

CHOOSING TO LIVE BY FAITH
HEBREWS 11:23-26

In *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz tells of a trip to his local moderately sized grocery store. He found 285 varieties of cookies, 13 sports drinks, 65 box drinks, 85 kids' juices, 75 iced teas, 95 types of chips and pretzels, 15 kinds of bottled water, 80 different pain relievers, 40 options for toothpaste, 150 lipsticks, 360 types of shampoo, 90 different cold remedies, 230 soups, 75 instant gravies, 275 varieties of cereal, 64 types of barbeque sauce, and 22 types of frozen waffles....[That's] why my wife sends me with a very detailed list in the unfortunate event that I am responsible for the grocery shopping during the week. If she tells me to get baby food, with no further instructions, I could come back with anything from liquid peas to dissolvable, cherry-flavored wagon wheels. I need specifics because there are just too many ways I can [mess] things up. [DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 32.]



Oh, the choices we face — and not just at the grocery store. We are inundated with choices every day. And not all the choices we are given are innocent. There are dire consequences for some of our choices.

We have seen repeatedly in Hebrews 11 that living by faith means trusting God — believing that He will accomplish His final purposes for His people; we can trust Him for that (10:36). It also means, as the life of Moses demonstrates, that we must make wise choices. We must choose to live against other things that purport to be worthwhile and trustworthy — against the temptations that say there is a better way to accomplish God's plan than by trusting God. Moses illustrates how to live against the temptations that entice us to find a pathway to peace, comfort, and joy apart from God and Christ.

This section about Moses is the longest section about any one person in this chapter, except Abraham. And the writer of Hebrews thinks much about Moses; he mentions him more than any NT book except John and Acts. It's fitting that Moses plays such a prominent role in the book since the readers were being tempted to go back under the Mosaic Law (and rejecting Christ); the writer acknowledges the significance of Moses (3:5), even while pointing out the superiority of Christ (3:6).

In this section (vv. 23-26), he argues that while the readers are tempted to go back to Moses and the Law, Moses rejected that temptation in order to follow Christ. He believed (had faith) that what Christ would offer was better than the temptations that were enticing him away from Christ. These verses exhort us —

TO LIVE BY FAITH, PURPOSEFULLY CHOOSE CHRIST OVER EVERY TEMPTATION.

What kinds of temptations might draw us away from Christ? Moses' life illustrates the two particular circumstances in which we must be intentional to choose and follow Christ...

1. Choose to Believe Christ When EXTERNAL PRESSURES Tempt You to Disobey (v. 23)

- ✓ Remember what God has REVEALED
- ✓ Remember the fear OF GOD

2. Choose to Believe Christ When INTERNAL DESIRES Tempt You to Disobey (v. 24-26)

- ✓ Remember your spiritual AFFILIATION (vv. 24-25a)
- ✓ Remember that sin's pleasures are PASSING (v. 25b)
- ✓ Remember that the world's rewards are PASSING (v. 26a)
- ✓ Remember the RICHES of Christ's rewards (v. 26b)

1. Choose to Believe Christ When EXTERNAL PRESSURES Tempt You to Disobey (v. 23)

- In verse 23, the writer introduces the life of Moses by saying, *By faith, Moses, when he was born...*
 - ✓ We know that the writer is not talking about Moses' personal faith, but is referring to the circumstances in his life which precipitated faith in others. We know that from the phrase *when he was born*, which is emphasizing the circumstance ("when") and that his parents' actions are emphasized — and they are doing something *for him (hid him)*; he isn't acting on his own.
 - ✓ You remember these circumstances (we read it earlier in Exodus 1-2) —
 - There is a new king in Egypt (Ex. 1:8) and he is fearful of the Israelites (1:9-10, 12)
 - So he demanded that all male Israelite infants be euthanized (1:16)
 - At least two of the mid-wives were unwilling to submit because they feared the Lord (1:17, 21)
 - Moses' parents (Amram and Jochebed) *hid Moses* for three months (2:2)
 - ✓ Notice that this temptation is external to the participants in the story — someone (government) is commanding God's people to rebel against God's dictates. The pressure is outside of them and it is compelling them to conform to a standard contrary to God's purposes and plan.
 - ✓ That the writer uses this circumstance is appropriate because it is not unlike the situation faced by the readers of this letter.
 - They were being persecuted (10:32-34), though probably not yet martyred (12:4).
 - So this is probably the persecution under Claudius (AD 49), in which the historian Suetonius tells us that "Jews were expelled from Rome because of riots in the Jewish community concerning Chrestus (almost certainly Christ). Christianity had been declared 'an illegal superstition' by the Roman Senate." [Coekin]
 - But martyrdom would come (inferred by 12:4) and experienced under Nero and Domitian.
 - ✓ *How should they respond to persecution?* They should look to the ancient example of Moses' parents, for how people have (and should) always respond to suffering. They responded *two ways*.
 - ✓ The question is timely for our day as well; there is increasing outward pressure to give up our "ridiculous" and "archaic" beliefs in Christ and the Bible and be more palatable to the world.
- Remember what God has REVEALED
 - ✓ Why did Amram and Jochebed protect and hide Moses? Because they saw he was *a beautiful child*.
 - The word *beautiful* means "handsome, charming, uncommonly striking..." I would guess that every parent thinks that of their child. So it seems that the writer means something more than just "he was a pretty baby."
 - There are two textual clues about what is going on: this same word is used about Moses in

Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:20 — "It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home." That hints at the grace of what God had planned for Moses as Israel's leader. *Did God tell Amram and Jochebed?* Perhaps. (I'm slightly inclined to think that there was some special revelation of the plan.)

- Another clue is in **Ex. 1:17** — the midwives refused to obey Pharaoh because they evidently had been taught and believed **Gen. 9:6** — murder is an act of rebellion against God. So perhaps the Amram and Jochebed looked at Moses' beautiful body and thought about things like **Ps. 139:13ff** and said, "this is a child created in the image of God and we must protect him."
- ✓ Whether the parents were acting on a particular revelation from God to them about the uniqueness of Moses' eventual calling and ministry or on his creation in the image of God, they were acting on the revealed will of God. And they would not disobey, regardless of the cost.
- ✓ When pressured, they rightly asked the question, "Is this edict a violation of God's truth?" and then they purposefully chose and acted on what was honoring to God. That is a helpful pattern for us.

- **Remember the fear OF GOD**

- ✓ The second reason that Amram and Jochebed hid Moses was that they **were not afraid...**
- ✓ The verse does not say they "didn't believe the king's edict or ability." Undoubtedly they were convinced that the Pharaoh could/would take action against them if they were discovered.
- ✓ It is a little bit of conjecture to say this, but why did they not fear Pharaoh? Because they feared they Lord. They did not run from Pharaoh because they had found their refuge in God.
- ✓ They just were not overly concerned about his ultimate ability to harm them — as the writer would later compel his readers, **13:6**, and as Jesus commanded, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (**Mt. 10:28**). This really is a remarkable demonstration of faith by an "ordinary couple."
- ✓ This is also the norm for believers (which is the point of this chapter) —

"By faith, Moses' parents risked their lives to disobey Pharaoh to further God's salvation, as by faith Elijah risked his life to condemn Ahab and challenge Jezebel; as by faith Daniel disobeyed Darius and was thrown to the lions; as by faith John the Baptist condemned Herod's marriage to his brother's wife and was executed; as by faith Latimer and Ridley refused to say that Christ is on the table in the Lord's Supper and were burned alive..."

"By faith, we can, like Moses' parents and so many Christians since, trust God enough and care for people enough to challenge and, if necessary, defy laws that impose immorality, abuse power, require idolatry, or silence the gospel, because by faith our conviction is that Jesus is Lord over presidents and parliaments and prelates, and so we are not afraid of powerful human authorities. And by faith in his word, God's Spirit will give us the courage we need to defy wicked employers and governments and denominations without being afraid of the consequences—because we are now living by faith in the King of kings, and Lord of lords! [Coekin, *Faith for Life*.]

- ✓ It should also be noted that this same kind of faith was clearly instilled in Moses (**Heb. 11:27**) — a reminder that our children (and others) are watching for the quality of our faith. We can have an influence that far surpasses what we might imagine when we live faithfully to the Lord.
- ✓ Summary of v. 23: when Moses' parents hid Moses, they were acting **by faith** —
 - *They trusted that God would protect the child*, even when Moses was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter.
 - *They trusted that God would protect the faith of Moses in Pharaoh's household* as an adopted child of Pharaoh's daughter.
 - *They believed that it was better to obey God even if they were discovered and suffered the consequences of their rebellion against the government.*
 - *They believed in the ability of God to ultimately preserve them when external pressures were tempting them to obey government and disobey God.* (And note their "ordinariness" — Moses gives the names of the midwives (1:15), but not his parents. All can obey and trust...

