

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus" — John 12:21

Learning To Yield to One Another

Let me first of all say that in matters of the faith -- such as in God's plan of salvation, the elements to be used for the Lord's Supper, or the proper view toward stealing, for examples -- there is no room for compromise; but in some matters of indifference, one must be willing and able to compromise at times.

I read a little illustration recently about two children who had been in a squabble. The mother, trying to put an end to their commotion, said, "Hush! You two children are always quarreling. Why can't you agree once in a while?" In response, her wrangling son explained, "We do agree, Mama. Joan wants the largest piece of cake and so do I."

Undoubtedly, Joan and her brother were in need of learning a lesson about compromise -- to have the willingness to give in to the other's wishes.

I've often heard people say to others, "You always must have your own way." When the real irony to this is that those who say such are usually totally unaware of all the times in which that person had respectfully bowed to the whims, plans, or desires of others. I would imagine this often happens in the marriage relationship --but how often is it overlooked?

We must realize that it isn't the nature of a true Christian to always be "demanding one's rights" or to be inflexible in all matters of indifference. Jesus taught this principle when He said, "And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two" (Matt. 5:41). As we come to understand the background for this statement, we are made aware that the Romans, of whom the Jews were then in subjugation (and often with loathing and great reluctance), had the right, by law, to command a Jew to perform certain tasks, such as to carry the Roman's military baggage upon demand. Jesus, on the other hand, wanted His people to be willing to go beyond the bare essentials of what the law demanded of them: He wanted them to be willing to go "the extra mile"; and, by doing this, the Jew would also show by his actions that he was being compelled by a power beyond that of the Roman law; rather, he was being motivated by a power of love -- a power which also prompted humble servitude and continual faithfulness toward that ultimate object of the Christian's obedience, the Almighty God Himself.

In similar fashion, Jesus instructed, "And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also" (Matt. 5:4). Again, knowing the historical and cultural background of this will help us to better understand the application; and that was that, generally speaking, the Jew -- even the poorest of them -- would have more than one change of "shirt" ("tunic" or inner garment); but only one "coat" ("cloak" or outer garment); and, according to the law, this coat could not be kept over night by another who had received it as a surety or pledge. Exodus 22:26, 27 reads, "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious." So, by right, this cloak could not be permanently taken away; but Jesus is saying that the Christian needs to be willing to forgo some of his rights -- to be able to give up at times even those things which both God's Law and man's would allow.

This certainly was the attitude of Paul. He said, "Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13). The apostle was willing to give up that which he technically had the right to, lest it caused another to fall.

One way in learning to compromise in matters of indifference is by striving to truly apply what Paul writes in Philippians 2:3: "...let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." If we are esteeming one another the way God's word demands, it should be much easier to yield to another's plan, wishes, or appeals, out of deference for that individual. For we are to "not merely look out for" our "own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (v. 4); and "...we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let us each please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon Me'" (Rom. 15:1-3).

Paul strove to be "...all things to all men" that he might "...by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:19-23). In other words, as he states in the beginning of this passage: "...though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more."

But this certainly does not mean that Paul was ever a man-pleaser in the sense of compromising the truth of God's word, for to this he was adamantly opposed (Gal. 1:10; 2:5).

We need to remember, as someone once said, real "joy" means putting...

Jesus first,
Others second, and
Yourself last.

Even Jesus did not come into this world to be served, but rather to serve -- and to give His life as a ransom for all (Matt. 20:28). May we each strive to follow in His footsteps, to never compromise in matters of faith; but to be able to not always be so insistent on our own ways in matters of indifference. For as Christians, we are to "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18). And as Paul also writes to the Ephesians, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).

Yes, this is the way in which we need to yield to one another.

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Looking Back

Jesus turned the minds of his audience back to a familiar account when He said, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). Isn't it interesting that He didn't have to say, "Remember Lot's wife... you know, the one who became a pillar of salt." They knew her story. They may not have even known her name, but they knew her lot in life. Yet, they continued to turn back from God. In reflecting on this story, perhaps Jesus wanted the people to remember these lessons.

God does not ask you to do the impossible. There was nothing difficult about what He commanded Lot and his

family to do. "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you," was His message through the angel (Gen. 19:17). That was clear, simple, and straightforward, without any room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation. He didn't require them to do something they were incapable of doing. That's because His commandments do not create burdens, they relieve them. The burden is on us to prove otherwise.

God does not give partial credit. Lot's wife almost got it right. She escaped for her life, she left the city, she fled to the mountains. So far, so good. But she looked back and became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). With God, there is no such thing as partial obedience. To obey in part is to disobey. You can't pick and choose parts of His law that you want to follow and discard the rest. Do it all or you have done nothing at all.

God does assess punishment on those who disobey. She became a *pillar*. This woman became a testimony to all generations of what happens when you don't follow the commandments of the Lord. "It is our business to see that we do right. God will see that we come out right" (Donald Barnhouse). In due season, that is.

Remember Lot's wife. It's a story worth looking back at over and over again.



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