

11. Settling for far less

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I heard a story of a young boy who was taken to a toy store by his daddy for the good grade from his school. Daddy told him, "You studied hard, so you've earned your toy. Choose what you want." The boy was not quite sure which one to choose. He looked at the price tags of some really fancy toys, but he didn't dare to point them out to his daddy. So he timidly settled for far less than what he really wanted.

His daddy was surprised by his choice, but he didn't say anything. On the way home, daddy looked at his son who was playing with his new toy and said, "Son, I thought you'd want to have a more fancy and expensive toy. I'd have bought it for you."

Like that boy, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh chose to settle for far less than what God had in mind for them, because they didn't have God's will for them in their hearts. We, too, often choose to settle for far less than what the Lord's will is for us.

I like what the late D.L. Moody said, "Spread out your petition before God, and then say, 'Your will, not mine, be done.'" Moody concluded, "The sweetest lesson I have learned in God's school is to let the Lord choose for me."

A. THE LAW CONCERNING VOWS

Chapter 30 is regarding the law concerning vows for the Israelites. When the Israel men made promises to God, they had to keep their promises and nobody could cancel them, but what about the women? This chapter deals with it. But I believe that we can apply some of these concepts to our 21st Century life, not only for women, but also men. Someone said, "Making a promise is a lot like having a baby. It is easy to make, but hard to deliver."

We are living in the society where our words don't mean a whole lot. The foundations of society today are eroding because of unkept promises, whether they be official contracts, marriage vows, political pledges, or words spoken even in casual manner.

I believe that the Lord teaches us to be men and women of promise. Once we give our word, we should keep it no matter what, even if it becomes disadvantageous to us, of course, with the exception of the promises that are against the Word of God. The Lord will honor our effort and bless us.

B. VENGEANCE ON THE MIDIANITES

Numbers 31:1-2 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people."

Numbers 31:8 They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed--Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.

This battle was part of a "holy war", not 'jihad', that the Lord had declared against Midian because Midian had led Israel into sin. Certainly Israel was responsible for disobeying God and engaging in idolatry and immorality, and God punished them for it, but Midian was the instigator, and such offenses must be punished.

Matthew 18:7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

The church has no mandate from God to engage in “holy wars” because we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

As we learned Balaam was the one who told the Midianite king Balak to use their women and idols to cause idolatry within the camp of Israel. According to Joshua 13:22, and Numbers 31:8, the Israelites were able to kill Balaam the soothsayer with the sword.

C. NOT SO FAST

Numbers 31:12-16 Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. 13 And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp. 14 But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle. 15 And Moses said to them: “Have you kept all the women alive? 16 Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord.

While the men of Midian were killed by the Israel soldiers, the women and children were spared by them as plunder in the beginning. But Moses commanded that only the virgin women who were thus innocent of the immorality at Peor could be spared; the guilty women and the boys who might endanger the inheritance rights of Israelite men were to be put to death. The nation had won the battle but was now in danger of losing the victory.

How often did they have to be reminded that a compromise is not worth all the consequences they had to go through? How often do we have to be reminded that our compromise is the first step to full-blown sin against the Lord and the loved ones.

Though most Israelites thought these women were harmless, but they were more dangerous to Israel than an army of mighty warriors. Israel could overcome mighty warriors if they were spiritually and physically strong; but they were seduced into immorality and idolatry by these women.

We often think of many things as dangerous to us as Christians – hostile government, secular humanism, legal and media industry attack, and so forth. But the things we accept in our midst as Christians that open the door to immorality and idolatry can do far more real damage than any of those other things.

I like what Charles Spurgeon said, “Anything, in fact, will serve as an excuse, when the heart is bent on compromise.”

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

D. SETTLING FOR FAR LESS

Numbers 32:1-5 Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock; and when they saw the land of Jazer and the

land of Gilead, that indeed the region was a place for livestock, 2 the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, 3 "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, and Beon, 4 the country which the Lord defeated before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." 5 Therefore they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession. Do not take us over the Jordan."

A successful community or nation depends not only on keeping our word and trusting God for victory, but it also depends on the loyalty of people to each other. Perhaps our word "patriotism" best describes this attitude, as long as we don't turn love of country into idolatry.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh decided that it was good for them to settle on the east side of the Jordan river because the land was good for their livestock. In other words, it was more beneficial for their checking account and stock portfolio to stay out of God's will than being in His will.

This is the second stanza of the same song by Lot, the nephew of Abraham. What am I talking about?

Genesis 13:8-13 So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." 10 And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. 11 Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. 12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.

What were the common denominators between what Lot did and these two and a half tribes?

- 1) They didn't seek the Lord
- 2) They didn't care what the Lord had for them.
- 3) They chose to settle for far less than what they could have in the Lord, because what they saw was good to their eyes.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.

- 4) They didn't care about the consequences of their carnal decisions.

As you know, Lot eventually moved into the city of Sodom and was living miserably. He ended up having two sons by his own two daughters. As part of the kingdom of Israel, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, the half tribe of Manasseh were conquered by the Assyrians, and they were exiled before any other tribes.

We've all heard it so many times it has basically become a cliché: "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life!" Supposed cliché or not, this is an absolutely true statement. It's true for all of humanity, true for all of us.

Jeremiah 29:11-12 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

Isn't that encouraging? It's true. God loves you. God has a good plan for you. God has a future and hope for you. God wants to use you and He wants you to make your mark in some way. You may be known to millions, thousands, hundreds, or maybe only a handful, but God has a purpose for your life. You are significant to Him.

The question is this: do you want to reach your potential as a Christian instead of someone like Lot or the people from the tribes of Reuben and Gad? Do you want to cross the finish line in the spiritual race, or are you going to self-destruct? You might be surprised to know that you have everything to say about that.

Maybe you're being tempted right now. Maybe you've already acted on it. Never fear, God will forgive you – if you repent. Acknowledge that you have done wrong, and God will give you a second chance. He has a plan for you. All you need to do is follow Him.

E. HOW DO WE KNOW THE WILL OF GOD?

If we want to know the will of God, our attitude needs to be right. Here are some guidelines as to how we can play our part in arriving at right decisions:

1) We must be willing to think.

God made us thinking beings, and He guides our minds as we think things out in His presence through His Word.

2) We must be willing to think ahead and weigh the long-term consequences of alternative courses of action.

Often we can only see what is wise and right, and what is foolish and wrong, as we think through the long-term issues.

3) We must be willing to take godly advice.

There are always people who know the Bible, human nature, and our own gifts and limitations better than we do. To say, "No" to godly advices is saying, "Yes" to the unnecessary consequences that follows.

4) We must be willing to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves.

We must ask ourselves why we feel a particular course of action will be right and make ourselves give reasons.

5) We must be willing to wait on the Lord.

"Wait on the Lord" is a constant refrain in the Psalms and it is a necessary word, because the Lord often keeps us waiting. While we wait on the Lord, we get to know His heart and His will; and we get to grow in godly characters. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Our seemingly minor compromise to a sin is a giant step away from the Lord's will.

2) To know God's will is a treasure to us. But to do God's will is a privilege for us.