

## Convenience or Conviction

By Al Felder

*“<sup>25</sup>Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. <sup>26</sup>And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: <sup>27</sup>If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. <sup>28</sup>Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. <sup>29</sup>And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. <sup>30</sup>And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. <sup>31</sup>And he made a house of high places, and made priest of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. <sup>32</sup>And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. <sup>33</sup>So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense. (1 Kings 12:25-33)*

The wise king Solomon died around 931 BC. Upon his death, his son Rehoboam ascended to the throne of Israel. Solomon completed many building projects during his reign – the most notable of which was the Temple. All of the projects had placed a heavy burden on the people physically and financially. Naturally, they were looking for relief from their burden. When Rehoboam became king the people hoped that he would ease their burden.

After Rehoboam took the throne, the people approached him and asked if he would ease the burden that had been placed upon them by his father. Rehoboam consulted with his advisors. His older advisors told him to heed the peoples request while his young advisors told him to increase the burden in order to show his strength. Well, Rehoboam listened to his younger advisors, and he told the people that he would increase their burden. As a result, ten of the twelve tribes rebelled against the king.

Prior to this event, God had already appointed Jeroboam to be the king of the ten tribes that rebelled against Rehoboam. This was due to God’s judgment against Solomon for his idolatry. The tribes of Benjamin and Judah remained with Rehoboam while the other ten tribes followed Jeroboam. At this point the ten northern tribes became Israel while the two southern tribes became Judah.

God made a promise to Jeroboam similar to the one he made David. God told Jeroboam that as long as he followed God’s commands his line would continue to rule over Israel. Jeroboam, however, did not have confidence in the promise of the Lord. He became afraid that

when the people went to Jerusalem to worship God they would once again return unto Rehoboam. In order to prevent this from happening, Jeroboam started his own religion.

The Bible tells us that Jeroboam pleaded with the people and convinced them that it was too much for them to have to travel to Jerusalem to worship God. He made golden calves, and set them in Dan and Bethel. He made a house, and appointed his own priests. He even made his own feast to go along with his false religion. It was a religion of convenience.

Today, we are living in a world filled with conveniences. These conveniences come from the technology that we enjoy. Pretty much everything relies on computers today. Computers allow people to perform jobs faster than they could in the past. Mechanics can diagnose car trouble quicker by using computers to do scans. It is also easier for adults to get their college education thanks to online classes. Communication is faster, and access to information is instantaneous thanks to the internet.

Conveniences are not inherently evil, but they can lead us to develop unhealthy spiritual attitudes. There are no shortcuts to salvation or spiritual growth. Nor can we substitute our convenient ways for God's commands. If we are not careful we will become like the children of Israel. We will convince ourselves that God's way requires too much, and we will replace it with our own brand of religion.

The conflict of convenience verses conviction in religion is not new. Throughout the Bible we can read about God's expectations of man, and Satan's attempt to convince people to make things more convenient for themselves. In fact, we find the first instance of this happening in the very beginning. *"<sup>4</sup>And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: <sup>5</sup>For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."* (Genesis 1:4, 5) Satan convinced Eve that the shortcut to godliness was eating the forbidden fruit. In other words, she and Adam could forgo all of the hard work of spiritual growth. One bite verses a lifetime of service. Eve chose convenience.

True service unto God, however, is not a matter of convenience. Instead it is a matter of conviction. *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."* (Hebrews 11:4) Cain's sacrifice was one of convenience. He ignored God's command and did what was easier for him. Abel, on the other hand, obeyed the command of God and made the proper sacrifice.

It was also by faith that Noah prepared the ark. *"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared the ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."* (Hebrews 11:7) This was certainly no easy task. From beginning to end it took Noah one hundred years to complete this project. Not only was it time consuming and physically draining; Noah became the laughing stock of the world because of his obedience to God.

Abraham too possessed conviction when it came to serving God. *“<sup>8</sup>By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing wither he went. <sup>9</sup>By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: <sup>10</sup>For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”* (Hebrews 11:8-10) He was willing to leave behind everything that he knew to serve God. He left his homeland where he could have had a comfortable life, and spent his days wandering around living out of tents.

Moses’ brother Aaron chose convenience. *“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”* (Exodus 32:1) Instead of standing up to the people, and encouraging them to do what was right; Aaron gave into their request.

