

Chapter 1

Compromise

The first of these principles is more familiar and readily apparent to Reformed believers than is the second. This is no doubt partly due to the fact that there is no shortage of compromise in nearly every aspect of religious life today. Those who are convinced of reformation Christianity tend to be very sensitive at this point and can usually spot religious compromise a mile away.

What exactly do we mean when we speak of compromise? It can be simply defined as the sacrificing of principles for the sake of gaining what is judged to be a greater good.

Such practice is prevalent in contemporary Christianity—even among evangelicals. We have witnessed the compromise of the Scripture's infallibility, inerrancy, and authority for the sake of appearing intellectually respectable to proponents of historical-critical ideology. We are seeing compromise of the biblically defined male-female role relationships in the face of increasingly militant feminist

theology. Indeed, our generation has been confronted with the compromise of the gospel itself by those who have capitulated to the false standards of successful church growth.

Compromise abounds, and in our culture the gospel minister is tempted by it at nearly every point in the ongoing discharge of his duties. But such temptations are hardly new. The Bible records many examples of God's servants being tempted to sacrifice their principles. The essence of Satan's dealings with our Lord in the wilderness may be seen in these terms. In each of his three attacks, he tempted Jesus to compromise God's eternal plan for the ages.

The temptation to compromise does not always come openly and overtly. Rather, it often confronts us subtly and sometimes incrementally. The encounter between Moses and Pharaoh is very instructive in this. The recorded dialog between the monarch of Egypt and the prophet of God provides us with a great study of a man of God's uncompromising allegiance to the word of God in the face of subtle temptation to do otherwise.

Moses had a commission from God to deliver the word of the Lord to Pharaoh and to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. In Exodus 3:18, we have the exact message the prophet was to deliver to Pharaoh: "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God."

This message left Pharaoh unimpressed, and he refused the Lord's command to let the Israelites go. Despite Egypt's

rivers running with blood and the land being overrun with frogs and infested with lice, the king of Egypt stubbornly maintained his position. Pharaoh's obstinacy did begin to waver a little after God sent the fourth plague into his kingdom, and he reached a point where he was willing to speak with Moses again.

He offered Moses the first of four concessions. It is the first of four attempts he makes to get Moses to compromise the commission God had given to him.

Exodus 8:25–27 records the exchange that took place:

Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God are an abomination to Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us."

Notice what Pharaoh is doing. He is tempting Moses to compromise God's Word. "Moses, your insistence on having your way about this thing is creating a great deal of hardship and stress in the community and among the very people you are trying to help—not to mention the mental anguish you yourself must be experiencing. This difficult situation in which we find ourselves can all be over if you will bend just a little. You want to lead your people to sacrifice? Great! Do it. Just do it here in Egypt. That's not so terrible, is it? Your God can be worshiped just as easily here as anywhere else, can't He?"

When this approach does not succeed, Pharaoh tries a different tactic in verse 28: “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away.” In other words, “Okay, you may leave the borders, but you really don’t need to go three days away, do you? Outside the country is outside the country. Just stay close.”

Moses again was not persuaded. God had given very specific instructions that the people were to travel three days beyond Egypt before they offered their sacrifices. Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened. Four plagues later, he tries again to get Moses to compromise. Exodus 10:8–11 tells us how.

So Moses and Aaron were brought again to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, serve the LORD your God. But which ones are to go?” Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and our daughters and with our flocks and our herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.” But he said to them, “The LORD be with you if I ever let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. No! Go, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you are asking.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

Once again, we must not miss what is going on. Pharaoh is lowering his demands. He is offering Moses an alternative, a solution to their problem. The issue is that Pharaoh’s solution would compromise God’s clear directive.

The same kind of effort is made shortly afterward: “Then Pharaoh called to Moses and said, ‘Go, serve the LORD;

your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind” (Ex. 10:24–26).

Once again, Moses refuses. What is going on here? What are we to make of these exchanges?

Here is Moses, preaching a message and taking a stand that made him a troubler in both Israel and Egypt. Everyone is upset with him. The Egyptians are upset because of the terrible plagues they have suffered at his proclamations. The Israelites are mad because this kinsman of theirs, this spokesman for God’s people, has made them a scourge to their taskmasters and has actually made their existence in Egypt more difficult. Because of Moses, they now have to make bricks without the provision of straw.

In the midst of this, Pharaoh offers to give Moses some leeway. As far as negotiation goes, Pharaoh makes some great concessions—from prohibiting any sacrifices to allowing those sacrifices to be offered inside the borders of Egypt to suggesting that they go just a little beyond the border to allowing them to go the whole way yet without their children to finally letting them go if only they will leave their livestock behind.

Why doesn’t Moses go along? Is he being obstinate? Is he unreasonable? Is he some kind of narrow-minded crank? No, he is a man bound by the clear directives of God’s word. He refuses to compromise that word under any threat or enticement. He has been commissioned, and he will not, he cannot, sacrifice the word of God at Pharaoh’s bargaining table. He is no legislator of God’s word. He is a mere