

“Compromise”

Psalm 8; Acts 15:1-11

August 18, 2024

Introduction

- I remember being taken to a fight years ago.
- It was James “The Bonecrusher” Smith, I’ll never forget the nickname versus some Panamanian.
 - o The Panamanian was the favored fighter but the Bonecrusher was a local kid who we were all pulling for.
- It was a great bout, with the Panamanian boxer fighting in colored pants.
 - o It wasn’t a snoozefest. The guys threw punches but through 15 rounds, there was no knockout.
- I’ll never forget, Harold Johnson, a local sports announcer gave the results of the bout, the Panamanian boxer won.
 - o Everyone threw beer at Harold as he announced the victory for the other guy.
- Fights are fun, right? They’re fun to watch, even if they shouldn’t be, perhaps.
 - o But fights aren’t generally the best way to solve issues, are they?
 - Sometimes we need to fight but, much of the time, we’re far better off coming up with a compromise.

John and Anna

- I should know, one of my life-long friends and I made a compromise years ago that I think worked for us all.
- Anna, cute redhead that we both liked.
- We agreed that neither one of us should try to go out with her as we were all great friends.
 - o To this day, John is still a guy I talk to deeply about significant matters as they arrive, a true, life-long friend.
 - It was a compromise and a good one.

Way to take this Sermon Wrong

- I’m NOT asking you to compromise on your Christian values or nature, that’s not the point of this sermon so if that’s what you’re taking away from it, speak to me afterwards as I’ve taken you down a wrong path.
- But there are, I think we’ll agree, occasions where finding a solution other than fighting is a good idea.
 - o In fact, sometimes, it is our compromises that lead us to the best possible outcomes if we’ll but listen to others, prayerfully consider alternatives.

The Situation

- Acts, as we know, sees the expansion of the church from Jerusalem outward.
- As we know, Paul has now for over 10 years been evangelizing the Gentiles and seeing amazing things by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - o New life, being disseminated among the people.
- Now, Paul returns to Jerusalem with great news – God is doing marvelous things through the Gentiles.
- Some men come and say, “hang on a second.”
 - o You need to be Jewish to be saved.
 - It isn’t sufficient to follow Jesus, you must do outward things as well.
- This posed a big threat to the Gospel.
 - o Circumcision wasn’t particularly popular, as you might well imagine, especially considering sanitation wasn’t particularly great for surgeries back then.
 - o This inclusion of the Jewish law could’ve sunk the Gospel.
 - But it need not as the Spirit was already doing great things among the people of God.
- Isn’t it interesting to note that these people were from the Pharisee faction of new believers.

- Sometimes, works based righteousness is so hard to get away from that even new life can't keep it from rearing its ugly head again.

- So, the situation was contentious.

The Big Question

- Is Grace sufficient?
- This is the heart of the matter.
 - What one side say was grace, given and shared by Jesus Christ, manifested in new life in the believer is the only thing necessary for salvation.
 - Another side would say you definitely need grace, BUT YOU ALSO REQUIRE something else.
 - What that something else is, though, could be any number of things, some even sounding quite good or right?
 - For example, BAPTISM.
 - Is baptism necessary for salvation.
 - NO! It is only an outward sign of an invisible grace. The grace is there invisibly BEFORE the application of water.
 - It's not like instamatic.
 - But there are other things,
 - Churches sometimes require tithing or any number of things.
- What the Jerusalem council ultimately affirms is a center point of why I'm a Presbyterian,
 - Grace alone.
 - One of the soles of our faith.
 - **Grace Alone (Sola Gratia)** is the heartbeat of the Reformed faith—a declaration that God's unmerited favor is the foundation of our salvation. It proclaims that we, in our brokenness, cannot earn or achieve righteousness on our own. Our good works, our moral striving, our religious rituals—all fall short of the glory of God. Yet, in His infinite love and mercy, God reaches down to us. He meets us not because of who we are, but in spite of who we are.
 - Grace alone means that God initiates, sustains, and completes our salvation from beginning to end. It is the gift of a God who sees us in our most desperate need and does not wait for us to climb up to Him, but instead, through Christ, He descends to us. Grace alone reminds us that salvation is not a transaction but a gift—a gift that comes not because we deserve it, but because God is good,
 - When we say "grace alone," we are declaring that the whole of our Christian life rests in the hands of a gracious God. Our past, our present, our future—all held together by His undeserved kindness. Grace is what saves us, grace is what keeps us, and grace is what will one day bring us into His eternal presence. So, we stand not on our own merits, but on the unshakeable foundation of God's amazing grace.

But notice this, while grace alone is upheld, a compromise is made to ensure cohesion at the local level.

