

# Choices, Deeds & Consequences

by A.W. Tozer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of considering our ways and making choices that have eternal consequences, highlighting the difference between wisdom and folly and the accountability we have for our acts.*

**Duration:** 42:40

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 30:19, Proverbs 14:12, Matthew 7:13-14, John 14:6, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:23, 1 John 5:12

**Topics:** "Consequences"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher tells the story of a man who was focused on his own wealth and success. Despite his plans for remodeling and his abundance of grain, the man suddenly falls ill and dies. The preacher emphasizes the importance of considering one's choices and their consequences, both in the past and for the future. He urges the audience to prioritize moral considerations and to listen to the voice of God, who calls us to examine our ways.

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## Transcript

Now, there's a voice that's speaking to us tonight. In the word, and out of heaven this voice speaks. And it says, consider.

And consider means, of course, to look at closely and to think about seriously. And all society is conspiring to prevent us from doing this. Organized human society wants us to do everything but this one thing, consider our ways.

And the voice says, consider your ways. Now, this is more important than any other thing that you could consider. You may give consideration to a house, to a car, to a journey, to health, to insurance, to anyone of the number or of many legitimate things.

But more than all these, it is important that you consider your ways. And when the scripture says, consider your ways, it means consider your moral ways. Now, it's vitally important that you study this.

More important than any branch of learning that you might engage in anywhere at any time, that you give careful, serious, intelligent, and honest consideration to your ways. And I ask also that you'll notice that it's your own ways that you are to consider, and this is exactly contrary to our common habit. For our common habit practically never is to consider our own ways, but always to consider other people's ways.

And the Pharisees were the classic terrible example of people who knew the sins of everybody but themselves, and they did not know their own sins. They considered the sins of the harlot, they considered the sin of the tax collector, they knew the sin of the drunkard, but they never knew their own sin at all. Society's not only in a conspiracy to prevent us from considering, but it is in a particular conspiracy to prevent us from considering our own ways.

And since the human mind is so constituted that it must consider something, we compromise by considering other people's ways. We read the newspapers and we tut-tut and scold and raise our eyebrows, and we can't understand why people do the things they do. But the scripture says not consider the criminal in the newspaper account.

It says consider your own ways. And it is the work of the Holy Ghost to focus my attention upon my own ways. And now as we do this, I want you to set your ways over against this one thing tonight, the law of choices and consequences.

Now, everything is related to its past and to its future. Every act that is committed, everything that exists, every word that you utter, and every deed that you do, is related to two things. It's related to the past as a consequence, and it is related to the future as an effect which will produce another consequence.

A simple illustration that I often give is that of the egg in the nest. The egg lying in the nest is an effect of another act, the previous act, the bird, the act of the bird that laid it. But while it is in effect a consequence of an act, it is also the cause of another thing, and that is the new bird that will be hatched out after a while.

It is a link between what was and what will be, and so are you, and so is every thought you have, and so is every deed you do. A link between something that made you do or think or say this thing, and that which will be the result of your having said or thought or done this thing. Now, everything is a consequence.

The curse doesn't come causeless, and the blessing doesn't come causeless. Everything is a result. Everything is an effect.

It is an effect of something else. But everything is not only a consequence of something else. Everything has consequences in something else.

The simplest word that you uttered today was the result of some conditioning of your mind and heart yesterday, and this simplest, most casual utterance today will have consequences. They may only be mild, but there will be consequences tomorrow for everything you are or say or do or think resulted from some choice you made, and everything you are or do or say or think will result in some future saying or doing or being or thinking. Now, everything has consequences of dual importance.

So everything is of dual importance. It is important for what it is in itself, and it is important for what it causes to be. It is important, we being intelligent and moral creatures, we are accountable for our acts.

I think it would make a wonderful difference in our lives if we were to remember and if we were to believe that we're going to be accountable for our acts, that we are going to give account to God for every deed and every word, and we're intelligent and we're moral. We have intelligence to appraise a situation. We have moral perception to know its qualities, and therefore we will be accountable, and each act that we do has consequence in our own moral structure.

I am not sure, but this may be, finally and at last, the most vitally, terribly important thing about consequences and acts and effects and causes. That is what everything does to our own moral structure, what it does to our lives. For what we are will determine our destiny.

Our moral fabric will determine heaven or hell for us. This cheap modern idea that we go to heaven by a kind of a nickel in the slot, pull down the lever and take out your ticket idea, and that if I accept Jesus, I go to heaven, if I don't accept him, I go to hell. Heard a man on the radio the other day, not long ago, telling and trying to make it very plain that it didn't require righteousness to go to heaven.

