

Little Compromises

by John O. Reid

Forerunner, "Ready Answer," January-February 2011

*"... that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel." —
Deuteronomy 17:20*

Contrary to popular belief, we live in one of the most difficult and dangerous ages in all of human history. Some would be willing to argue this, saying that civilization has come a long way and that mankind is not as cruel as the record of history shows that he once was. Certainly living in the first century in the Roman Empire must have been difficult, they might say as an example, since we have the Bible's account of the apostles living in constant danger—and most of them died horrible deaths!

That is true. From what the Bible shows, that constant danger promoted closeness to God; the apostles relied on God to keep them safe and provide deliverance for them at every turn. While we are not being hunted down for our religious beliefs, the danger we face today is far greater—spiritually—in that it does just the opposite: It promotes a slow separation from God. We know this kind of danger by the illustration of the frog in the water. The increase in temperature happens so slowly that the frog fails to realize that it is in trouble until it is too late to jump to safety.

What produces this danger for us, the called-out children of God? What is the signature attitude of the era that we live in? What failing among the majority of people will cause the loss of our freedoms and the downfall of our nation? It is compromising with the laws and principles of God.

We live in a nation that has largely compromised the character it once possessed. Just a minority uphold the Christian principles that underlay documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which provided the foundation for America to become the envy of the world. Now,

so many are willing to trade their hard-won freedoms for a little temporary security, essentially selling their birthright.

We face an analogous situation among the greater churches of God. We live in a time when the majority of those with whom we once fellowshiped have compromised the beliefs they used to hold dear. Many of these people have joined worldly churches, or worse, losing faith altogether, have slipped back into the world. Some have contrived strange new doctrines to live by, and despite attending services among the scattered churches, too many have nearly lost their faith and zeal for this way of life.

In our church history, we can see how deadly even a little compromising with God's ways is. It almost always leads to greater compromises until a person is so far from what has been revealed in Scripture that he has apostatized, cutting himself off from God. What a sad end after such a promising start!

Royal Compromise

God's Word provides an example of compromise for us to learn from, if we are wise enough to heed it (Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11). This example comes from the life of the wisest king ever to live, one whom God blessed with wisdom that no one could gainsay, who had wealth and ability no one had ever possessed before. God loved this man greatly—He even spoke directly to him more than once, and because of the man's humble response, blessed him far beyond what he requested. This king, a man of peace and learning, was commissioned to build the most beautiful Temple to God in Jerusalem. The man, of course, was Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba.

To understand why Solomon's compromises seemed so small and insignificant to him when he succumbed to them, we have to understand the situation of Solomon's reign. We could compare it to America today. As Psalm 18:43-44 suggests, David and his armies had essentially subjugated all of the world that mattered at the time. King David of Israel was "the head of the nations," and faraway kings he did not even know trembled at the mention of his name. As the sole superpower in the region, wealth poured into Israel. When Solomon was made king upon David's death, not a nation

on the face of the earth would have considered attacking Israel. It was just too strong.

So, Solomon ruled the known world, and as time progressed and in that strength, he did not see the need to obey God fully in all that He had commanded the kings of Israel to do. In his power and wealth, he saw no problem with compromising just a little with God's instruction. As we will see, Solomon failed completely in his old age, but the seeds of that failure were sown early in his reign.

II Chronicles 9:22-28 gives us a summary of his reign:

So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. Each man brought his present: articles of silver and gold, garments, armor, spices, horses, and mules, at a set rate year by year. Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem. So he reigned over all the kings from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland. And they brought horses to Solomon from Egypt and from all lands.

This sounds like the perfect, storybook career until we notice God's instruction to kings in Deuteronomy 17:14-20:

When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, "I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me," you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply

horses, for the Lord has said to you, "You shall not return that way again." Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Was Solomon unaware of these instructions? Of course not. David, a man who knew God's law intimately, would have been sure to instruct his son in them and have him write a copy of the law as commanded. Surely, Solomon could not have been ignorant of them. He, then, must have known it was wrong to import horses and chariots from Egypt, but because of his wealth and might, he must have considered this infraction too minor to take seriously.

