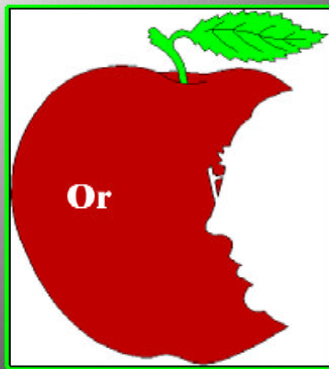


Necessary Compromise?



Outright Sin?

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On-The-Job Duty? Or Sinful Compromise?

By Duane V. Maxey

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"Neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22).

The above scripture makes it clear that Christians must not so compromise their behavior as to become guilty of taking part in the sins of others.

"In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing" (2 Kings 5:18).

This scripture involves a requested, on-the-job indulgence to do what otherwise would have clearly been a sin, if not connected with what Naaman perceived to be his unavoidable duty.

Is it possible to sin guiltlessly "under protest"? -- viz., to do a thing that would in itself be sinful if one was not compelled to do it as a part of one's job, or circumstance, but which is not accounted to a person by God as sin because it was necessary?

When we read the story of Naaman we are first told of his good character, high position, and bravery: -- 2 Kings 5:1 "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour," -- and then we are told of the one huge blot on his being: -- "but he was a leper."

Next we read the story of his trip to visit Elisha seeking the healing of his leprosy, of his proud rage when told to dip seven times in muddy, old Jordan, his listening to reason, and his happy healing after he humbled himself and complied.

But, in my mind, what occurred next has always cast a shadow on the happy story, this being the matter recorded in II Kings 5:18 above, wherein Naaman requested that God not count it to him as a sin when he too bowed before the idol Rimmon with his master, that bowing being a necessary part of his job when steadying the King of Syria as he bowed before that idol.

The reason Naaman's request for an indulgence in this matter has always overshadowed the story in my mind is that it has struck me as something very close to a compromise with evil -- like a new convert making an excuse for continuing to do an evil thing as a matter of necessity on the job.

I must admit that at this point in the story I am always "pulling for Naaman" and wanting him to continue under the Divine favor, and I say to myself, "Well, I guess maybe he couldn't help it. It was his job to steady the old, idolatrous king, and even though Naaman did physically bow before the idol, in his heart he was not doing so, and therefore God must have overlooked this act as sinless, even though outwardly it looked bad."

Still, I should always have felt better about this story if Naaman had so utterly renounced idolatry when he embraced Israel's God that he had said: **"In this thing regarding when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, I will tell him that I can no longer bow with him before that Idol, even to merely steady him when he does so, for I am now a worshipper of the one, true God who healed me of leprosy!"**

Yes, if the rejoicing and grateful Naaman had thus stated his intentions, I should always have classed him in my mind as on a par with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who bravely refused to bow before the golden image, and who defied the fiery rage of Nebuchadnezzar, saying: **"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up"** (Dan 3:16-18).

In "pulling for Naaman," I should have rejoiced if he had been as clear-cut in his renunciation of idolatry as the 3 Hebrew Children in the fiery furnace, or as stalwart as Daniel in the lion's den, or as courageous as Mordecai when he refused to bow before Haman! We are told that Naaman was honorable, and that he was brave in battle, and I should like to have seen a bit more bravery from him in this matter also. Instead, to my disappointment and perhaps to that of many others likewise, he requested God's indulgence for what he felt to be a necessary on-the-job compromise.

Did God allow this compromise? Who can tell? God's Word is actually silent on the matter. Following Naaman's request for a Divine indulgence in the matter, Elisha merely told him: "Go in peace," and Naaman departed, nothing more about the matter being said. Therefore, we cannot say of a certainty that God either condoned or condemned Naaman's proposed indulgence. The thing requested by him lay in "a gray area" which, as I see it, bordered dangerously close to being a compromise with sin. For all we know, it could have been the means of Satan leading this healed man back into the actual worship of the idol Rimmon, but even if this was not the case, his

compromised action may have at least hidden from the view of others Naaman's testimony as a worshipper and servant of Israel's God.

But Naaman's requested indulgence brings to mind the whole question about whether one can do various things as on-the-job necessities that would otherwise be sin. Consider the following questions along this line:

(1) Can a Christian, check-out employee in a grocery store sinlessly ring-up sales on beer, wine, and tobacco as necessary, on-the-job duties? when, if he (or she) owned the store and sold such items, it would be clearly sinful? I think not.

(2) Can a Christian trucker sinlessly haul a load of new slot-machines to a casino in Vegas as an on-the-job duty when, if he owned the truck or trucking-business doing that hauling he would clearly be committing sin? Again, I think not.

(3) Could a Christian Detective on a Police Department sinlessly pose in godless attire (or lack thereof) smoke pot, and both use and listen to filthy talk in the effort to infiltrate some dangerous underground group that threatens our nation? I say, No.

(4) Can a Christian clerk in a department store sinlessly ring-up sales for pornographic videos, books, or magazines any more than he or she could stock and sell those items if an owner of the store? I say Nay!

(5) Could a Christian woman sinlessly work as an airline stewardess, serving drinks and showing filthy films on-board the plane as an on-the-job, "necessary evil"? Absolutely not!

(6) Could a Christian Taxi-Cab Driver sinlessly convey passengers to known houses of ill-repute as an on-the-job duty, any more than he could drive his teenage son or daughter to such vile destinations? I trow not.

In many cases such moral questions and decisions are not nearly as gray and indistinct to sanctified saints "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14), -- even though new Christians sometimes wrestle with their conscience in those areas. According to the Bible, it is never possible to sinlessly "do evil that good may come." However, there ARE some on-the-job decisions that are not as easily decided, even by older Christians.

For example:

(7) Can a Christian Educator sinlessly expel a Christian student from a public school for violating a ban on prayer with other students in the hallway or classroom during school hours? especially when failure to enforce such rules would cause that educator to be fired? What do you say?

What if that Educator had a wife who was gravely ill, and his dismissal would mean the loss of her necessary medical coverage if he was fired for failure to enforce the ban? What if the

violating, professed-Christian student was actually a Mormon-zealot, a Moony, a so-called Jehovah's Witness, or a member of some other false cult? Would THAT justify the Christian Educator in enforcing the prayer-ban?

Perhaps to some, the right answer to even the above questions would not be a bit difficult, and they would immediately say that under no circumstances would they, or could they, uphold any ban on prayer in a public school -- even if it meant losing their job and the loss of all fringe benefits to those in their family. Still, I think that any honest person must admit that there ARE some moral decisions that Christians are compelled to make regarding their jobs that require the very personal persuasion and direction of the Holy Spirit. But, when in doubt, the decision should always be made in God's favor.

In Conclusion:-- Naaman the Syrian felt compelled by his on-the-job duty to steady his idolatrous king as he bowed before the Idol Rimmon. I wish he had not felt so compelled, and that he had taken a clear-cut stand against idolatry, like those mentioned above. I will admit that there ARE some gray areas in the arena of moral decisions, and there ARE some things in those areas about which some folks are too nit-picky and judgmental toward others. However, my guess is that too many folks make too many excuses for compromising with evil on-the-job, when God would bless both themselves and their influence far more if they clearly and completely separated themselves from those supposedly, necessary indulgences and practices! What think ye? Your feedback is invited.

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THE END