

Compromise vs. Conviction

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The church is not a democracy. Sometimes, however, we treat it that way when it comes to practicing leadership. Instead of seeking out the word of God and how it might apply to our decisions, we listen to the voices of people, practically giving them the same status as God. Instead of turning to the Lord in prayer, we turn to the opinions of worldly experience. We say to ourselves, “we must have made the right decision since it was the popular thing to do,” and in triumph we declare, “We have performed the commandment of the Lord!” In the meantime, the Lord is smacking His head at our rationalistic refusal to follow His simple commands or help those who are trying.

King Saul found himself in such a situation in 1 Samuel 15. God had given him some very simple instructions. “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey’” (1 Samuel 15:2-3). Did Saul and the people do what God said to do? The text says, “But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed” (1 Samuel 15:9). In other words, they destroyed what they thought was worthless, but they kept what they thought was valuable. (They were going to save them some money!) They “obeyed” God’s word as it pleased them, but when it didn’t, they didn’t; such isn’t obedience.

Leaders must not listen to others when they have a command from God. Their only task is to carry out the command. Any other act on the part of the leader is already compromise. Instead, leaders should be concerned with facilitating God’s commands, that is, making it easier for others to obey, not making it more difficult, which they often do by putting roadblocks in the way of good works in the name of saving money, or some “good” thing. We need to get ourselves out of the way and do God’s will instead of following our own justifications as to why we can’t do God’s will.

Oh, but we have good intentions! “Good motives” do not count when we are frustrating God’s commands. Really, so-called “good motives” are just rationalizations for why we don’t have to obey God. I’m sure the people and king Saul thought they had good motives. They saved all the good things, but that is not what God wanted. He simply wanted them to obey. (God has His own good motives!) King Saul even added an additional good motive, “We will sacrifice these animals to the Lord!” (1 Samuel 15:21). A person cannot justify his disobedience to God by saying that he will do something good with his disobedience.

God’s response to Saul’s rationalizations was complete rejection. “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Today’s church leaders should take note: The church has a chief shepherd to which shepherds’ must answer—Christ Jesus (1 Peter 5:4). They better be answering to Him right now instead of waiting for the day of judgment. It will be too late to change the decision then, and they will be completely rejected like Samuel. Leaders can find all kinds of reasons to compromise. Instead, let’s be convicted with the word of God, and do what God says.