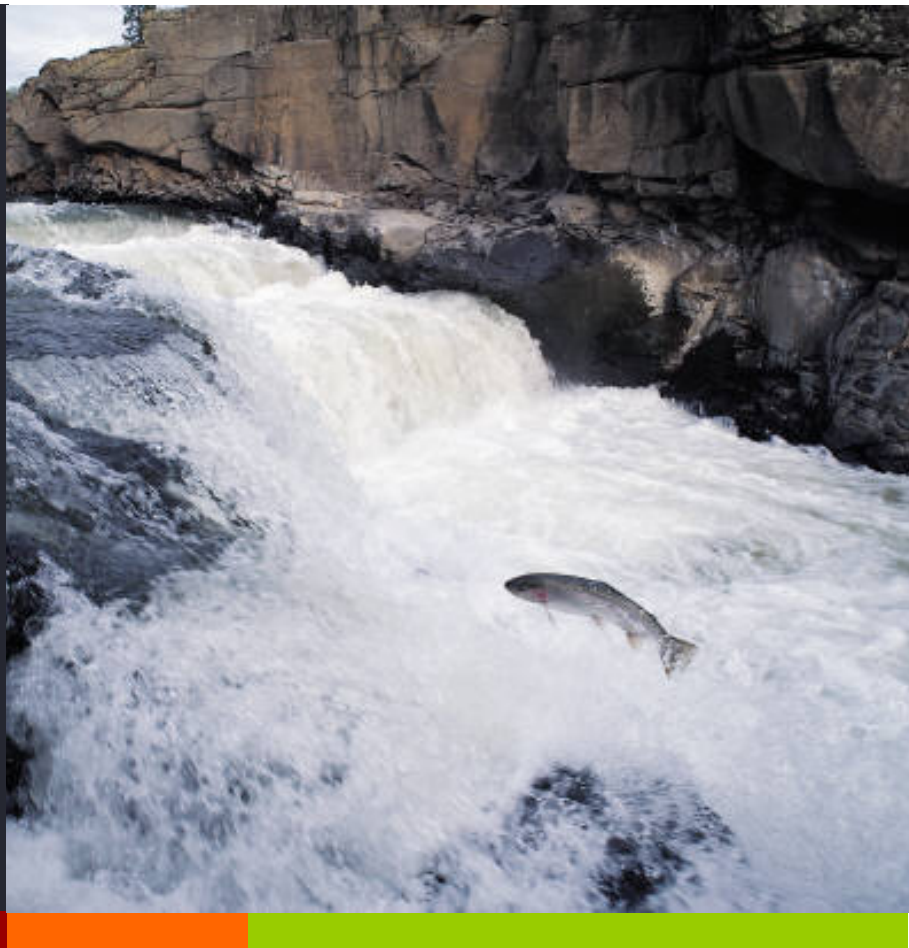


Conviction or Compromise

When the pressure is on, does your conviction crumble, or do you stand for what you know is right?



By Brother Michael Watson

We live in a world of compromise. It's rare to see true conviction nowadays. According to one dictionary definition, conviction is "a fixed or firm belief."

My parents' convictions about dating included me tagging along with my sister on her first date and dance. It was a little awkward sitting in the Denny's booth next to my sister and across from this guy who got a little more than he bargained for. At least we didn't have to slow dance together.

My parents' convictions also prevented my sister and me from watching shows like *Seinfeld* and *The Simpsons* growing up. It didn't matter how many times I asked my Dad to watch *Ace Ventura: Pet*

Detective; the answer was always the same: "No."

Looking back, I'm glad my parents didn't back down from their convictions. It taught me a few things. First of all, it taught me that they loved and cared about me. It didn't feel like love at the time, but in retrospect, I'm convinced love was their motivation. Second, they demonstrated there's something higher and greater in this life than my own desires — that is to please the One who gave us everything worth receiving.

Trust me, I know firsthand what compromise looks like, too. I found myself doing a lot of things I wasn't proud of to gain acceptance in high school. For me, compromise meant

doing whatever I had to in order to get some cheap laughs out of my "friends." In fact one time, I remember doing a Michael Jackson dance move in front of my teacher's desk, complete with a well-placed grab and high-pitched "Yeeeeheeee." This resulted in getting thrown out of class and landing in detention. Compromise often found me when I wanted acceptance, wanted to find an easier way, or just plain wanted to *do it my way*.

Kings of Conviction

We can learn a lot from Rack, Shack, and Benny's experience in Babylon (any of you seen Veggie Tales?). Although they were Hebrew

captives, because of their friend Daniel, they were named governors over the province of Babylon. At the time, Nebuchadnezzar was King over the Babylonian empire, essentially making him the most powerful ruler in the world. He gathered together all the powerful men of his kingdom to worship the large image of gold he made for himself. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were faced with a huge dilemma: just quietly bow down and worship the image like everyone else or be burned alive in a huge furnace.

They could have easily come up with some pretty decent excuses for why they should bow to save their lives:

- We can bow, but we won't actually *worship* the idol.
- We're not hurting anybody by bowing.
- The king appointed us — we owe this to him.
- We can't help our people if we're dead, so let's just bow down to save our lives for the benefit of the greater good.
- We won't become idol worshippers, but we will do it just this once and then ask forgiveness.
- This is a foreign land, so God will excuse us for following its strange customs.

Are any of these starting to sound remotely familiar? Although this is a very different situation from what we face today, I've used the same line of thinking as an excuse to do what I want rather than follow my convictions.

Think back. Have you ever used a similar excuse to watch a questionable movie or show, to

gossip about someone, to skip out on going to church, to entertain yourself rather than spend some time with God, etc.? It's just so much easier to compromise.

Time to Take a Stand

But haven't we bowed down for far too long and far too often?

God is looking for a generation that will follow its convictions! He wants young men and young women who are ready to live for something much greater than themselves.

Most of you know that Rack, Shack, and Benny did not fold under the immense pressure. In fact, they responded to the king saying, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter." In other words, "We don't have to think twice about it." They feared God far more than they feared the king, his furnace, or anything else in the world.

So King Nebuchadnezzar had all three men thrown into the furnace, but it wasn't long before he saw *four* men walking around in the fire, and the fourth looked like the Son of God. He called them back out, and to his complete astonishment, he found that they didn't even smell like smoke. Read more in Daniel chapter 3.

Standing Alone

God miraculously delivered them, but keep in mind, it doesn't always work out that way. Sometimes standing by our convictions means standing alone. Or it could mean losing a "friend." Or having to endure some teasing and ridicule. We may be asked to

suffer because of our convictions, but for those of us who have found our life in Christ, don't we count this an honor to suffer with Him? Remember what Paul said: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him."

Thank God we have one another. Our shared convictions bind us closer than a brother or sister. Let's support one another to ward off compromise in our lives. Let's "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27b). It's our greatest privilege to do so.

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