It required nothing but accepting Jesus. Well, what he forgot was that the act of accepting Christ, if it is a true indeed act of accepting Christ, has an instant effect upon the whole moral life, and it changes the man from being a bad man to being a good man. It is ridiculous to say that heaven is the garbage pail for all the wickedness of men.

Only by grace the Lord takes foulness in. No king ever took the garbage pail into the king's parlor, and God is not going by some trick of grace to take evil, foul-minded, self-righteous and vile people into his heaven. When he saves a man, he saves him from sin, and if he's not saved from sin, he's not saved at all.

And there is no act of grace and no trick of mercy and no trick of justification that can take an unholy man into the presence of God or take an evil man into God's holy heaven. He came not to call the righteous but sinners. He came not to call people who thought they were righteous but people who knew they were sinful.

But when he calls us to himself and saves us, he saves us out of our past and out of our iniquity, and by the twofold act of justification or the threefold act of justification, regeneration and sanctification, he makes people fit for heaven. The idea that justification is imparted righteousness and that it is a robe of righteousness put over a dirty, filthy fellow who terribly needs a bath, and that that dirty, filthy fellow, filled with cooties and the accumulations of dirt of his lifetime, will stand boldly in God Almighty's holy heaven among seraphim and cherubim and archangels and the spirits of just men made perfect and blithely and flipantly say, I belong in hell. I'm a filthy man.

What are you going to do about it? I have on me the robe of Christ's righteousness, and that's enough. This is a heresy as terrible and as devastating as the heresy promulgated for the falsely called Jehovah's Witnesses. God saves only sinners, and he saves only sinners who know they're sinners, and he saves only sinners who admit they're sinners.

But he saves sinners from being sinners to being good men and full of the Holy Ghost. And when we teach anything else, we're teaching heresy, a frightful heresy. The choir sang tonight the song of John Newton.

John Newton was a Puritan, and John Newton would have been horrified and stood aghast if he had heard the doctrines that we're hearing now. One man wrote a book or a tract or something and called it Only Bad Men Go to Heaven, trying to impress upon the listeners that self-righteousness wouldn't get you into heaven. That's true.

Trying to impress upon us the idea that it was only by grace and faith and that not of ourselves, it's a gift of God, and that's true. Trying to impress upon the minds of the people that no man by his good works or his good deeds or his good acts can ever be good enough to get to heaven, and that he must stand in the

righteousness of Christ. But making nevertheless by that kind of statement the grace of God and turning it into lasciviousness, no bad man ever goes to heaven.

The harlot and the idolater and the liar and the fearful and the unbelieving shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Now, I say that each act has consequences in our moral structure, in what we are, which is by far the most important thing about you. Nobody, nobody fools me by how they're dressed, and certainly nobody fools the Holy Ghost.

Nobody impresses the Holy Ghost by how good looking he or she is, or the color of their skin. Nobody impresses the Holy Ghost with their education or their degrees, or where they've been, or how many stickers they've got on their suitcase. I preached one time at Wheaton College, and I told the professors, God bless them, it's a good college, they gave me a degree.

But I told them that this idea that we go around the world and come back all over stickers, I said, go home and wash the stickers off, professor, we don't care where you've been, we want to know where you're going. And our consequences, our choices, I say, have consequences in our moral structure, either to strengthen virtue or to rot the nerve center of virtue. You've met people whose virtue has been rotted, like a tree ready to crash.

It's rotted at the core and center. And then it has a secondary consequence in what it does to others. For no man lives to himself, and no man is an island, as they're saying now.

And either directly or indirectly, you are deeply influencing somebody else. You don't know who it is, maybe, maybe you do. But you're deeply influencing somebody.

And if you're a carelessly living Christian, there may be persons who will use your careless life as a shield, a hiding place for their own much more serious iniquity. Or there may be those who kneel at night and thank God for you and say, God make me like brother so-and-so, make me like Mrs. so-and-so. It can be either way, for deeds have consequences.

And deeds are the result of choices, impulsive choices, but choices, carefully thought out choices, but choices. And I say that our most vital acts are our choices, always, our most vital acts. No act has as far-reaching consequences as the act of choosing.

I repeat, everything we are is a result of choices we made. Everything we are today is a result of choices we made yesterday. And everything we will be tomorrow will be the result of choices we make today.

And those choices may be good or they may be bad. They may be ignorant or they may be well-advised. They may be impulsive or they may be, after much thought, made.

They may be made out of spite. Many a pair of lovers have had a blow-up in a fight, and their girl rushed out and married somebody else and said, I'll show that twerp. And then she lived with her second choice for a lifetime and whispered to people who know her in years to come, this was a mistake of my life.

