

## *Have You Really thought about choosing a local church?*

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**Introduction:** Have you thought about how to choose a local church?

A. It is understood by those who study human behavior that *we do many things without careful thought!*

1. One writer lists six *shortcuts from facts and reason* in making decisions.

(From the Psychology of Persuasion – Robert Cialdini)

2. The Bible warns that we should not *treat God's word in that manner.*

(Lk 8:18; Deut 29:2-5)

**Luke 8:18** - "Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

**Deuteronomy 29:2-5** - Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land -- <sup>3</sup> "the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. <sup>4</sup> "Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this *very* day. <sup>5</sup> "And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet.

B. Regular Bible reading and meditation *is crucial* to the development of a good heart.

1. As we wake, live and lay down in our bed we should make effort to mediate on God's word. (Ps 63:6-8; 77:11-12; 119:15, 27, 48)

**Psalm 63:6-8** - When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the *night* watches. <sup>7</sup> Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. <sup>8</sup> My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me.

**Psalm 77:11-12** - I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. <sup>12</sup> I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds.

**Psalm 119:15** - I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.

**Psalm 119:27** - Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wondrous works.

**Psalm 119:48** - My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, Which I love, And I will meditate on Your statutes.

2. When we do this then God's word will become *the most important thing to us.*

3. When we do not mediate and daily apply God's word then we fall into a way of thinking *that comes when we choose not to think --- worldliness!*

### ***I. Have we thought about the easy path of worldliness?***

A. Because men tend to follow the "path of least resistance" worldliness *becomes the dominate force in their lives.* Some chose a local church this way! (1 Jn 2:15-17)

**1 John 2:15-17** - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that *is* in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world.

<sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

1. The “lust of the flesh” is simply *putting first whatever our body wants*. For example, it is harder to diet than to gain weight!
2. The “lust of the eyes” involves both *the desires of the flesh and the false world that pride brings*. As an example, it is easier to spend than to save!
3. The “pride of life” involves the unreal-ego centered world that comes *when we put ourselves first*. It is easier to praise ourselves than to see our faults!

B. The *lazy mind* will not resist the pressures of the world. **(Lk 11:34-36)**

**Luke 11:34-36** - "The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when *your eye* is bad, your body also *is* full of darkness. <sup>35</sup> "Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. <sup>36</sup> "If then your whole body *is* full of light, having no part dark, *the whole body* will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light."

1. What are some of the “shortcuts” to reason? Most of them involve our desire *to belong and to be consistent*.

- 1. Reciprocation** - “There is an obligation to give, an obligation to receive, and an obligation to repay.”
- 2. Commitment and consistency** -. Once we have made a choice or taken a stand, we will encounter pressures to behave consistently with that commitment.
- 3. Social proof** - “We view behavior as more correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it.”
- 4. Liking** - “People prefer to say ‘yes’ to those they know and like.”
- 5. Authority** - “We tend to follow authority figures. An order from an authority is usually seen in isolation instead of the situation as a whole. We are as vulnerable to the symbols of authority as to its substance.”

2. These shortcuts were very effective in *keeping men from following Jesus*.  
**(Jn 7:48-49; 12:42-43; Mt 10:37-39)**

**John 7:48-49** - "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? <sup>49</sup> "But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

**John 12:42-43** - Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

**Matthew 10:37-39** - "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>38</sup> "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>39</sup> "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

3. When people “*follow their gut*” they are taking the easy path. **(Prov 17:16)**

**Proverbs 17:16** - Why *is there* in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom, Since *he has* no heart for it?

4. Some *in pride* just assume that they can speak for God. (**Prov 6:16; Jas 4:6**)  
**Proverbs 6:16-17** - These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup> A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood,  
**James 4:6** - But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."  
 5. Reasoning from and applying scripture *takes time and effort*. It also may cost you important relationships. Am I in the right kind of local church?