2. Choose to Believe Christ When **INTERNAL DESIRES** Tempt You to Disobey (v. 24-26)

- The rest of this section is about the faith of Moses himself (4x it says **by faith**, **vv. 24, 27, 28, 29**).
 - ✓ **When he had grown up** points to another circumstance and makes it clear that now he was demonstrating his own faith in God; his parents' faith had become his faith. He was following the same pattern in them, though he had largely been trained in the home of Pharaoh (which is a good reminder that God can train His people even in unlikely and adverse circumstances).
 - ✓ This event is also remembered by Stephen and he tells us it happened at about age 40 (Acts 7:23). These are the actions of a mature man, consciously and intentionally making godly decisions.
 - ✓ **He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter** refers to the episodes beginning in Ex. 2:10 — defending the Israelite who was being beaten (2:11-14) and then fleeing to Midian (2:15ff).
 - ✓ While there likely would have been consequences for Moses killing the Egyptian, the writer of Hebrews suggests that there was something else going on in Moses mind/heart that preceded that action, and the writer gives us several lessons for dealing with temptation and staying faithful —

• Remember your spiritual **AFFILIATION** (vv. 24-25a)

- ✓ The key word/idea in v. 24 is that Moses **refused** to be called **the son of Pharaoh's daughter**.
 - The word has the idea of having disdain for something. It is a clear and unequivocal denial. "That is not who I am...I am *not* Pharaoh's grandson, and not even an Egyptian."
 - But in rejecting (by choice) his adoptive heritage he is also saying that he is giving up all the rights and privileges that come with being a grandson to Pharaoh.
 - We are not completely certain of the identity of his adoptive "mother," but it could be that this was Hatshepsut, who later became co-regent with her brother; it would have been possible that Moses himself was in line to become Pharaoh after her; and he gave it up.

- It would have been so enticing to be drawn to that royal position. The internal desire for ease, power/authority, wealth, and position had to be tremendous. Moses **refused** it all (intentionally).
- ✓ Not only did he refuse identity with Pharaoh, but he embraced identity with **the people of God**.
 - The reference is to God’s chosen people, Israel — which was enslaved to Egypt at the time.
 - So Moses gave up a royal position to identify with a slave’s position.
- ✓ The writer is even more explicit in v. 25 that this was Moses’ choice — **choosing...ill-treatment**.
 - We know what kind of treatment Moses might have expected to receive (**Ex. 1:11-22**) and likely worse as one who had been in the “inner circle” — he would be perceived as a traitor.
 - The word **ill-treatment** is suggestive of the kind of suffering that often comes from *being identified with God and Christ* (**Acts 5:41; 2 Cor. 1:5-7; Phil. 1:29; 1 Th. 3:4; 2 Th. 1:5; 1 Pt. 2:19-23; 4:13; 5:10**). We need to remember the call and expectation of suffering (Jn. 15:18).
 - He *chose* suffering. It was not thrust on him, but he volitionally made this decision after careful deliberation. His choice was not accidental and no one made it for him; he knowingly embraced suffering. [That is not to say that we must choose suffering, but it is to say that sometimes when we choose to obey Christ, we will also be choosing suffering. We do not always need to run to suffering (it’s often acceptable to escape persecution); but we should not be fearful of it.]
- ✓ Though he was raised as an Egyptian and as a member of Egypt’s royal family, Moses was not internally attracted to that prestige. He refused all the allurements that went with that identity and willingly chose and embraced his identity as a follower of God.

• Remember that sin’s pleasures are **PASSING** (v. 25b)

- ✓ It’s easy to think of **the pleasures of sin** in this verse as generic kinds of licentious living (e.g., Gal. 5:19-21). And certainly those kinds of sins might have been available in Pharaoh’s court.
- ✓ It seems that the writer is thinking of something more specific: once he was aware of his identity with the Israelites and of God’s favor on his life (Acts 7:20), for him to align himself with Pharaoh and the Egyptians would have been sin. He would have enjoyed the pleasures of governmental authority and “glories” *at the expense obeying God’s call* on his life, which made it sin (**Js. 4:17**).

