

# “Are You Seeking the Favor of Men, or of God?”

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Galatians 1:10 “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.”

The temptation to shave the rough edges off of God’s truth in order to make it more acceptable to a broader audience is a continual problem for God’s servants. The apostle Paul faced it himself, warned his fellow servants about it, and predicted a day when it would be epidemic in proportion. It seems to me that such a day is upon us!

Compromise for the sake of reaching more people or having a broader influence seems to be the name of the game in our day. Sometimes the compromise is formal and blatant, but often it is more informal and subtle. By formal and blatant, I refer to compromises like *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* or the toleration of open theism within a church association like the Baptist General Conference. By informal and subtle, I refer to compromises that manifest themselves by silence on issues of critical biblical importance or by little noticed cooperation with those who deny or disobey the truth of God’s Word.

My point, however, in this article is not to identify all the potential types of compromises that face us; it is to address some of the faulty reasoning that supports the spirit of unbiblical compromise. My heart was stirred about this issue as I was re-reading Iain Murray’s excellent little book entitled *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. The “prince of preachers” is not known in our day as a man of controversy, but his ministry began and ended in conflict over biblical truth. At the end of his ministry, he found himself involved in a conflict that was known as the Downgrade Controversy in which he took a very open, vocal stance against the toleration of doctrinal defection within the Baptist Union. He tried to influence the leadership of the Union to take a clear stand on sound doctrine, but they refused. He subsequently withdrew his membership and used the platform his ministry provided to sound the warning about the dangers that lay ahead.

Not surprisingly, many argued that Spurgeon was wrong to stir up controversy, and some said it was unwise to withdraw from the Union instead of remain in it for the purpose of exerting his influence within it. Many comforted their consciences about the compromise of staying in with excuses we still hear today—“we must have a broad unity to accomplish great things” and “our opportunity for usefulness will be cut off if we take that stand.” Spurgeon completely rejected this line of thinking. Consider these words preached in the last year of his life:

Ah my dear brethren! There are many that are deceived by this method of reasoning. They remain where their conscience tells them they ought not to be, because, they say, they are more useful than they would be if they went “without the camp.” This is doing evil that good may come, and can never be tolerated by an enlightened conscience. If an act of sin would increase my usefulness tenfold, I have no right to do it; and if an act of righteousness would appear likely to destroy all my apparent usefulness, I am yet to do it. It is yours and mine to do the right though the heavens fall, and follow the command of Christ whatever the consequences may be.

Or consider similar words from a period of “non-conflict” over twenty years earlier:

That argument I have heard hundreds of times when people have been urged to come out of false positions and do the right. But what have you and I to do with maintaining our influence and position at the expense of truth? It is never right to do a little wrong to obtain the greatest possible good.... Your duty is to do the right: consequences are with God.

I believe that Spurgeon is right on target in this matter precisely because his position reflects the ministry principle Paul outlined in this text of Scripture. Any compromise of the Scripture ultimately springs from a corrupt motive that has exalted man and dethroned God. If we compromise in order to obtain or maintain favor and influence with people, then we have turned from being Christ’s servants.

It is of great concern to me, as a fundamentalist, that the application of this principle is in danger of becoming lopsided in our movement. That is, we are quick to point out where the liberals and new evangelicals are guilty of formal, blatant compromise, but it seems to me that our movement is in danger of succumbing to the more informal, subtle varieties of compromise. In our concern to preserve the appearance of a unified front or to build a broader coalition, we must be careful not to blunt the sharp edge of God’s truth. If our unity cannot withstand the clear, accurate exposition of the whole counsel of God, then it is not worth maintaining anyway. We must build unity on the truth, not at the expense of it!

There can be no denying that certain segments of fundamentalism have been excessive in picking fights where no legitimate fight existed, and such unbiblical behavior did and still does need to be confronted. But the answer for divisiveness is not found in compromise. Ultimately, our service to the Master demands that we please Him above all else, regardless of the cost. May God grant us men who will heed Spurgeon’s example and advice—do what is right and leave the consequences with God!