

THE CONTROL ISSUE

The concept of “control” is fascinating. People will normally settle for **less** material things or other compensation 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 one 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 “control” issues in almost any situation. The significant question that each person should address is what will he or she do with the 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.”

In the events that happened prior to the break up of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms as recorded in Chapter 12 of 1 Kings, Rehoboam refused to let the northern tribes have any input to how they would be governed. Instead of having a sense of cooperation and inclusion, he resorted to threats and intimidation. I found 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.”

Rehoboam, as well as his young advisors, would fit this description. The issues with them were simple: power and control. The most expedient way to achieve those objectives 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 We could have predicted the results. It makes little difference if we are dealing with nations, employees, or family members. The harsher the approach, the more likely there is to be rebellion. On the other hand, when people have a voice in their future, then they will be willing to endure many hardships. If the people had been dealt with in a fair manner and could have had some input, then they would have followed Rehoboam.

We see that Rehoboam had a choice between two alternatives. It was not that he was denied access to having a wise alternative. In his lack of wisdom, he failed to see that love is stronger than force. He failed to see that continuing success can result only from having a nation of people who are internally motivated rather than acting only from fear of reprisal. It was a very costly lesson.

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.

1 KINGS 12:18-20 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.

1 KINGS 12:21 Desperate things are also done by people who are driven by their desire for power and control. It would seem that Rehoboam had not learned anything from his initial mistake of threatening to use force rather than negotiate. When faced with disagreement, he decided to implement force rather than admit his error.

1 KINGS 12:22-24 Here we see a glimmer of hope for Judah. They were on the verge of civil war that was brought on by misplaced values by those in positions of power. Typically, we might expect such things to lead to disaster and devastation. Amazingly, the people (and presumably the king) listened to a word from God. Rehoboam should have consulted “the man of God” when he needed advice on how to deal with the northern tribes.

1 KINGS 12:25-27 The “control issue” was soon on the agenda of the leadership of the newly formed northern kingdom. This time we find a mixture of attempting to retain control and fear at work in the heart of Jeroboam. Jeroboam was leader of the Northern Kingdom only because God had chosen him to be the leader. What he failed to realize was that God was in control and that he would govern as long as God willed it to be. His first failure was that of not recognizing Jehovah as Lord of all. In addition, he was grossly ignorant of God’s requirements for the nation of Israel.

1 KINGS 12:28-33 Like his counterpart in the Southern kingdom of Judah, Jeroboam turned to his contemporaries for advice rather than turning to God. The temple in Jerusalem was a powerful focal point in the religious life of the Israelites. The natural tendency was to provide a substitute for that focal point. They remembered the story of what Aaron did when Moses was on the mountain for so long and they committed the same error by making two golden calves as representatives of God. One would be located in Bethel and the other one in Dan. The logic of having two main places of worship was to make it convenient for the people. Convenience was the excuse they used to avoid going to Jerusalem.

The lessons for us are many. We can start by seeing the foolishness of following the advice of worldly counselors. We are to seek the Lord first and follow His leading only. Another powerful lesson is that we must never have a focal point for our worship other than the One appointed and approved by God and they One is the Lord Jesus. Finally, we should always be wary when we let convenience be the driving force for the way we approach and worship God. It is no coincidence that the concept of worship and sacrifice are tied closely together throughout the Scripture. I can not recall any references to worship and convenience as the acceptable way of service. According to Paul, our acceptable service of worship starts with a “living sacrifice.”

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.