“Moses might have argued to himself that he could do much more for the Israelites by remaining in Pharaoh’s court and using his influence there on their behalf than by renouncing his Egyptian citizenship and becoming a member of a depressed group with no political rights. But for Moses to do this, when once he had seen the path of duty clear before him, would have been sin — the crowning sin of apostasy, against which the recipients of this letter needed so insistently to be warned. Even if (as some have imagined) the crown of Egypt was within Moses’ reach had he remained where he was, and his name had been perpetuated in history as the greatest and wisest of the rulers of that land, he would never have attained such a reputation as he did by making the great refusal.” [Bruce]

- ✓ Everything he would have experienced in that position would have been “enjoyable.” There *are pleasures* in sin — that’s what makes it tempting to us: we think of the “fun” of it.
- ✓ But no matter how great the pleasure of sin, it is always *passing*. It is always short (even if it lasts for decades, in comparison to eternity, it is always short). It will always fade. It will always be lost.
- ✓ “Any seeming good [in sin] is both deceptive and fleeting.” [MacArthur]
- ✓ There is no (ultimate) pleasure in avoiding the call of God and shirking our spiritual duties.
- ✓ That’s what Moses remembered and that’s what kept him faithful to God. And we will likewise maintain our faithfulness when we remember the passing nature of sin’s pleasure when tempted.

- Remember that the world’s rewards are PASSING (v. 26a)

- ✓ He also refused the *treasures of Egypt* — he considered them to be of minimal value.
- ✓ It should be noted that during this era, Egypt was at the height of its strength and wealth:
 - Egypt made 16 campaigns in Western Asia, turning Syria-Pal. into an Egyptian province.
 - “The wealth, religious influences and captured peoples from Canaan entered Egypt.”
 - Ultimately there was an alliance with northern Mesopotamia that strengthened Egypt and gave her great peace and worldwide superiority and power.
 - During this timeframe, many beautiful temples and buildings were built, and nations like Babylon came to Egypt for gold. (We have seen some of Egypt’s wealth in the tomb of Tutankhamen, who reigned shortly after this time period.)
 - “The increasingly splendid temples of the gods enjoyed rich endowments in land and settlements in Egypt and abroad, and a goodly share of the spoils of conquest.”[ZPEB]
- ✓ Moses refused all this wealth and position. Why? Because it too was passing — it did not compare to the eternal treasure of Christ.
- ✓ Do you know the saying, “All that glitters is not gold?” Well, “all that’s gold is not gold.” It may pass the test of being the most refined gold, but it won’t carry its value into eternity (gold in Heaven is just blacktop and paving material, Rev. 21:21).
- ✓ When we see the “rewards” of earthly enticements, we need to ask, “Is this going to last?...”
- ✓ Moses could come to these conclusions because of one final principle...

- Remember the RICHES of Christ’s rewards (v. 26b)

- ✓ The writer tells us that Moses accepted the *reproach of Christ* because he was *looking to the reward* of Christ.
 - In fact, the writer is even stronger, Moses *considered* — he made a careful inquiry. He was not impulsive but made reasoned decision after evaluating the options.
 - And his choice was “give me *the reproach of Christ*” — he willingly embraced the accusations, insults, and persecution that came from following Christ (e.g., Jn. 15:18).

- Now Moses was some 1500 years before Christ. How could he be identified with Christ's reproaches? He knew that he would be a deliverer for Israel (**Acts 7:25**), but he knew that he was not the ultimate Deliverer. He knew something about that Deliverer (**Dt. 18:15**) and he was willing to associate himself with that **Christ**/Anointed One, Jesus.
- It seems that the writer is also intentionally using Moses to remind the readers, "you are wanting to forsake Christ because of your suffering, but you need to go to Christ, even if you suffer (**13:13**). And by the way, the one you want to go to (Moses), went to Christ and was willing to suffer in his obedience of the anticipated Christ."
- ✓ This is another instance that Moses is thinking and choosing — **refused** (v. 24), **choosing** (v. 25), **considering** (v. 26), **looking** (v. 26). There was intentionality in everything he did.
- ✓ What he really wanted to do was gain the treasure of a final **reward**. He was doing what everyone in this chapter did (and all godly people do) — he believed God would reward his faith (**11:6**).
- ✓ He was fixated on the reward of Heaven and (the promised) Christ. He traded temporary pleasures for ultimate rewards. He was willing to sacrifice and endure suffering now to get great treasure and pleasure later.
- ✓ He was engaged in "self-denial" which John Piper helpfully defines like this: "...*biblical* self-denial means 'Deny yourselves lesser joys so you don't lose the big ones.' Which is the same as saying: Really pursue joy! Don't settle for anything less than full and lasting joy." [*Desiring God*]
- ✓ That's what Moses pursued — whether facing external or internal temptations.

BENEDICTION: **Hebrews 13:20-21**