

## WHEN POWER IS MISUSED

The concept of “control” makes an interesting study. People will normally settle for **less** if they can have some **influence** in what they will receive. Conversely, people are seldom happy if even beneficial changes are made or rewards are received **if they** have no input to the decision. The difference is “control.” Basically, the American concept of “freedom” really does not center around absolute freedom as much as it does in having control of our choices. The choices may be limited, but most will be happy if they can make their own choices. In spousal abuse situations, the issue that leads to the abuse is typically one of control. Generally, males want to be in control. In a family setting, the husband is the one who has the TV remote control in his hand. The rise of feminism is simply an expression of females wanting to get their share of “control.” I would even go so far to assert that the accumulation of wealth is not usually related to materialism as much as it is driven by the sense of control it brings. An alternate version of the “Golden Rule” is *Those with the gold, rule.*

To some extent every person will establish a sphere of control in which he or she can exercise power over something or someone else. It may be parent to child. It could be one child over a playmate. Other possibilities include people and their pets. It could be a wife exercising control over her husband. In the work place, supervisors attempt to control the workers. Workers will attempt to control each other. There will always be “power” issues in almost any situation. The significant question that each person should address is what will he or she do with the power or control he or she has? Even those who feel “powerless” will find they do have control in many areas -- these areas are normally overlooked and considered insignificant by those who feel powerless. The possibility for misuse of their power is still there. Good stewardship of whatever power base we have is important even in the “little things.”

We tend to concentrate on the misuse of power that are of epic proportions. We can point to such characters in history as Nero, Genghis Kahn, Hitler, or Idi Amin. We, also, can turn to the Bible for examples of such misuse. The Egyptian Pharaoh of the Exodus, King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, and Herod the Great are well-known examples of the “bad guys.” But even King David had occasion to misuse his power in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah. Solomon was blessed with great wisdom and wealth and still went awry in laying heavy burdens on the back of the people to support the lavishness of his lifestyle. Both David and Solomon are viewed in a good light. But things were deteriorating generation-by-generation. After Solomon passed from the scene, his son Rehoboam was faced with a choice of how he would handle the power that went with the office of king.

**1 KINGS 12:6-7** Solomon, in his Proverbs, had advised the “wise to listen and add to their learning, and for the discerning to get guidance.” He had also said that the “wise man listens to advice.” In another place he had written, “he who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.” Rehoboam took a good first step by seeking advice from the elders who had advised his father. These men had been able to observe what had happened in the reign of Solomon and were able to offer some very wise counsel. In fact, their idea was so radically different from the prevailing ideas of the relationship of kings to subjects that it was likely inspired by God. They suggested that the king establish a government that would actually help people rather than misuse and abuse them. They suggested that the king in his government encourage people and reinforce the good things they did. This idea was revolutionary. The next time we hear such an idea expressed in the Bible, we find it coming from the lips of Jesus. He told His disciples “He who would be greatest among you must be servant of all.”

**1 KINGS 12:8-9** Most people are wary of taking a bold step in a new direction. We are not comfortable with change. When Rehoboam heard the advice of the elders, he did not recognize the wisdom and value of it. So he checked with some of his contemporaries. One advantage of seeking advice from people who are no longer involved in government or business is that they can consider the alternatives apart from how it may affect their personal ambitions. The younger people who were still a part of the “system” found it difficult to separate what was good for the nation with what they considered to be good for themselves. We have these same conflicts of interest in our government. Everyone can agree that our government spending programs must be cut back, BUT few want to cut

the programs that help them. Therefore, we should not be too surprised with the advice the young men gave Rehoboam.

**1 KINGS 12:10-11** I copied and kept a statement from an article I read many years ago that says "Many people pursue executive careers to obtain power over others as a way of compensating for real or fancied personal inadequacies or as a reaction to an unconscious sense of helplessness. Being neurotically driven, their single-minded, perpetual pursuit of control blinds them to their own subtle feelings and to those of others." These younger men, as well as Rehoboam himself,

would fit this description. The issues with them were simple: they were power and control. The most expedient way to achieve those was through the use of force. The problem with any expedient approach is that short range decisions have a greater and opposite reaction on the long range results. They wanted influence, power, and control but the results they expected did not take into account the fact that people will inevitably respond to oppression by fleeing and, if necessary, fighting.

**1 KINGS 12:16-17** During the days of David and Solomon, the people realized that sacrifices were necessary for investing in the future of the nation. Eventually, investments need to provide a return. The problem was that all the return was going to royalty and the ruling class and greater sacrifices were being demanded from those who had sacrificed already. The people had lost the vision of “the light at the end of the tunnel.” The new leadership gave them reason to believe that the tunnel did not have an end. People do desperate things when they are faced with a hopeless situation. The ten northern tribes decided they had enough and they could do better on their own. They were willing to leave the “glory that belonged to Israel” since they could not see they had any share in it. The people of the tribe of Judah stayed with Rehoboam out of a sense of family or tribal loyalty.

Each of us can learn from the mistakes of others. The pursuit of power and control is the cause of much of the misery that is in the world today. We would do well to heed the words of the elders of Israel and of Jesus if we wish to have influence on the world around us. “Those who would be greatest among you, must become servant of all.” This is the better way, this is the higher road and this is the way that honors God.