Joseph had conviction in his service to God. *“And it came to pass after these things, that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.”* (Genesis 39:7) Joseph certainly was no stranger to adversity. He was in his current situation because his brother had sold him into slavery. Despite all that he had been through, he remained faithful unto God. As a result, he had risen to prominence within the house of his master. When his master’s wife wanted him to commit adultery with her Joseph refused. In order to get revenge, his master’s wife falsely accused him and had him cast into prison. Joseph chose conviction over convenience.

At one point in his life David chose convenience over conviction. *“<sup>9</sup>And when they came unto the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. <sup>10</sup>And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God.”* (1 Chronicles 13:9, 10) The Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be carried by staves on the shoulders of the Levites. David did not heed God’s word on this matter. Instead, he choose to place it on a cart pulled by oxen out of convenience. As a result of his actions, a man lost his life.

Daniel is one person who never chose the convenient route. He always obeyed God no matter how difficult things got. *“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”* (Daniel 6:10) At this time Daniel was a captive in the Persian Empire. He was favored by the king above all of the other advisors. Naturally, this lead to jealousy from the other advisors. They tried to find fault with Daniel, but none could be found. Finally, they devised a plan to make it unlawful for Daniel to pray to God. Instead of obeying the command, Daniel prayed to God just as he had always done.

On this occasion, Daniel's conviction caused him to be cast into a lion's den. God took care of Daniel, and he survived without harm. He was restored to his position of prominence, and his enemies were destroyed. Had he chosen, however, he certainly could have made things easier for himself. Doing so would have been an issue of convenience, not conviction. Daniel simply wasn't that type of man.

For the first time in our country we are starting to experience some of what Daniel experienced. People are now fired, sued, or even imprisoned for their religious beliefs. How will we handle such adversity? Will we show conviction, or will we seek convenience?

As parents, we have to make sure that our children do not become complacent and choose a convenient path. *"And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel. <sup>10</sup>And also all the generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel."* (Judges 2:7, 10) Under the leadership of Joshua, the children of Israel fought many battles in service to God. There were many obstacles and challenges that they had to face. Their offspring, however, did not have those challenges to overcome. As a result, they became complacent and moved away from God.

The same thing can still happen today. As we face challenges in living the Christian life, they help us grow stronger in our service to God. The sacrifices that we make in serving God build a sense of value in our Christianity. It is this sense of value that causes us to dig down deep, and hold on to our faith when things get rough. As we have children, we have to make sure that we seek to instill this value in them. Otherwise, as they get older they will be like the generation in Judges who forsook God.

The fact of the matter is that there are many aspects of the Christian life that require us to place aside what may be convenient. *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."* (Hebrews 10:25) We are required to assemble with a faithful congregation upon the first day of the week to worship God in spirit and in truth. This may be inconvenient for people at times. It may get in the way of vacations, sporting events, or work. There are many modern day Jeroboam's who would tell us that it's too much for us to have to attend service every Sunday. Yet, the scriptures are clear regarding what God expects.

We could further talk about studying the word of God, prayer, and giving of our means. All of these things are required by God of His people, and they all require sacrifices on our behalf. Studying God's word and prayer both require time and effort. There may be times when it is not convenient to do these things. We may be busy, or there is something else we would rather do. In those instances will we choose convenience or conviction?

One of the big issues is our involvement. *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself*

*unspotted from the world.”* (James 1:27) How involved are we? Living the Christian life requires action on our part. It is not enough to keep to ourselves, and try not to do anything bad. We have to be busy in well-doing. God requires His people to tend to the needs of others, and declare the Gospel to those who are lost.

God’s wisdom is contrary to the wisdom of man. *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”* (1 Corinthians 1:18) The way of salvation is straight and narrow. It requires complete submission and surrender to God. It is not the popular choice, or the choice that will make you look wise before the world. In fact, the opposite is often true. People will look down upon you and think that you are foolish.

The Christian life is a life of conviction. Our faith and actions must be based on what is true, right, good, and holy; not what is easy or feels good. Commitment to the Lord and to the work of the local church requires conviction – not convenience.

Don’t be like Felix. *“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”* (Acts 24:25) Don’t wait for a convenient time. If you are waiting for a time when you are no longer tempted, a time when you don’t have to sacrifice as much, a time when Satan will get out of your way; then you are waiting for a time that will never come.