



Compromise, Conformity, & Courage

by Doug Batchelor

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An Amazing Fact: Because of its unusual growth habits, the tropical Banyan tree is known as a “strangler fig.” These large trees usually start life when their seed is deposited by a bird high in the foliage of another tree. The Banyan’s roots descend over the trunk of the host tree seeking out the soil below. Once they have rooted themselves, the roots of the strangler fig rapidly thicken and lengthen. Where the

fig roots cross each other they fuse, thus creating a lattice around the host tree's trunk. Gradually they starve the host tree and prevent it from growing by robbing all its light, water, and nutrients. Eventually the Banyan tree chokes the host until it dies and rots away, leaving the strangler fig standing in its place.

In a similar manner, as the seeds of creeping compromise are tolerated in God's remnant church, spiritual life and fruit are being sapped away.

Taking a Stand

The ancient Greek storyteller Aesop provided a colorful fable explaining how bats came to live in the dark. There was a war between the beasts of the field and the birds, and when the birds were winning the war, the bat would fly around and say, "I'm a bird. Look at me fly! I'm a bird." But later, the beasts began to win, so the bat dropped to the ground

and said, "I'm a beast. See me crawl! I'm a beast." Pretty soon, both the birds and the beasts got disgusted with the bat trying to play both sides of the war. Together they banished his kind to live in caves and only come out in the dark. In wanting to make everybody happy, he ultimately made nobody happy.

Everyone, like this bat, yearns to be accepted. But for the dedicated Christian, it is impossible to have both the acceptance of the world and the approval of our heavenly Father. Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters" (Luke 16:13). And James put it this way: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). Thus according to God's Word, it is impossible for a Christian to enjoy the acceptance of the world and all its sinful pleasures while simultaneously enjoying the peace and assurance that come from a saving relationship with

Jesus. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

But the sad truth is that millions of professing Christians around the world are searching for a way to strike a comfortable compromise between their convictions and the wicked world in which we live. I feel passionate about this issue because I also struggle with the insidious yet gradual influence of compromise and conformity in my own walk with the Lord. We are under relentless pressure to conform to the world. The devil is always offering to negotiate our values and principles. He rarely uses an all-out frontal assault, but rather by virtue of internal erosion where, little by little, we are pressured to compromise our beliefs in small increments.

Compromising with the devil is deadly to the spirit and always fails in bringing any lasting satisfaction. Our Lord clearly told us we cannot play the middle. “He that is not with me is

against me” (Matthew 12:30). And as the Chinese say, “You cannot cross the river with your feet in different boats.” In reality, it is impossible to truly compromise with the devil, because any attempt to compromise with Satan will ultimately become total capitulation. Only by constant dependence on God and personal vigilance can we hack off the tentacles of this monster.

Good and Bad Compromise

Now compromise is not a dirty word. Many times it is a wonderful principle that helps provide and maintain peace and unity within relationships. Compromise in a marriage encourages domestic tranquility. On frigid days in the winter, I like setting the thermostat to 75 degrees, but my wife Karen prefers a more economical 68 degrees. So we compromise at 72 degrees and get along well. This kind of compromise on “nonessential” issues shows a meek and humble spirit.

But when Christians begin to compromise elements of truth, sacrificing biblical moral principles, for the sake of achieving peace, it can be eternally fatal. In the words of Martin Luther; “Peace if possible, truth at all cost.”

Satan’s primary goal for believers is to, little by little, buff down your resolve, getting you to concede an inch here and an inch there, until before you realize what has happened, your convictions have been displaced by his ethics and the proverbial frog has been boiled.

