

# Break Free...

*A Thought for the Week From Patrick Kemper at  
No Strongholds Ministries*

## Week 18

### God Shopping

**Deuteronomy 11:1-7 (NCV)**

- 1 Love the LORD your God and always obey his orders, rules, laws, and commands.*
- 2 Remember today it was not your children who saw and felt the correction of the LORD your God. They did not see his majesty, his power, his strength,*
- 3 or his signs and the things he did in Egypt to the king and his whole country.*
- 4 They did not see what he did to the Egyptian army, its horses and chariots, when he drowned them in the Red Sea as they were chasing you. The LORD ruined them forever.*
- 5 They did not see what he did for you in the desert until you arrived here.*
- 6 They did not see what he did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the ground opened up and swallowed them, their families, their tents, and everyone who stood with them in Israel.*
- 7 It was you who saw all these great things the LORD has done.*

No one living in America can ever authentically complain about a lack of variety.

What happens, though, when there are fifty possibilities within each option? How do you decide which is the best for you?

Variety is not always a good thing. Sometimes having too many options becomes a distraction, and prolonged distraction can prevent you from making a decision altogether.

Today, there are almost 1000 channels on home satellite dishes and a decision regarding where to buy donuts is no longer just between Winchell's and Dunkin'. Just a few years ago, buying an automobile was a choice between Ford, Chevy, Pontiac, Dodge-Chrysler, Honda, Toyota and a few of the luxury lines like Mercedes, BMW, Jaguar and Rolls Royce. There were also some exotics like Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati and Lotus. Let's just say that I missed a couple. Stuff the ballot box and round up the number to an even two dozen as the possibilities from which to choose. Now, according to a quick web search for the number of currently existing car manufacturers, there are... can you guess?

282.

It's true. There are at least 282 auto manufacturers in the world.<sup>1</sup> No, I'm not going to try to name them, but if you trust that I am telling the truth (and if you don't, go Google it yourself), this helps to make my point. Along with an increase in the myriad of amenities-of-life choices, the number of false gods and flaky, rule-driven, ritualistic religions has proliferated exponentially as well.

The Bible points out how prevalent the problem of false religions (and the inevitable, subsequent worship of false gods) has been throughout history. Attempting to appease some new deity has always been an option, the search for a more benevolent (and accommodating) divinity, an ever-present temptation.

There have always been gods and practices to justify any kind of thinking (or behavior) ranging from those who insist it is cruel to eat animals to those who believe it's perfectly acceptable to eat people; from those who refuse to medicate their desperately ill family members (as a sign of faith), to the worshipping of bronze statues on which people would sacrifice their own infants; from the complete surrendering of an individual's life (taking a vow of silence, poverty and seclusion from the outside world), to shameless, undaunted solicitation as a temple prostitute. The range of stupid human choices (and debauchery) seemingly knows no bounds... all in the name of religion.

Today, more than ever in the history of human kind, the variety of false gods and religious practices has burgeoned like the channels of our televisions. Even more detrimental than the fact that there are so many from which one may choose is the deep-seated contradiction lurking within the ranks of possibility.

While they all, separately, claim to have identified the magic process or method to please the divine entity on which they are betting their eternity, they simultaneously (and contradictorily) agree that all paths lead to this higher power. "Coexist" and "tolerance" are their secret handshake and decoder ring... their recipe for inner peace.

So why should it matter which path or set of rules one chooses if they all ultimately arrive at the same destination? Does this mean heaven (or whatever the place is called to which our existence travels when finished here) is a multi-jurisdictional atmosphere where we all, upon arrival, find our respective worldview's concierge who will connect us with those who opted for our same path?

Lovely. Sounds like we leave one crappy, comparative world of segregation, categorization and competition... for another.

## *Application*

It's nearly impossible to catch up on current events without hearing how another Hollywood star has decided to follow some mystic, ritualistic knuckle-head (who, even though he has taken a vow of poverty, is sporting Prada slip-ons, a Rolex and a Beverly Hills address), chanting some new, proprietary mantra and looking for some place to put a piercing where no one else has thought to yet.

I have studied most of the planet's worldviews. It was truly enlightening for me to discover that, without fail, they all fall short in the same way – except for one. In every

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<sup>1</sup> I say it this way because it's the number reported by the search, but you know somebody out there is probably getting left out...

instance, in every worldview or practice (besides Christianity), there is a list of things man needs to do in order to qualify - or hopefully qualify (*there's* an incentive to pledge) - for a chance at an afterlife that doesn't include the prospect of becoming worm food.