## ***II. Have we thought about why is the choice of a local church so important?***

- A. God has created us as social creatures. We are *greatly influenced by our relationships!* (**Prov 12:3-5, 26; Ps 1:1-2**)  
**Proverbs 12:3-5** <sup>3</sup> A man is not established by wickedness, But the root of the **righteous** cannot be moved. <sup>4</sup> An excellent wife *is* the crown of her husband, But she who causes shame *is* like rottenness in his bones. <sup>5</sup> The thoughts of the **righteous** *are* right, *But* the counsels of the wicked *are* deceitful.  
**Proverbs 12:26** <sup>26</sup> The **righteous** should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.  
**Psalms 1:1-2** Blessed *is* the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; <sup>2</sup> But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

1. The most important decision outside of becoming a Christian is *the choice of a mate*. Your spiritual future will be greatly impacted. (**1 Pt 3:7**)  
**1 Peter 3:7** <sup>7</sup> Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.
2. The choice of a local church falls in *this type of a decision*.
3. Becoming part of a local church ought to create *many new and close relationships!* (**1 Cor 12:25-27**)  
**1 Corinthians 12:25-27** <sup>25</sup> that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*.  
<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

B. Local churches are a key provision *given by God for our growth*.

1. The function of a shepherd *is uniquely found in a local church*. (**1 Pt 5:1-4**)  
**1 Peter 5:1-4** The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:  
<sup>2</sup> Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> nor as being lords over

those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; <sup>4</sup> and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

2. This is God's provision to help us grow and be faithful.
3. Some flocks may be *led in the wrong path* by unfaithful shepherds.
4. Our goal is to find a local church that truly *has Christ as their head!*

### ***III. Have we thought about seeking the spiritual maturity needed to make that choice?***

A. A mature Christian has learned to *discern and seek what God wants*. (**Rom 12:1-2**)  
**Romans 12:1-2** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

1. When our hearts are seeking "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" then we will empty ourselves and *desire to truly be taught!*
2. The immature *may not have yet learned* to put away selfish desires or even learned how to read and apply scripture personally.
3. The immature can be swayed by emotion and deception of men. (**Eph 4:14-15**)

**Ephesians 4:14-15** <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ --

B. Many elements of the doctrine of Christ are only practiced within local churches!

1. The assembly involves *a collective worship*. (**1 Cor 14:26, 11:20, 23-24**)  
**1 Corinthians 14:26** <sup>26</sup> How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

**1 Corinthians 11:20** <sup>20</sup> Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

**1 Corinthians 11:23-24** <sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

2. Local churches *observe the Lord's Supper*. (**Acts 2:42**)  
**Acts 2:42** <sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

3. Local churches *have a weekly collection* for the Lord's work.  
(**1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 11:8**)  
**1 Corinthians 16:1-2** Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: <sup>2</sup> On the first *day* of the week let

each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

**2 Corinthians 11:8** <sup>8</sup> I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you.

4. God gave *instructions to appoint elders and deacons!* (**1 Tim 3; Acts 14:23**)  
**Acts 14:23** <sup>23</sup> So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

5. All will be greatly challenged to discern these and other important issues!

#### ***IV. Have we thought about the kind of choices we make will reveal our own hearts?***

A. Jesus often taught that *our response to His words* reveal if we really love Him.

(**Jn 3:19-21; Jn 14:15, 21, 23-24**)

**John 3:19-21** <sup>19</sup> "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

**John 14:15** <sup>15</sup> " If you love Me, keep My commandments.

**John 14:21** <sup>21</sup> "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

**John 14:23-24** <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. <sup>24</sup> "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

1. Our discernment is *a process that takes time!* We should be in a local church that openly gives emphasis to discernment and change!

2. When I made the commitment to follow Jesus as my Lord as I learned more about the Lord's will I tried *to both discern and stand* on what I found!

B. I would seek to find a church that *believed God's word was inspired and complete!*

1. Most local churches within "mainstream Christianity" have rejected this truth.

(**2 Tim 3:16-17**)

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup> All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2. Churches that do not have this foundation cannot stand on anything. If Jesus is a risen Lord then *His word is perfect!* (**Eph 1:22-23; 2:20**)

**Ephesians 1:22-23** <sup>22</sup> And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

**Ephesians 2:20** <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,

C. I would seek to find a church that taught and defended God's plan of salvation!

1. Jesus placed baptism as *a foundational doctrine* for all Christians. **(Eph 4:4-6)**

**Ephesians 4:4-6** <sup>4</sup> *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;* <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

2. Paul indicated that all Christians were brought into fellowship with Christ and

His blood *at the point of baptism*. **(Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:26-27)**

**Romans 6:3-4** <sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

**Galatians 3:26-27** <sup>26</sup> For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

3. This was a very real personal choice I had to make.

**Conclusion:** Do our young have the maturity and knowledge to make these decisions?