Even in a short book like this, it is tempting to launch a moral Blitzkrieg targeting multiple areas where the church is compromising. I could parade a list of Christian standards that have been sacrificed on the altar of compromise to gain acceptance with the world. I could write about the dangerous inroads of worldly music and “contemporary” worship styles, unchecked materialism and the subsequent debt, the Babylonian

diet and health practices, absurd and suggestive dress and adornment, and the blizzard of popular entertainment that is spiritually numbing the minds of professed believers. I could even take on the most dangerous of all conformity: the watered-down, generic theology in which believers are never called to deny self and take up their crosses. Each one of these compromises have neutralized peace in the hearts of believers, diluted the potency of the gospel, and strangled church growth.

Alas, the limited space will not permit me to unpack each of these issues in detail. So instead I will direct your attention to the broader principles that lead to compromise and conformity and how we can resist the temptation to fall in line with the devil.

One Size Fits All

I recently bought a baseball cap at an airport convenience store. It's not the

cheapest place to do your shopping, but I forgot to pack mine. (A baseball cap is a necessity for my bald head on airplanes!) All the baseball caps hanging on the rack said, “one size fits all.” I was doubtful this generic sizing system would accommodate my large noggin. But to my astonishment, it fit! It was designed to conform to anybody’s head.

I have discovered that most Christians want a theology that will comfortably accommodate the sins in their life. But a fallen man’s sinful life is not a one-size-fits-all relationship with God. Is God to conform His will to suit our desires, or is the gospel supposed to transform our lives to fit God’s will? Paul gives us the answer; “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” (Romans 12:1, 2). We should not be *conformed* but *transformed*.

Don't Compromise With Sin

The story of Joseph provides an inspiring example of how we can successfully avoid compromising our convictions. While the Egyptian captain Potiphar was away on business, his two-timing wife attempted to seduce Joseph, his most trusted servant. Joseph was probably tempted to consider the benefits of that forbidden relationship—perhaps he could have earned higher wages with less work and enjoyed more prestige in his household with a manipulating lover on his side. In the least, it seems he would have avoided jail time for spurning her advances.

Thus it must have been a powerful temptation for a single, healthy young man to compromise his principles for power and pleasure. Yet even with all the whisperings of the devil, Joseph knew it was wrong and refused to even consider the evil deed.

“So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie

with her or to be with her (Genesis 39:10 NKJV). If you didn't notice, not only did Joseph refuse to commit adultery, he also *stayed away* from the temptation.

When a jet aircraft starts its engines at the gate, the ground crew knows to stay far away from the intake of that powerful turbine. A few curious but careless workers lingering near the maw of one of these large engines have been literally vacuumed off the asphalt and vaporized. It is also true that if you compromise near forbidden boundaries, the deadly vortex of sin will suck you in like a category five tornado.

When you are being tempted by someone or something to compromise your convictions, steer as far away as you can from the edge of the evil. Don't let sin work on you, whittling down your resolve. Eve wandered too close to the forbidden tree and then waited to hear Satan's rationalizations. As soon as she saw that tree and heard the serpent

question God's truth, she should have run for cover. The Word of God commands us to flee from temptation (1 Timothy 6:11).

Just a Little

It's not very popular today to speak out against sin, especially those that have been generally accepted by the church. Those who do speak out can count on being called uncompromising and legalistic. I know, because it has happened to me many times. As just a small example, I once attended a Christian wedding reception where someone poured champagne in the glass at my seat even though I didn't ask for it. A little surprised, I politely protested, saying, "No thank you. I don't drink."

The host assured me, "This champagne is only eight-percent alcohol. It won't get you drunk."

"But I don't drink any alcohol," I affirmed.

Obviously annoyed, the host answered, "We're just celebrating a wedding tradition. Don't you want to offer your best wishes and toast the bride and groom?" He even suggested that I put the glass to my lips and pretend to drink. It was as if the devil himself was saying, "After all, everyone else is doing it."

