to terminate this pregnancy?"
- E. Nancy's depression worsened. The alcohol didn't seem to help much anymore. She just couldn't seem to repress the horrible reality of her abortion six-years ago. It crushed her heart with guilt and regret. How could she escape the anguish?



Leaders's Guide
follows.



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The “what” of this choice is clear. The context of this choice was the covenant God established with His people. This Bible study will explore this “Covenant Choice” and what it means for God’s people today especially in relation to the life issues.

Definition of a Covenant

“Covenant,” and sometimes “testament,” comes from the Hebrew word *“birith”* which means “to cut.” The Hebrews would often speak idiomatically about “cutting a covenant.” A biblical covenant was more than an agreement between two parties. It was a commitment or a pledge or a promise to do some prescribed action or fulfill certain conditions between two entities.

Here are some examples. Look up the passages and write down the covenant being described.

Malachi 2:14 – [**Marriage was a covenant ordained by God between a man and a woman.**]

Genesis 21:25-32 – [**Covenant over water rights between Abraham and Abimelech.**]

Genesis 31:43-55 – [**Covenant between Jacob and Laban. You may want to point out some of the common aspects of a covenant found in these verses—a sign (heap of stones v 45-46), stipulations (treatment of**



daughters v 50, border marked v 52) a witness (in this case God v 50), an oath was often taken (v 53), offering sacrifices (v 54), a fellowship meal (54).]

The above covenant examples are between “equals,” but often times covenants were established between “unequals” with the more powerful dictating the covenant conditions. As an example, look up Ezekiel 17:11-14 where the conquering king, Nebuchadnezzar, imposed a covenant upon the conquered, Zedekiah.

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Look at the following covenants made by God. Note elements associated with the various covenants. Are there sacrifices, signs, promises, rituals, etc.? Also try to discern whether the covenant is unconditional, where God is responsible for all aspects of the covenant, or whether it is conditional, where His people are asked to participate.

[You may spend as much or as little time on these as you desire. Pick and choose if you want to save time. The intent is to take a brief look. If you want to go into detail, this may become a two-part Bible study.]

Genesis 9:1-18 – **[Unconditional, terms – God will never again destroy the earth with water, He makes a promise to this end, sign = rainbow]**

Genesis 15:1-21 – **[Unconditional, terms – God will multiply Abram’s descendants, give him this land (v 7, 18-21), there is sacrifice and the ritual of “cutting” them in two. Normally both parties of the covenant would walk between the pieces indicating that if they broke the covenant, they would be like the severed animals, but here only God—“flaming torch”—bears the responsibility for keeping the covenant.]**

Genesis 17:1-14 – **[Somewhat conditional as it must be kept by bringing the males to be circumcised (v 9), ritual in the circumcision, circumcision is the sign, God makes the promises to again multiply Abram’s descendants (v 4) and to give him the land (v 8) and to be their God, changes Abram’s name (v 5), various regulations about age and foreigners (v 13), penalty for breaking v 14.]**

Exodus 19-20 – **[Conditional in that the Law is required to be kept which all the people promise to do (19:5, 8)—but even this is an act of grace for the inability to fulfill the law will lead to a need for a Savior. Point out the rituals involved in preparing (19:9-15). God makes the promises**



associated with its keeping (v 5-6). Point out the use of v 6 to refer to His new covenant people in 1 Peter 2.]

Jeremiah 31:31-34 – **[Unconditional. Very much one sided. God makes and will keep all the promises of this covenant (v 33-34). The sacrifice associated with this covenant will be the blood of Jesus.]**

Hebrews 8:1-13; 12:24 – **[Unconditional. Here we see the fulfillment in Jesus Christ of the above New Covenant prophecy.]**

God's Covenants and Choice

Now let's go back to Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and the choice His people were given. As we said, the choice was clear "life and death." Good and blessing will flow from the choice of life and curses and evil will flow from the choice of death. But dig a little deeper. Fundamentally, what was the choice about? (30:17)

[The fundamental choice was to trust God and His covenant promises or turn away to other gods. You may want to use this quote from Luther to make the point that it is easy for us to do the same thing. "Does your heart cling to something else from which it hopes to receive more good and help than from God, then you have an idol, another god." (Tappert, 368, 28)]

What is implied in the phrases "turns away" or "drawn away"?

