



Take a moment and read the following excerpt by Os Guinness. Consider the parallels with Xerxes.

Critics dismiss [the view of Scripture as the final authority] as quaint and rigid in the world of modernity. And modernity tends to render it unthinkable in a thousand ways, subtly but systematically. For a start, there is the inescapable presence and power of *pluralization*—the process by which the proliferation of endless choice and incessant change increases at all levels of modern life.

. . . From breakfast cereals to restaurants and cuisines to sexual identities and temptations to possible sexual arrangements of all types to self-help techniques and philosophies of life, we are offered an infinite array of choices, and the focus is always on choice as *choosing* rather than choice as the *content* of what is chosen. Just choose. Experiment. Try it out for yourself. How else will you know unless you have tried it?

. . . “Love to one is only a barbarity,” Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “for it is exercised at the expense of all others. Love to God also.” There you have it. Even God is reduced to consumer choice, and when truth is taken out of the equation, sticking to one choice is no longer a matter of intellectual conviction but a sign of timidity as well as folly. You should be open-minded, for the freethinker will always wish to choose and keep choosing. Our freedom is the freedom to choose, regardless of whether our choice is right or wrong, wise or stupid. So long as we can choose, we are free. Choosing is all that matters. Truth, goodness, and authority are irrelevant: you are the sovereign chooser, and you are free to exercise your sovereign right to choose and choose and choose until all choices seem the same and each one shrivels into insignificance.

. . . The modern temptation to trivialize choice is not new. It ultimately stems from our human fallenness as truth seekers who are always inevitably truth twisters too. Instead of seeking to shape our desires according to the reality of God's truth, we seek to shape reality according to our desires—and modern consumerism aids and abets us as never before.

Os Guinness, *Impossible People*, 67-71.

Last week we discussed the narcissism of Xerxes and Vashti and how it resulted in irreconcilable conflict between them. This week Xerxes consults his advisors with the intent “to shape reality according to his desires.” He looks to them to endorse and justify his position despite the absence of any legal violation on Vashti's part. Then with their help he shifts the blame for his own choices to Vashti and all the women of the kingdom. Finally, he ignores the problem by means of a plan to replace Vashti with someone more to his liking. Xerxes' response to conflict sounds eerily familiar in a culture where alignment with our own views determines preferred news outlets, social media sites, and even friends. Blame similarly rests on those who disagree with our choices. And it is always easier to address the problem by finding a new job, church, or even family than to face the truth, confess our faults, and find redemption.

Discussion Questions

We often use consumerism and choice to avoid reality. How else do we attempt to deny reality, blame others, or distract ourselves?

Os Guinness describes freedom of conscience as distinct from freedom of choice because it is bound to a source of objective truth like Scripture. How can our commitment to truth, no matter how big or small the issue, contribute to order, our own well-being, and the well-being of others?

When we gather as God's people, how can we be sure we are encouraging each other in truth rather than gathering “to say what our itching ears want to hear” like Xerxes and his advisors? (2 Tim. 4:3)