"Don't you care about them?" "Just do it this once." "Don't be a fanatic." These familiar rationalizations often precede a compromise. But we have to say no. "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14). Wanting to avoid even the appearance of evil, I refused to even hold a glass of alcohol in my hand (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Another familiar mantra of those who endorse worldly compromise is "balance." I can't count how many times I have been approached and told I need "more balance." But when it is carefully evaluated, their definition of balance is usually to conform our

Christian standards to worldly values. It sounds something like this: “It’s okay to take the family to the football game on Sabbath once in a while. You need to have balance.” In other words, they are recommending that we balance our holiness with a little sin. It appears that to them, being Christ-like is being out of balance.

Compassionate Compromise?

Another popular rationalization used for compromising Christian standards is ostensibly to make Christianity more attractive to the world. This was the approach taken by some church leaders in the days of Constantine.

The Roman and Greek pagans loved their idols. The second commandment regarding idolatry was a real stumbling block that prevented countless pagans from easily embracing Christianity. The thought of defacing or destroying their precious idols represented a

tremendous struggle for these devout but superstitious pagans.

So in the interest of evangelism, some church leaders suggested, “Why not allow them to rename their idols after Christian heroes and saints? Then after they come into the church, we will gradually educate them to abandon their idols.” But you know the rest of the story—instead of the church converting the pagans, the pagans converted the church. It is how things like this typically work. Whenever the church attempts to compromise a Christian standard under the pretense of making conversion less traumatic, the world converts the church by making sin much more palatable.

Compromise or Combat

In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews began to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. In Ezra 4, the Bible records, “Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin

heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple ... they said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him.” But the Jews knew these neighboring nations commingled the worship of the true God with Assyrian pagan gods.

How did Israel respond? They “said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord.” They made the right choice, refusing to let an unconverted pagan influence to define in any way how they built the Lord’s holy temple. But then catch this: “Then the people of the land,” that is those who just offered to help, “troubled them in building.” Suddenly, their peace-offering neighbors showed their true colors and became their harassing enemies.

Don’t miss this important reality. If you stand up for what’s right and do not get involved in apostate alliances, you’ll

be persecuted for it. First the devil's approach will be, "Let's just work together. Let's all love each other. Compromise a little on your convictions; we'll compromise a little on ours, and then we'll be united. After all, unity is so important!" If you don't fall for that trap and take a stand for truth, they will become your worst enemy, which really tells you where their hearts were in the first place.

This is a vitally important lesson as we head into the last days, because eventually all the world's religions will make concessions to form a united religious front that will ultimately promote the worship of the beast power. If we are developing a pattern now of sacrificing our convictions for the illusion of peace, we are paving the way in preparation to worship the beast. "Those who have yielded step by step to worldly demands, and conformed to worldly customs, will then yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves to derision,

insult, threatened imprisonment, and death” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 188).

A Fear of Offending

Have you ever heard about the pastor who did not want to offend his wealthy congregation? He said, “Dear brethren, unless you consider repenting, in a measure, and be a bit converted, as it were, you will possibly, I regret to say, be damned to some extent.”

In reality a great percentage of compromise and conformity worms its way into our lives and the church because nobody wants to offend anybody. We are trained from our earliest years to be polite and considerate—to comply with people’s requests and not do anything that might upset somebody. But Jesus taught that it is not possible to preach the gospel without causing some offense (Galatians 5:11).

Suppose you should develop a small spot of malignant skin cancer, but the

dermatologist, not wanting to upset you, told you it was poison ivy. Would he or she be your friend? By its very nature, the convicting essence of the gospel turns a blazing light on our hearts to peel back our layers of hypocrisy and expose our selfish motives and impure thoughts.

John Wesley was apparently riding along a road one day when it dawned on him that in the past three days, he had not suffered the slightest persecution. Not a single brick, egg, or verbal insult had been thrown at him for three entire days. Alarmed, he stopped his horse and exclaimed, "Can it be that I have sinned and am backslidden?"