I digress. Perhaps there is an upside. Some worldviews offer the incentive of a return trip ticket in the form of a bird, a dog or a tree (yes, you're coming right... back... here!).

In each of these worldviews the conclusion is the same... follow some set of rules to attain acceptance into/become a part of whatever may be the "afterlife" when these bodies are no longer operational.

Interested? Nor am I.

I was worshipping my God today... *Elohim* (God, the Creator), *Jehovah* (God, the Redeemer), *El-Shaddai* (God Almighty) and *Abba* (Father) are just a few of the names I get to call Him. Lost in the vastness of His generosity and faithfulness, His power, love and patience, I got to thinking about how He stacks up against the gods that today's dysfunctional world has to offer.

What do you think about my God who claims (and is the only one to do so) to have created all that exists (and has ever existed); an entity who claims to be omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing) and omni-present (everywhere, all the time, and always has been)?

What is your response to my God who says the only way to gain access to the afterlife isn't through a set of rules (that you can't always keep), but is accomplished by accepting His free gift (that you can't ever have stolen)? How does my God, who offers to help you - to guide you - through the rest of your time here on this planet (instead of making demands and offering no promises), compare with the gods of other worldviews?

What do you think about my God who is more interested (and dedicated) to reconcile the issues between the two of you (you and Him) than insisting you master a set of expectations that are unattainable (while promising nothing definitive)?

What do you say about my God, who makes the claims of significance that He does, and then says to you, "You aren't good enough - and you never will be - but I have decided to pay your way and put your name on the list... anyway.?"

What do you say to my God, who says He loves you so much that He would rather die (the price required to pay your way) than be separated from you for eternity - then proved it by doing so?

I sincerely hope what you say to Him is, "Yes!"

If you desire to have a relationship with the God I serve, such a relationship does not require a commitment to achieve a specific status through performance, it requires a humbleness to accept a gift (the paying of your debt that you can never cover).

Having a relationship with my God does not require endurance to discover and master an established set of rules and rituals, it requires your commitment to submit to Him and allow Him to lead you in the ways that make your life better; ways that mold your existence and equip you for the purpose He designed and created you to accomplish. Having a relationship with my God does not offer you the possibility of a safe and secure eternity in the afterlife as long as you have completed more good days than bad, it offers a guarantee to spend eternity with the One who created and redeemed you...

... if you will choose to follow and obey Him with the remainder of your mortal days.

This relationship is not one based on do's-and-don'ts – it's about wills-and-won'ts.

What do I mean?

The do's-and-don'ts mentality is a rule-driven philosophy. This kind of functionality is punitive in its foundation and is misleading. "Do this and don't do that," has an underlying pronouncement inferring your performance could (potentially) qualify you and make you acceptable. Wills-and-won'ts is the posture of an intentional choice to be submitted, and obedient, to the requests God makes and the opportunities He provides. This functionality is not a proactive approach, but a reactive one... one of responsiveness. In this mode of operation – obedience, the response to a stimulus – recognition is not based on initiative, but on proximity... how close are you?

**Luke 9:23 (TLB)**

<sup>23</sup> Then he said to all, "Anyone who wants to follow me must put aside his own desires and conveniences and carry his cross with him every day and keep close to me!"

God gives rules as warnings to keep you safe, but His interest in you, His concern for you, is not based on a list. God's passion for you begins with Jesus' sacrificial act to rescue you and is activated by your willingness to follow His leading - for the rest of your days - in gratitude for the gift of rescue He provides (the gift you are incapable of attaining no matter how many rules you follow).

A relationship with God - Elohim (God the Creator), Jehovah (God the Redeemer) - is exactly that... a relationship.

It is not a membership (requiring your pledge to follow the rules in order to stay associated), it's a personal interaction where input and guidance is offered... then accepted (obeyed). The deeper (and more frequent) the interaction, the more fulfilled you are. It is in this obedient, reciprocal interaction – this relationship – that His promise, our guarantee of a safe and secure eternity, remains intact.

**Luke 6:46-49 (HCSB)**

<sup>46</sup> "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say?"

<sup>47</sup> I will show you what someone is like who comes to Me, hears My words, and acts on them:

<sup>48</sup> He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. When the flood came, the river crashed against that house and couldn't shake it, because it was well built.

<sup>49</sup> But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The river crashed against it, and immediately it collapsed. And the destruction of that house was great!"