Selfish choices, cowardly choices, choices that are made because we're afraid to make other ones. And careful choices, we can make them. And wise, unselfish, far-seeing, courageous choices, humble, faith-inspired, God-obeying choices, we can make all of those.

Now I'm asking you this night about your life and character, and reminding you that you are today what you chose yesterday to be, because neither the blessing nor the curse comes causeless. We must live and continue to live in the light of choices and consequences. And this distinguishes the wise man from the fool, that the wise man knows that he must give account of the deeds done in the body, and the fool doesn't.

I don't like to use the word fool, because it's not a good word, it's a contemptuous word, and I wouldn't use it myself, and I don't think that I would say without some hesitation that any given man was a fool. But in the Bible the word is used quite a lot. And a fool in the Bible is not a man of retarded mentality.

He's not even a man who may have lost his mind. In the Bible a fool is a man who acts without regard to consequences. It has nothing to do with his I.Q., nothing to do with his education, nothing to do with his cultural level.

These playboys, these rich playboys we read about, they've had all the education they could get, they have all the money and best clothes and the best cars and the best homes and the best food, and they're exposed to the, I use the word best not in its moral sense at all, but in the sense of the finest that can be had with money and prestige. And yet they're playboys and they live their lives out, and every once in a while you'll hear some old wrinkled playboy dying. They all do after a while, as we all do.

He's had all the women he's wanted because he had the money to buy them, and he's had all of the acceptance in society because he had money, and his name was in the paper. And now he's got to die, and he dies as a fool dies, for he dies without thought of consequence. He lived without thought of consequence, and made his choices, but he may think about them when he's dying, but it's too late then.

It doesn't make any difference about the I.Q., I say. The difference is not a mental one, but a moral one. It's not even, it is, it is a moral one, but it's further in yet than that.

For morals, as I understand and use the word, has to do with ethics and righteousness and my relation to my fellow man and myself. But it's deeper in than that. It's in the spirit of the man.

In the Bible, a wise man is not necessarily an educated man. He could be. In the Bible, a wise man is not a man of high cultural level.

Necessarily, he could be. In the Bible, a wise man is a man who acts with an eye to consequences. He thinks, what will the result of this be? And then he acts in a way that will bring him consequences that he won't have to be ashamed of or afraid of in the day to come.

And this explains wisdom and folly as God sees it. There was that man that our Lord told about and called a fool. Now, I don't think his neighbors said he was a fool.

I don't think they did. I think that if he stopped to nod to a farmer along the road, the farmer hustled home and told his wife, What do you think, Mabel? Mr. So-and-so nodded to me today and called me by my first name. And if he went to a grange meeting, he would be the first one to get the floor.

Everybody would sit down while he talked. And if he ran for some little office, he'd get elected. Why? Because he was a landowner and a big farmer and a big guy and a big wheel.

And he had to tear down his barns and build bigger ones because he'd had a bumper crop. And when his hired men came in with their hats twirling around their thumbs awkwardly and shifted from foot to foot and said, Mr. So-and-so, boss, we have more to the acre out on the South Forty than we've ever had. You won't believe it when I tell you how many cartloads of wheat and corn I've brought in.

And we filled the barns. Well, he said, we're going to have to do some remodeling, rubbed his hands and went out and remodeled. Then he ate his supper, talked to his wife all the time about his big barns and the grain.

And as he was eating, he said, I don't feel so well. His wife said, oh, you were busy today and excitement and all. Get to bed early.

So he went off to bed that night and his wife went up later. She spoke to him. She was getting herself ready for bed.

She tried to carry on a conversation. She got no answer. She raised her voice a bit, got no answer.

Finally went over and looked at him and then shook him and then screamed, This night thy soul has been required of thee, thou fool, said Jesus. Educated man, a man of some standing in the neighborhood, a wealthy man, a man who looked ahead, but a man who never thought beyond his last heartbeat. He was a fool, our Lord said so.

Hell is full of fools and heaven is full of wise men. And there'll never be a fool in heaven and there'll never be a wise man in hell, according to God's definition. For according to God's definition, a fool is one who acts without regard to consequences and who chooses without thinking of eternity.

And nobody will be in heaven like that. And according to God's definition, a wise man, I may have mixed that up, but I'm trying to make it show the difference between the two. The wise man is the one who chooses thinking of tomorrow and heaven will be filled with men like that.

And hell will be filled with the opposite. Who lived for today are not necessarily evil men. The idea that God loves evil men and can't stand a decent man is a modern heresy.