Slipping from his horse, Wesley went down on his knees and began pleading with God to show him where, if any, there had been a fault he committed. At that exact moment, a rough fellow on the other side of the hedge, hearing the prayer, looked across and recognized the unconventional pastor. "I'll fix that

preacher,” he said, picking up a brick and tossing it over the hedge. Although the brick missed its mark and fell harmlessly beside Wesley, the thrilled preacher leapt to his feet joyfully exclaiming, “Thank God, all is well. I still have His presence.”

The apostles were all slain or imprisoned for their faith because their message offended somebody. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). I believe one reason we do not see more severe persecution of Christians in North America today is because we have compromised so much with the world that the offense of the gospel has been greatly diluted.

A Straight Path

Cache River is among the most serpentine streams in the world. It is useless for navigation because it winds 180 miles while only covering a distance of 35 miles, basically wasting 140 miles in bends and turns. The reason

a river becomes crooked is because it follows the path of least resistance, the same reason that Christians become crooked. But the path of the Christian should be more like a tight rope than a meandering trail.

Moses told the children of Israel just before his death, “Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you” (Deuteronomy 5:32, 33).

Luke 4 records the devil’s chilling attempt to get Christ to compromise. “And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ... All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them. ... If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine” (vs. 5–7). The devil wanted to make a

deal. He wanted Christ to consider the option, to negotiate a treaty to end the great controversy between good and evil. Satan implied Jesus could avoid the cross and rule the world if He would only give Satan worship. Everybody could live happily ever after.

But what did Jesus say? “Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (vs. 8). Jesus would not even consider it. This was the same answer Christ gave Peter when the disciple suggested Jesus shouldn’t go to the cross. Sometimes the devil even works through those closest to us, but when we’re tempted to compromise Christian principles and convictions, we need to learn how to say, “Get thee behind me, Satan. I am not going to do it.”

Compromise Killed Christ

In the events surrounding the trial of Christ, we can see that compromise

ultimately crucified the Lord. In John 18, while being interviewed by Pontius Pilate, Jesus says, “I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (vs. 37). Pilate’s response, “What is truth?”, is a telling indicator of the vacillating ruler’s cynical attitude about absolute truth.

In the Roman Empire, everybody debated everything. (It’s not much different in America today, is it?) One philosopher in Rome encouraged every person to debate both sides of every issue, hoping to broaden the minds of the citizenry. But Augustus eventually evicted the man because the people ended up thinking of truth as something fluid and relative—nobody would stand up for any clear definite truth. No one would take a stand, because every position had some rationalizing argument against it.

In this case, the truth was very clear and Pilate openly admitted that Jesus was innocent. “He went out again unto

the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all” (vs. 38). Yet instead of taking a stand for truth and releasing Jesus as innocent, Pilate sought to compromise his conviction of truth to win approval, a behavior that frequently plagues politicians.

Wanting to appease the majority, Pilate explains that he will have Christ beaten and then released. Yet if Jesus is innocent, why have Him beaten? The answer is once you begin to walk down the road of compromise, no matter where you stop, the devil will pick you up and complete the walk for you. You have already signaled your weakness to him by displaying a willingness to negotiate with wrong if the price is right. From then on it is like trying to climb a flagpole made of ice. Once you begin sacrificing your convictions, it is very easy to slide down into ruin.

Sensing Pilate’s weakness, Satan used the crowd to press the vacillating ruler

all the way for crucifixion. Pilate started down the road of negotiating with evil, and that's where the devil wanted him. That's why when Pilate attempted to outsmart the devil, it backfired. He offered them Barabbas as a compromise instead of Jesus. Pilate paraded the cold-blooded killer in front of the throngs as an example of real evil to contrast with the example of a sinless Christ. He must have thought to himself, "They just want to see a crucifixion so I'll offer them a compromise, and they'll obviously pick Jesus." He never dreamed they would ask him to release Barabbas, but that's exactly what they did.

Finally, Pilate's little concession of compromise got to the place where it was completely out of his hands. In vain, "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person:

see ye to it” (Matthew 27:24). But was he really clean? He had declared the Savior just but conformed his sentence to the pressure of the crowd.