[It reveals a lack of trust in God and a willful turning away as they are drawn by the false pleasures and false hopes of other gods.]

How did the people of God become the people of God in the Old Testament? (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) **[God chose them and it had nothing to do with them. His choice was based upon His love. His choice flowed from His covenant promises made with their forefathers.]**

How did the people of God become the people of God in the New Testament? (1 Peter 1:9-10 and Romans 6:1-4) **[God chose us and it had nothing to do with us. His choice was based upon His love. His choice flowed from His promise of a new covenant. He chose us through the power of His Word at work in holy Baptism.]**

Now the critical question of this study. "Why can His people trust Him and thus choose life?" Answer: It was because of His _____! (Hint: It starts with a "C"!) **[Covenant]**

God never, ever, ever broke one of His covenants with His called and chosen people, not even a single promise involved in those covenants. This is the context in which we trust God and choose life. **[This is the point of the study. Making choices involves "what" we choose, but for Christians it involves first and foremost trusting in our God and the covenant He makes with us in the waters of Baptism. We are His treasured people. He has set His love upon us.]**



Read Romans 8:32 and discuss how this verse relates to our context for making choices. **[This is another critical point. The sign and seal of the New Covenant is the cross of Jesus. Here is where God demonstrated and set His love upon us. Here is our assurance of that love and that He is at work in our lives. You can trust in a God who makes this kind of commitment in a covenant!]**

But given our sinful nature, isn't making God-pleasing choices difficult? (Deuteronomy 30:11-14) **[God tells us clearly that it is not difficult. But how can that be? Look at the next question.]**

What is the key *word* in the above passage? **[The key word is WORD! God has placed His Word in our mouths and in our hearts. His Word contains all His covenant promises, and they all find their "Yes!" in Jesus. His Word reveals His will and His love. His Word reminds us of His promises and strengthens us to trust in them through the great "bonus" of being chosen.]**

What "bonus" comes along with being chosen? (Galatians 4:6) **[God's Holy Spirit enables us to cry out in trust to our Heavenly Father. We can rely on His truth and trust that our Father knows what is best and that His power is at work in us. We can trust God and choose life!]**

Choosing Life

We have learned that the *context* of our choices is God's covenant relationship with us. He has chosen us in Christ and called us to be His chosen people through the waters of holy Baptism. He will not forsake us. We can trust in Him, and in the commands and promises of His Word. Choosing life involves more than choices we make about the life issues. Nevertheless, it includes them. So, let's look at some examples of choosing life to apply what God's Word has taught us. Assume that the people involved are Christians.

In each of the following scenarios, identify and discuss:

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- A. Sally and Joe are definitely attracted to one another and seem like a good "match." They go out frequently, at first with their friends, but more and more are finding themselves alone together. The physical attraction is growing stronger. "Part of me wants to go further," Sally says one evening. "But should we?"



[Allow the class to give input into each of these for A-E. There will be many acceptable answers besides those presented below.]

1. **Choice faced = Pre-marital sex**
2. **Word of command = "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). "Flee from sexual immorality ..." (1 Corinthians 6:18).**
3. **Word of the world = "Everyone is doing it." "It's okay if you love each other." "It's archaic to call something so wonderful wrong."**
4. **Word of promise = Our bodies have been purified by the blood of Christ to be temples of His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).**
5. **The "covenant choice" = Trust God and choose chastity—honoring God by choosing to love your future spouse by remaining sexually pure. The blessings of stronger faith and character will follow such a choice.]**

