

CHOICES

There are choices which are not really choices at all. We call them Hobson's choices. Hobson was a 17th Century Cambridge innkeeper who hired out his horses. You could choose your horse, as long as you took the one nearest to the stable door - this way each horse was given equal use and each customer impartially served. But in reality of course the customer had no choice at all, so people would speak of the choice of a horse as Hobson's choice. Henry Ford is reputed to have offered his motor cars in any colour of your choice as long as it's black. It appears to be a choice but in fact there is no alternative.

There is a Hobson's choice in the Christian gospel. St Paul wrote about it to the Christians at Corinth. Given the acceptance of one single statement, we are left with no choice as to our subsequent action. *When once we have reached the conclusion that Christ died for all - the love of Christ leaves us no choice.* If we have reached that conclusion - what follows? It is simply that we should cease to live for ourselves and should live for him who for our sakes died and was raised to life. Sounds all very familiar. We must have heard it or read it a thousand times. But St Paul won't let us get away with pleading familiarity. *You have no choice*, he says.

Once you have reached that conclusion that Christ died for you - then there *is* no choice - it's Hobson's choice. There are not a number of alternatives to choose from - there is only one possible course of action - you are *bound* to put Christ first and order your life around his purpose. So the real question then becomes, have we actually come to terms with the idea of Christ dying for us, or is that no more than a pious phrase so familiar that it has lost its impact?

The beginning of Christian discipleship is the personal appropriation of this fact - *He loved me and gave himself for me.* For this business of accepting the fact - or as St Paul puts it - *reaching this conclusion* - is not simply an intellectual experience - it is a response to *love*. It is a powerful emotional experience as well. And whether it is more emotional for some and more intellectual for others - it does not become actual until the will is surrendered. But once that has happened - once we have in St Paul's phrase,

reached that conclusion there is no doubt about what happens next - *the love of Christ leaves us no choice.*

Take a very inadequate illustration of the principle. Some time ago I was collecting for the Life Boats. We all have our favourite charities and Life Boats are not everybody's cup of tea. But imagine yourself in a sinking ship, in heavy seas, perhaps trapped in a space no one is likely to reach. A life boat eventually gets alongside and a member of the crew sees you and comes to get you out. In the course of bringing you to safety he is hit by a heavy sea and swept away to drown. Once you know that that man has died for you what would your attitude be when I ring your front door bell? Your action would be determined by the sacrificial devotion to duty which led that lifeboatman to die for you. His sacrifice would leave you no choice. You may not necessarily give your life to the Life Boat Fund - and that's where my illustration breaks down - but your response and commitment would not just be an intellectual recognition of that Society's work. It would be a response and commitment which has been won by *love and sacrifice* - leaving you no choice.

St Paul says that once you've actually become aware of Christ's love for you - you have no choice. You are *bound* to become his ambassador, a *witness*; someone able to testify to the reality of Christ's love in their own experience.

I like the story of the blind man to whom Our Lord restored sight - to the great annoyance of the religious leaders of his day. The theologians seized on him. Who did it? How did he do it? What did he say? What qualifications had he got? How do we know that there was anything wrong with your sight in the first place? The man was in no position to argue. He couldn't match the minds of the Pharisees. He knew nothing of the spiritual or ecclesiastical qualifications of the One who had restored his sight. There was no question of him responding in any philosophical or theological debate. He said all he could say - and it was all that was necessary - *I know nothing of all these matters. All I know is that once I was blind - now I can see.* That is all that is required of us as witnesses to the love of God in Christ.

But it is not an optional extra to the ordinary business of being a Christian. Once you have accepted the basic fact of Christian belief - it's Hobson's choice.

When once we have reached the conclusion that one man died for all.....the love of Christ leaves us no choice. 2 Corinthians 5.14