It's not true and never was true. There's nothing in the Bible to lead us to believe that it's true. But if the evil man became wise long enough to make his eternal choice in the light of eternal consequences and chose God and Christ and the blood of the Lamb and repentance and deliverance from sin, he's a wise man.

And God accounts him such, and heaven will be filled with such. And if the good, decent fellow who lived a decent life on earth and was well thought of by the people and perhaps preached into some kind of gentle limbo when he died, the pastor didn't have quite the courage to say that this upstanding Canadian citizen's in heaven, knowing that he was a scoundrel, though reasonably decent and everybody liked him. Why, if he didn't preach him into heaven, he preached him to the front gate.

You've been present at funerals where there were men who never turned their face upward to look at God. They ate and drank and never liked the chicken that drinks and looks up to God, or never liked the bird that sang his praise, but thought only of themselves and lived for themselves, and yet they're pretty decent fellows. Pretty decent fellows they are.

I know a lot of them. But they were fools, because they made their choices, they chose whom they wanted to marry, and they married that person. But they didn't think of eternity when they did it.

They chose what they wanted to do with their money, and they did it. They chose what they were going to say, and they said, as the brother read in the psalm this morning, our mouths are our own, our tongues belong to us. Who can tell us what to say with our tongues? So they said what they would, but they didn't think of the judgment day and tomorrow and the awful face of God and the old great white throne.

They were fools. Hell, I say, is full of fools, and heaven's full of wise men. There are wise men in heaven who couldn't read and write when they were on earth, and there are fools in hell who had degrees after their name like the tail on a kite.

They knew everything, but the one thing, they were fools. Therefore choose, says the Holy Ghost, and the great main choice is between life and death. Now I ask you to notice that you shall choose has been decided for you, but what you shall choose has been left to your own decision.

It's already been decided that every man has to choose. We can't escape that. Choose you this day, says the Holy Ghost, but what we choose is left to ourselves.

The eternal decrees of God that our Presbyterian friends like to talk about take in this, that I must choose, but they do not take in what I choose. As soon as the eternal decrees determine what I choose, I am no longer a free moral agent. I'm no longer free at all.

I'm an automaton, a Mr. X, an electric brain, and God controls me from heaven, and I have no choice of my own. Now brethren, free choice is necessary to holiness, just as it's necessary to sin. If a man can't sin, he can't be holy, because if he can't sin, he isn't free.

And if he isn't free, he can't be holy, for holiness is moral freedom of choice resulting in a right choice, the choice of holiness and righteousness. Now, nobody ever deliberately chose death, I'm sure of that. It wasn't a Tennyson that said, no matter what crazy sorrow seth, no man that ever breathed with mortal breath has ever really longed for death.

It is life, not death, for which we panic. Nobody ever longed for death, but they just choose the path that leads there, and so they've chosen it by a series of small choices. They made the last choice of moral folly.

They chose death, not that they looked at death and said, I choose you, but they looked at all the pleasant ways that lead there and said, I choose you. Young couples would get out in a car on a night like this, drink a little, they can get it somewhere, and get excited and worked up, and go out onto the highway full of jokes, borderline, and all of the kind. They zoom down the highway, not one of them's choosing death, not one of them's choosing death.

Ask the driver as he stops somewhere for a gas, do you want to die? And if he can get him still long enough and quiet long enough, he'll say, why, to ask me a foolish question, of course not. Ask the girl that sits beside him, do you want to die? And she said, no, I'm too young, I've got my life ahead of me, I'm just having some fun. Ask the two in the back seat, sitting as close as one, and say, do you two want to die? And they say, no, I don't, we don't want to die, of course not.

We want to live and love and enjoy the world. Nobody wants to die. But they wanted to drink, and they wanted to see how much was in the old car, and the boy at the wheel wanted to show off before his giggling companion.

As they round a bend, they lose control, and the poor hard-working cops come along later and stick inside, drag them out. One or two of them dead, and a couple more broken. They didn't choose to die, they simply chose the way that leads there.

Choose you this day, I said before you, the way of life and the way of death, choose you this day. Toronto hasn't chosen death. Toronto's just chosen to have burlesque shows on Sundays.

I've read the paper, right? Toronto hasn't chose to die and rot, like New York and Chicago. Toronto the Good has just decided that they can't be old-fashioned and puritanical any longer. So they've opened the door, and brother, when you open that Pandora box, you let out all the devils and evil that is possible to know.

They say before Rome collapsed under the blows of the Norsemen, that policemen had to accompany women on the streets. It wasn't safe. And in great areas and sections of the city of Chicago, my wife and I never allowed our daughter to go alone.