Likewise, when we begin to compromise with truth, and our actions finally get out of hand and the consequences come full and hard, we won't be able to claim innocence either. So once you start thinking of going down the road of compromise, remember Pilate. Remember that Jesus died because someone thought they could compromise truth.

Be Courageous!

When I attended a New York military academy, the students would recite the Cadet's Prayer in chapel: “Make us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half truth when the whole truth can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with

vice and injustice and knows no fear when truth and right are in jeopardy.” That kind of noble resolve is something you scarcely hear about anymore. It’s believed by many to be virtuous to compromise truth in the name of unity, but not according to the Bible.

Refusing to buckle to the pressure of compromise requires divine courage. The Lord told Joshua, “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:7).

We don’t need to worry that God won’t forgive us if we sincerely repent of our compromise and turn the other way. But when we sin, when we stumble into error, we train ourselves to go down that road again. God can give you a new heart, but don’t think you can continue to compromise and not reap the

consequences. Continued compromise can numb your conscience, until it is the fruit of conformity with the world.

Close Your Mind to Conformity

When it comes to compromising the Word of God, don't have an open mind. You're going to be called a conservative extremist for not accepting the standards of world. But don't be intimidated when you are accused of being "close-minded." It is good to be closed minded regarding the commandments of God. I have a wife with whom I have covenanted—I am not open-minded about anything else that would destroy that promise.

The devil is setting up the church in the last days by preaching a message of unity through compromise. Little by little, he's softening up our resolve, encouraging us to make little concessions and compromises so that when that big test comes, he has us where he wants us.

Read Daniel 3 and bear with my loose paraphrase. Nebuchadnezzar said to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, “So you didn’t bow down? I’ll tell you what: I don’t want to lose you; you’re good workers. I’ll give you another chance and have the band play the music one more time. Perhaps you just want a little different song? But when you hear the sound, you need to bow down.”

But the three young Hebrews resolutely told the king he need not waste his time on them. “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Daniel 3:16–19). They didn’t negotiate, even when the devil tried to engage them.

The devil would rather have you die after you've disobeyed than die a martyr and be a victorious example. But if you die in this world upholding the Word, you will live in the next. So today we need to be faithful in that which is least. We may not think the little tests we face now are a matter of life and death, but if we can't learn arithmetic with pennies, we will never understand it with dollars. If we compromise and conform now in the little things with no death threat hanging over our heads, what are we likely to do when we are threatened with imprisonment or death?

Stand!

When the children of Israel reached the borders of the Red Sea and their Egyptian masters were riding hard on their heels to capture and re-enslave them, the situation looked bleak. But Moses told the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the

LORD, which He will accomplish for you today” (Exodus 14:13).

Once we know that something is right according to God’s Word, our responsibility is to take our stand. God will do great things for those who stand up for Him. He is looking for representatives who will trust Him. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

When you stand firm for truth, your life will be a saving witness to your family, your friends, your neighbors, and even the heavenly agencies. God will look down from heaven and say, “Have you considered My servant, that there is none like that on the earth, one who fears me and shuns evil?” (See Job 1:8.)

But Christ has not left us to do this alone. He has provided His own armor to protect us. “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to *stand*

against the wiles of the devil. ... Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:11, 13). Just remember that the correct posture for those wearing the armor of God is to stand!

William Jennings Bryan said, “Never be afraid to stand with a minority that is right, for the minority which is right will someday be the majority. Always be afraid to stand with the majority that is wrong, for the majority that is wrong will someday be the minority.” Ellen White, one of my favorite Christian authors, said it like this: “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall” (*Education*, p. 57).

With God all things are possible, including living a life without worldly conformity and compromise. Resolve now by His grace to stand on the Rock and resist the waves of compromise that are sweeping God's children from the shores of salvation. And always remember that when you take your stand, you do not stand alone. Jesus stands with you.



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