The Compromise

- Now, while upholding grace alone, the Jerusalem council couldn't deeply offend Jewish Christians.
 - There were several practices that were considered so instructive that they were not to be left behind.
 - Not as substitutes for grace because this wasn't about salvation, it was about interconnected.
 - Jewish believers living and working alongside Gentile believers required sensitivity.
 - Further, there were somethings that were just beyond the pale of the church. Somethings were so outside the bounds of normalcy that they couldn't faithfully be included.

- **Acts 15:19-20** – *“Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.”*
 - o The idol meat, Paul is going to cover in First Corinthians, it isn't that we can't eat it it's that we shouldn't eat it because it might confuse new believers.
 - o Sexual immorality was considered to be beyond the pale.
 - Think about this in light of recent church “Revelations” that sexuality was always considered to be a dangerous area and that licentiousness should always be avoided.
- The church fashioned a compromise that upheld what was necessary, what made for good partnerships between Gentiles and Jews and allowed the church to GROW, GROW, GROW.
- Compromise can be a tricky concept for Christians. On one hand, we are called to stand firm in our faith, holding to the truths of the Gospel. On the other hand, we live in a world that requires collaboration, negotiation, and sometimes even concession. How do we, as Christians, navigate this tension? When is it appropriate to compromise, and how can we do so faithfully without compromising our core beliefs?

Section 1: Understanding Compromise in a Biblical Context

- What Compromise Is and Isn't:
 - o *Compromise* is a tool for building relationships, fostering peace, and working together with others, especially in areas where differences do not strike at the heart of the Gospel.
 - o *It is about finding common ground in areas of preference or wisdom rather than fundamental moral or theological truths.*
 - o *Compromise is not* the abandonment of truth or a surrender of core Christian convictions. We are not called to compromise on matters that define our faith, such as the deity of Christ, the authority of Scripture, or the call to live a holy life.

Section 2: When to Compromise as a Christian

- Compromise in Matters of Preference or Practice:
- In areas of personal preference, tradition, or non-essential matters of faith, compromise can be a way to promote unity and peace.
- Romans 14 speaks to this, encouraging Christians to be flexible in matters of eating, drinking, and special days, emphasizing love and edification over rigid personal standards.
 - o Example: In church life, this might mean compromising on worship styles, service times, or non-essential practices that reflect different cultural backgrounds. The goal is to seek the good of the community rather than insist on our own way (Philippians 2:3-4).
- Compromise in Relationships:
 - o In our relationships—whether in marriage, family, friendships, or workplace interactions—compromise is essential for healthy, loving connections.
 - o **Ephesians 4:2-3** calls us to be *"completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*
 - o Compromise here means listening well, valuing the perspectives of others, and being willing to yield on non-essential issues out of love. It reflects the humility and servant-heartedness of Christ, who did not cling to His rights but emptied Himself for our sake (Philippians 2:5-8).

Section 3: How to Compromise Faithfully

- Keep Christ at the Center:
 - o Any compromise must be evaluated through the lens of Christ's teachings and example. Does this compromise reflect Christ's love, humility, and commitment to truth? Does it help advance the Gospel, promote peace, or build others up? If not, it's worth reconsidering.
- Prayer and Discernment:

- Seek God's wisdom in prayer when faced with decisions that require compromise. James 1:5 promises that God gives wisdom generously to those who ask. Use discernment to ensure that any compromise honors God and upholds the integrity of your faith.
- Draw Clear Boundaries:
 - While we should be flexible on non-essential matters, there are boundaries that cannot be crossed. We must not compromise on core truths of the faith, moral integrity, or obedience to God's commands. For example, when faced with ethical decisions in the workplace, Christians must refuse to compromise their integrity, even if it costs them (Daniel 3:16-18).
 - Be Courageous: When compromise would lead to sin or undermine your witness for Christ, stand firm.
 - Ephesians 6:13 encourages us to "*take up the full armor of God*" so that we can stand our ground when needed.
- Pursue Peace, Not People-Pleasing:
 - The goal of compromise is not to please everyone but to promote peace and unity where possible.
 - **Romans 12:18** says, "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*" This recognizes that peace may not always be possible, especially when truth is at stake. Avoid the trap of people-pleasing, which can lead to unhealthy or unfaithful compromises.
- Instead, pursue a peace that is rooted in truth and love, reflecting the reconciling work of Christ.

Conclusion: Compromise as a Reflection of Christ.

- In a world of conflicting values and perspectives, Christians are called to navigate the tension between standing firm in faith and showing grace through compromise. Compromise, when done faithfully, reflects the love, humility, and wisdom of Christ. It is a tool for building bridges, maintaining unity, and advancing the Gospel in a broken world. But it must always be rooted in prayer, discernment, and an unwavering commitment to the truth of God's Word.