Never. Somebody had to be with her. Cities don't choose to rot and die, they just choose to do that which leads them to rot and die.

And just as men do not choose life or choose death, they do not choose life in itself. No man can stand up and say, I choose life. In that sense, he says, I choose the one who gives life.

I choose the way to life. I choose life by choosing the way that leads there. I choose life by choosing the one that gives life.

I choose life by repudiating death. I choose life. I've made a lot of choices in my time, I suppose, but I've never regretted the one I made, when I decided that I would become a Christian.

There was nobody in my home that was a Christian, nobody. Not any influence anywhere, anywhere in my whole circle of relations and close friends, not one. But by the good mercy of God, I said I would.

And I didn't know what I was getting myself in for. I didn't know the joys and I didn't know the sorrows. I didn't know the pleasures and I didn't know the hardships.

But I chose. And so men choose life by choosing the course that leads to life. Doesn't the Bible say, choose ye this, they choose life? Yes.

But you can't walk up and say, I choose life. You have to come where the life is. You choose water, but you come where the water is and drink.

You choose to be saved, but you have to come where the Lord and Savior is to be saved and give yourself into his hands. So we make the right choice by starting with repentance and talking to people who are taking their religion very casually, very casually indeed. You're very casual about it all.

Watch out that you don't cast your luck with mortality. Watch out that you don't say to the worms there, my sister. Watch out that you don't say to death, this is my brother.

You can't afford to be casual. There are people that would influence you. Some of you would be better Christians if you weren't under the influence of certain who aren't good Christians.

Some of you are being influenced to make wrong choices. And those that influence you are blind, or they're hard, or they're careless, or they're morally irresponsible, and they're influencing you. But did you ever think they can't help you in that day? Can't help you.

When the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, they hunted his least worthy disciple, Judas, the one that they figured would be the one they could reach, as they say in politics. So they went to him, and sure enough, they guessed right, they could reach him. He could be bought.

So they said, we'd like to arrest your master, but we're not familiar with his face, we don't know which one he is, and we don't want to make a scene. We'd like to slip in quietly and put some handcuffs on the one that's your master, but they're all dressed alike, and we don't know one from the other. He said, I'll tell you who he is, for a price, eighteen dollars.

For eighteen dollars, I'll tell you who. He said, all right, here's eighteen dollars. He said, now we'll figure it like this.

When I get to a certain place, I'll run up to one of the twelve, and I'll, the eleven, and I'll kiss one of them, and the one that I kiss, that's your man. So he went up to Jesus and said, Rabbi. Jesus turned and sadly said to him, friend.

Kissed his cheek, they grabbed him. And later on, when Judas had an attack of conscience and the money burned like fire in his hand, and he saw them lead his loved friend away, he turned against himself viciously and ran back to these evil men and threw the eighteen dollars at their feet and said, I've betrayed innocent blood. And they said, oh, the infamously, devilish cynicism of this.

They said, what's that to us? You see to that. That fellow that's leading you off, he's influencing you now and leading you away, but in that day, he'll say, what's that to me? I can't answer for you. See you to that.

That business partner is persuading you to cut edges and corners and be a bit crooked. He smiles and pats your back and tells people, oh, good old Joe, he's a great guy. He's a great guy.

Ha ha. But there'll be a day when good old Joe will stand all by himself, and that'll be you. And your business partner won't be able to help you at all.

I tell you, I'm frankly trying to influence you. I have nothing to gain by your choosing the right. Not a dime have I to gain by it.

I have nothing to lose if you do. And yet I plead with you in the language of the Holy Ghost. I said, God sets before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life.

Choose life by choosing the living one. Choose life by repudiating death and sin. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life. Choose life by choosing the living one, who is the life. And I am earnestly trying to influence you.

To choose the right way and the right one. And I'm trying to influence you Christians who are living casual Christian lives, to put away that wickedness. Consider your ways, and this night start to live a Christian life that will shame the devil, and please God, and start you on the way to victorious living and fruitful service, and holy character.

Choose you. You must make the choice. That choice will result in deeds, and deeds will result in destiny.

This is an honor God's bestowed upon us, that we can choose. Have you chosen? Do you choose? What have you chosen? And those of you who tonight are halfway in between, and you don't know whether to believe or doubt, you don't know whether to surrender or bullet through a little longer, you don't know whether to say yes or no, I am seriously trying to influence you to say yes to God and no to sin. To say yes to Jesus, as the song says, and no to the devil.

What about it? You that are tempted all so deeply and bitterly tempted, and you don't know which way to turn, I'm seriously trying to get you to turn the way of righteousness and God. Will you do it tonight? Let's pray.

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