Why did God not want Israel's kings to import warhorses? Armored warhorses and the chariots they pulled can be compared to today's tanks, which are devastating when fighting foot soldiers. A nation with this level of war materiel put their reliance on it as it made the army such a powerful fighting machine. Why should a nation trust an invisible God to fight its battles when it could see rank upon rank of seemingly invincible horses and chariots?

God wanted His people to rely on Him. Solomon knew this, since he wrote in Proverbs 21:31: "The horse is prepared for the day of battle: but deliverance is of the Lord." The issue of importing horses may have seemed a small thing to Solomon, but it was important to God. From all indications, his compromise in this matter began his slow separation from God.

Many Wives Too

Compounding his compromise concerning warhorses, by the end of his reign, Solomon had a substantial harem:

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. (I Kings 11:1-3)

As he began his reign, would Solomon have considered "multiply[ing] wives for himself," especially to this extent? Probably not. When he was tender of heart, needing God to help him rule this great people and kingdom (see II Chronicles 1:7-12), he doubtless walked carefully, making sure he did what was commanded in everything. But once secure in knowledge, wealth, and power, he began to forget the God who had spoken to him, placed him in power, and given him all that he had.

Perhaps Solomon's reasoning went something like this: "When I imported horses from Egypt, there were no adverse consequences, so what would be wrong with taking additional wives for political reasons?" We do not normally see the results of sin immediately, yet they inevitably come. At some point, he learned this principle, writing in Ecclesiastes 8:11: "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." In any case, knowing this did not help him, as I Kings 11:4-8 records:

For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of

Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

Wise Solomon fell victim to the same temptations that the rest of us so often face. He compromised on what he thought were small concerns—matters he probably considered well into the gray areas—to do things his way rather than God's. The danger of such reasoning is that small compromises weaken character, and over time, they lead to major sins. For Solomon, the results were devastating. His experience is a warning of what will befall us if we follow his example of compromise.

The psalmist writes in Psalm 111:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they that do His commandments: His praise endures forever." Solomon's compromises gradually but inexorably distorted his understanding of God's laws and ways. He slowly drifted away from God, so that when he was old, unbelievable as it seems, he allowed his wives to turn his heart from the God that had given him everything.

From the "minor" infraction of importing horses, Solomon eventually condoned and was at least an accessory to the sins of idolatry and outright murder, sins that he would never have considered committing at the beginning of his reign. For, at the end of his life, Solomon worshipped Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, and Molech, the last having rituals that called for children to be given to the fire of his altar. By giving his royal sanction to worshipping these pagan deities, he set a precedent that was followed by many of the kings of Israel and Judah after him.

A Righteous Example

We can see what a little bit of compromise cost this supposedly wise man, as well as how it affected future generations of Israelites. But what about those of us who live in a world that feels free to compromise at will? Has this society and the spiritual confusion among some of the churches of God caused us to ignore the laws, principles, and statutes that we see in God's Word?

Josiah, who reigned not long before Judah's Babylonian captivity, was one of the most righteous kings. II Kings 23:10-11 records how he dealt with the "insignificant" issue of horses and the more important matter of child sacrifice:

And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech. Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

All it took was to stand up for what God had revealed, and he used the power given to him to respond in obedience.

In these perilous times, it is of the utmost importance that we resist the urge to use our human reasoning to compromise with God's law. We must be particularly careful in what we perceive as the "smaller areas" of God's Word. Why? Because Satan often makes his greatest inroads by getting us to relax in little things and gradually convincing us to do the same in more vital matters. If he can just get his foot in the door, he feels he has won a great victory and can make us slip away from God. Paul, however, exhorts us, ". . . nor give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27).

Once we compromise, the process of sin has commenced, and godly character, which is so precious to God, begins to erode, opening the way for sin on a larger scale. If a wise man like Solomon went from ignoring a seemingly obscure admonition to the flagrant breaking of many of God's commandments, we, too, can certainly yield to the peril of compromise. We must learn to spot and avoid the little compromises that lead to big sins.