**Matthew 7:21-23 (NIV)**

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

<sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

<sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Many worldviews exist. They all claim to be one of the ways to achieve a safe and secure afterlife, but the Bible makes it clear there is only one way:

**Romans 6:16 (TLB)**

<sup>16</sup> Don't you realize that you can choose your own master? You can choose sin (with death) or else obedience (with acquittal). The one to whom you offer yourself—he will take you and be your master, and you will be his slave.

**Romans 6:23 (TLB)**

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Romans 6:10 (TLB)**

<sup>10</sup> He died once for all to end sin's power, but now he lives forever in unbroken fellowship with God.

**John 14:6 (TLB)**

<sup>6</sup> Jesus told him, "I am the Way—yes, and the Truth and the Life. No one can get to the Father except by means of me.

The Bible also makes it clear that the offer is good for everyone - no one (who humbles himself and accepts Christ's gift in humility) is excluded:

**Romans 10:11-13 (TLB)**

<sup>11</sup> For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed.

<sup>12</sup> Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect: they all have the same Lord who generously gives his riches to all those who ask him for them.

<sup>13</sup> Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

**John 6:37 (TLB)**

<sup>37</sup> But some will come to me—those the Father has given me—and I will never, never reject them.

The sacrificial, non-obligatory rescue of that which is unworthy... an invaluable gift. There is no conceivable way for the recipient of such a gift to ever repay such a debt. Does that mean the gift can be received and acknowledged but gratitude and loyalty are irrelevant?

**Luke 9:24-26 (TLB)**

<sup>24</sup> Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it, but whoever insists on keeping his life will lose it;

<sup>25</sup> and what profit is there in gaining the whole world when it means forfeiting one's soul?

<sup>26</sup> "When I, the Messiah, come in my glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels, I will be ashamed then of all who are ashamed of me and of my words now.

It is not possible to earn, or deserve, the gift.

It is equally impossible to repay the debt incurred by accepting the gift, but a giving over of yourself – totally and completely to the One who rescued you – is where your gratitude begins. Jesus' sacrifice rescued you (in total). All of you (in obedience) is expected in return. It is the least you can do for what you are being offered.

Humble yourself.

Tell Jesus (if you mean it) you believe He is the only Son of God and the only way to a favorable existence beyond your days here on Earth. Acknowledge that He gave His all... to rescue you all. Ask Him to forgive you of the sin in your life and invite Him to enter into a relationship where He leads and you follow – no matter what. Offer up your rescued life, in gratitude, to become all you were designed and created to accomplish.

**Matthew 10:37-39 (HCSB)**

<sup>37</sup> *The person who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; the person who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*

<sup>38</sup> *And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.*

<sup>39</sup> *Anyone finding his life will lose it, and anyone losing his life because of Me will find it.<sup>2</sup>*

Give away your life (lose your life because of Him... and find it) to the One who rescued you. Offer your life in obedience to the One, True God.

**Joshua 24:14-15 (TLB)**

<sup>14</sup> *"So revere Jehovah and serve him in sincerity and truth. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Worship the Lord alone.*

<sup>15</sup> *But if you are unwilling to obey the Lord, then decide today whom you will obey. Will it be the gods of your ancestors beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites here in this land? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord."*

Variety is not always a good thing – sometimes having too many options becomes a distraction, and prolonged distraction can prevent you from making a decision altogether.

From among all the possible choices, choose today whom you will serve... and put an end to god shopping forever.

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<sup>2</sup> Underline added is mine

# Homework for the Week...

1.) For you, is there a variety of choices when it comes to your beliefs in life after death? What is it you believe must be done for a safe and secure existence after time served on Earth? What do you believe regarding the claims and promises of Jehovah (God the Redeemer)? Do you understand the difference between a do's-and-don'ts, and a wills-and-wont's mentality? Which one best describes the way you function? Is a relationship with God something you see as necessary... something you desire? Are you ready to follow, for the rest of your earthly days, and operate responsively in obedience? Choose today whom you will serve. Carefully consider each of these questions and work them through to an end. Refuse to consider any one of them as insignificant. Ask God to reveal to you where you might need to make some changes, and to confirm where you are on the mark.

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2.) Mid-week check. List the opportunities you have had and how you responded (this is your obedience indicator). If you are still posting a doughnut, more than likely you weren't all that truthful when you asked God for chances to respond and improve. Check your heart; be authentic. Ask God to show you the way through what is blocking you from submitting in obedience.

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3.) How are you doing compared to the way you started the week? If you still need improvement, refuse to move on to the next session. Stay here, submit, and choose to be obedient no matter what it takes. Explain how you have improved, or make a commitment to continue working. When you are operating in obedience in this area of your life... turn the page and move to the next session.

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