B. Mary is sixteen and pregnant. Her boyfriend insists, "You've got to 'fix this.'"

1. **Choice faced = Life or death of an unborn child.**
2. **Word of command = "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). A caution here when it comes to abortion as murder. It certainly is. However, the abortionist is the murderer. The mother and father are complicit in this to be sure. But often there is much pressure and women end up making a choice they really do not want to make. They cannot see any other way out. To call women who have abortions "murderers" can unduly burden already burdened hearts.**
3. **Word of the world = "Abortion is your only choice, but don't worry, it won't hurt much and it will all be over soon." "Abortion is your right." "Abortion is good."**
4. **Word of promise = Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).**
5. **"Covenant choice" = Trust God and choose life! The blessings of parenting may follow such a choice if there is adequate family support. Perhaps the blessings of adoption will follow the choice of life.**



C. John, 56, suffers a sudden brain bleed that leaves him in a minimally conscious state. He maintains bodily functions on his own, but needs a feeding tube because he is unable to swallow. He seems to respond occasionally to family members, even smiling now and then. He is under twenty-four hour care in a nursing home. One day, John's doctor suggests to the family that John's suffering would all be over if they would just remove his feeding tube.

- 1. Choice faced = Life or death. The choice presented here is not to "allow" John to die. Removing his feeding tube would "cause" him to die.**
- 2. Word of command = "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).**
- 3. Word of the world = "Such an act is compassionate, the relief of suffering." "He would be better off dead."**
- 4. Word of promise = "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you" (Isaiah 42:6a).**
- 5. Covenant choice = Trust God and choose life! The blessings of God at work accomplishing His will in John's life will follow this choice. As long as God gives life, He gives that life meaning and purpose.**

D. The doctor spoke bluntly on the phone, "Mrs. Jones, I'm sorry but the tests reveal that your baby has Down syndrome. When would you like to come in to terminate this pregnancy?"

- 1. Choice faced = Life or death of a special child. A large majority of Down's babies are aborted.**
- 2. Word of command = "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). (See also Isaiah 45:9-11 where the LORD tells us not to question Him about the work of His hands.)**
- 3. Word of the world = "You don't want this burden." "You can try again. Maybe your next one will be "normal." "He is better off dead."**
- 4. Word of promise = Romans 8:28 will probably come up again. Also suggest, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8).**
- 5. Covenant choice = Trust God and choose life! God not only blesses, He decides what blessings are. How often do we not hear concerning the Down Syndrome child, "She is such a blessing."**



E. Nancy's depression worsened. The alcohol didn't seem to help much anymore. She just couldn't seem to repress the horrible reality of her abortion six-years ago. It crushed her heart with guilt and regret. How could she escape the anguish?

1. **Choice faced – Deal with the reality of her abortion or continue in despair.**
2. **Word of command – “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden ...” (Matthew 11:28a). “If we confess our sins ... (1 John 1:9a). Point out that the command not to murder has already had its affect. She now needs to hear the invitation to trust in God’s great mercy in Jesus.**
3. **Word of the world – “You have done nothing wrong. What you did was good.” “You’ll feel better soon.”**
4. **Word of promise – “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28a). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Point out the objective nature of forgiveness in Jesus. It does not depend upon *feeling* forgiven. It does not depend upon being able to forgive yourself.**
5. **Covenant choice – Trust in the Lord and place yourself completely in His mercy. Here is a good place to share Lutherans For Life’s *Word of Hope* post-abortion hotline number 888.217.8679. Have some of the *Word of Hope* brochures available. [Item LFL404T. Free–limit 25. To order call Concordia Publishing House at 800.325.3040.] Tell folks to take one if they know someone struggling with this or if they just want to learn more about *Word of Hope*. That will make it easier for those dealing with this burden to take one.**

[Conclusion: Does a Christian have the “right to choose”? Yes, but that choice depends upon what is being chosen. More importantly, that choice flows from the context that God chose us as His covenant people. We need not listen to the world. We can trust God and His Word of promise. Trust God! Choose life!]