

THE DIE WAS cast. He would be a Christian. All unlawful commerce with the world was over. He would not compromise. Now he knew what was right, and that only would he do.

But it was not to be that simple in execution.

Chris was resolved to have that quiet fifteen minutes at the very beginning of the day (he hoped that later it would be thirty). Time for the Word, time for prayer. Nothing would budge him from the new habit. But what's that shriek from the bathroom? The toddler of the family has slipped on the wet bathroom floor and hit his head on the side of the shower recess. Quiet time is quiet no longer. Instead of passivity there must be activity, instead of the abstract, the practical. Rather than wrestling with metaphysical subtleties, Chris must wrestle with a yelling, squirming baby!

Time to eat. About this, too, Chris has had new resolutions. No more coffee and doughnuts, no more bacon and eggs. What he needs is a substantial breakfast of whole grains and fruits, perhaps a few nuts, too. But what is it Tania is saying? "I'm sorry, dear. I'm not used to cooking cereal. It burned. If you don't mind, use the packaged stuff again."

Of course he does. He must, or go hungry.

On to the hassle of the freeway. He would never flagrantly break the speed limit like everybody else. He would go no faster than the few miles over usually granted as

reasonable even by enforcers of the law. He would stay in the right lane.

What a fool one feels as all the

other vehicles whiz by, horns blaring. He can feel the daggers from the eyes of the driver stuck behind him.

Wasn't it agreed that it was wiser to go with the flow? Why be righteous overmuch? Certainly it would be safer. With a sigh, he accelerates moderately.

There's old Blinks entering the office door. Chris had made some resolutions about Blinks, too. Chris would not be part of the general hazing of a fellowman thought to be somewhat sadly retarded. Why should a Christian engage in something thoughtless and cruel? Yet, as he followed hard on Blink's heels he found words of gentle mockery on his tongue just from years of habit. Chris' casual greeting sounded hollow to his own ears.

Now to the grind. But with a difference: meticulous honesty must guide him in all his office practices. No more wasting the boss' time with long political arguments with Fred. No more taking home office pens for personal use, etc. Here comes Fred. Who could fail to see that already on Chris' lips was a political teaser? What is Chris to do? A Christian doesn't cut people—neither act righteous overmuch. He will never win Fred if he is stiff, starched, and negative.

"Hi, Fred! No, I really don't know the solution, and right now I can't get involved in such a heavy issue. What's your answer?" Fred's answer, Chris knew, would take 10 minutes.

Down the hall he glimpsed Vern the office boy. Vern was not the brightest, belonging to the same ilk as Blinks. Everybody used him, and abused him. "But not Christians," thought Chris. Vern must be treated as a normal human being. Indeed, as the subject of Christ's great love, as one infinitely valuable. But Chris didn't have time

Compromise

COMING,
READY
or
NOT!

by Desmond Ford



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to say anything to Vern just now. It was still the boss' time.

Hours later Chris was relieved to see the hands of the clock giving him the signal to leave. He mustn't forget that supermarket call to buy items needed at home. The wifely instructions had been rather general: "Get some cereal for breakfast, and some snacks for the kids."

Chris knew that the body is the temple of God. He knew that the cardboard cartons of some breakfast cereals are more nourishing than the contents. How would the children take to whole grain rice, the brown stuff? Chris could hear their derision. Besides, true Christianity isn't a killjoy religion. Food should be palatable. But overly refined foods ultimately lead to disease. Still, the kids wouldn't know that, and wouldn't accept it.

"If only someone would make these decisions for me. O Lord, come! Wasn't that an early Christian motto? Not a bad one. . . ."

In your life and mine apparently trivial conflicts with conscience abound. There are also more serious tussles with far-reaching consequences. If I compromise my resolution as to what I will read, what I will watch on TV—can there be any stopping once embarked on that slippery path? Above all, what about my choices regarding "free" time, and what to be made of it, and those vital choices about my use of tongue and talent, passions and privileges?

Do not the divergences of train lines begin with the very, very slight veering to one side or the other from the original set of tracks? It has been said about bad habits: "Resist beginnings." While my going with the stream of traffic on the freeway may be difficult to fault, suppose I do the same with words, with stories among the other workers at the office? Suppose I do it with money, my health habits, with honesty, truthfulness, purity, fidelity, my children (remembering that the average father spends no more personal time with each of his children than it takes to shine his shoes)?

Life does not consist simply of

black and white. Gray abounds much more. Issues are rarely between simple right and wrong. More often they are between what is bad, and which is less bad.

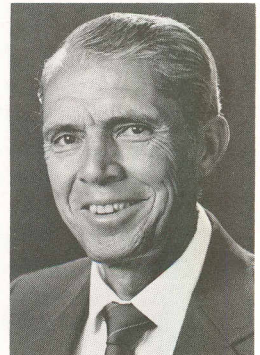
Wise is that person who learns that "when two duties conflict, one ceases to be a duty." Hans Selye's advice was both idealistic and pragmatic when he said: "Strive for the highest possible aim, but never put up resistance in vain." The martyrs would have disagreed with the last half, and modern martyrs will agree with their prototypes, knowing that doing right for right's sake is never entirely in vain, whatever the appearance. Still, Selye's counsel is worth heeding.

As is almost always the case, error lies close to truth. In a world twisted and perverted by sin, choosing is not a simple matter for the conscientious. Because values constantly come into conflict in an unending series of life situations, the Christian is never relieved from the "strain" of faith: the necessity of constantly throwing oneself afresh upon the guiding Spirit of God. Amid life's bewildering circumstances faith ever looks beyond self to God, the Source of wisdom and strength, for each moment's new decision.

Christians will find mere rules quite inadequate. Rules must change with situations, though never principles. Principles never change. The strategies of war may dictate to a Christian politician necessary divergence from some rules, but woe to the politician who forsakes principles. So in the wider, more mundane, hemisphere of the rest of life. Only the prayerful, studious Christian will move wisely most of the time, even in the wider arena of compromise.

Yes, compromise is often inevitable. Do you question that? What would you do if you saw your family swept from the ship's deck by an unexpected giant wave, and knew that as a nonswimmer to jump overboard would be to suicide? And even if you did jump, which member of the family would you rescue first? The others you did not choose would surely be lost. If like

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DESMOND FORD

Mark Twain and Sir Walter Scott you found yourself threatened with bankruptcy, a fate only to be avoided by suicidal toil, which would you choose?

It is clear to all of us that unless we have priorities, decisions are impossible. The starving Jew who chased a pig in the desert in order to live and not die, was surely pleasing to his Maker. Continuing to live on, though ritually unclean, is surely better than dying ceremonially undefiled!

Does the Christian view the practice of compromise with serene, untroubled regard? Never! Can a Christian avoid compromise altogether? Never! Must a Christian compromise with his resolve to do his best whatever the situation? The answer is the same. As change and constancy both permeate our environment, so adaptation, and yet unyielding loyalty to principle, characterize every Christian's life-style.

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Ours is a very complex world, and the anguished cry of Paul in Romans 7:14-25 is uttered by all believers on their way to glory, and continually so. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"

We wish the necessity for adaptation, and apparent compromise of rules, did not exist. But it does. Instead of despairing over such necessity, let us see in it a challenge to a closer walk with God. Knowing that the gospel has reconciled us to God, and that the name of Jesus our Representative gives profound influence to our prayers, let us boldly pray for wisdom to see, and power to do, the right—whether functioning amid zephyrs or tornados, whether in light or in darkness. One day soon all the grays and all the blacks will alike be gone—morally as well as physically—and we will walk together in rainbow hours of everlasting day. □
