

Flexibility

Intro:

One of the great illustrations of flexibility is from our service men and women. Colin Pilch has just returned from his second tour of duty in the Mid-East.

Colin, give us an example of how a soldier needs to be flexible.

What would happen if a soldier was not flexible?

I. Definition of Flexibility:

Flexibility is the willingness to change my plans or directions according to the direction of my authorities.

Flexibility is the capability of being bent, turned or twisted without breaking.

To understand the concept of biblical flexibility we must understand what it is and what it is not.

II. Flexibility is not being wishy-washy or a lack of conviction.

You are never flexible with absolutes. Absolutes are always absolute. They never change. Two plus two is always four. This is not only true with natural law, it is also true with spiritual law. God designed both. The Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

Conviction is a must. We are commanded to be bold about conviction – the fundamentals of the faith – 1 Cor 15:58; Prov 14:26; 28:1.

(1 Cor 15:58 NIV) Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

(Prov 14:26 NIV) He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.

(Prov 28:1 NIV) The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

III. Flexibility is the opposite of stubbornness and obstinacy – 1 Sam 15:22; 2 Chron 36:16-17; Ps 95:8-11

(1 Sam 15:22-23 NIV) But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. {23} For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

(2 Chr 36:16-17 NIV) But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. {17} He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar.

(Psa 95:8-11 NIV) do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, {9} where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. {10} For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." {11} So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

Examples of Inflexibility, stubbornness and a resistant spirit

Children

Jedi only wanting what he liked and wouldn't try anything new to eat

Adults

The way the toilet paper is hung
Ronnie refusing to move when asked to move in church

An example of flexibility – a GPS

Recalculating

IV. Biblical Admonitions

A. Stubbornness of Israel

(Lev 26:19-21 NIV) I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. {20} Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit. {21} "If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve.

(Deu 9:27-29 NIV) Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin. {28} Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say, 'Because the LORD was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the desert.' {29} But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm."

(Judg 2:19-21 NIV) But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. {20} Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, {21} I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died.

(Jer 5:23 NIV) But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away.

(Jer 7:24 NIV) But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.

(Ezek 2:4 NIV) The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.'

B. Stubborn son

(Deu 21:18-21 NIV) If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, {19} his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. {20} They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard." {21} Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

C. God gives stubborn people over to their stubbornness

(Psa 81:12 NIV) So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.

D. Stubbornness restricts righteousness

(Isa 46:12 NIV) Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness.

(Jer 13:10 NIV) These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt--completely useless!

(Jer 16:12 NIV) But you have behaved more wickedly than your fathers. See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me.

E. Stubbornness of Disciples

(Mark 16:14 NIV) Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

F. Stubbornness brings wrath of God

(Rom 2:5 NIV) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

V. Biblical Examples of Flexibility

A. Abraham – Gen 12:1-4

(Gen 12:1-4 NIV) The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. {2} "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. {3} I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." {4} So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

B. Jesus – John 5:30-32; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10; Matt 26:39

(Mat 26:39 NIV) Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

(John 5:30-32 NIV) By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. {31} "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. {32} There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid.

(John 6:38 NIV) For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

(John 8:28 NIV) So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *the one I claim to be* and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

(John 12:49 NIV) For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

(John 14:10 NIV) Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

C. Paul – Acts 16:6-10

(Acts 16:6-10 NIV) Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. {7} When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. {8} So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. {9} During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." {10} After Paul

had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Application: Christian stubbornness

In church – we never did it that way before. There is a natural inflexibility to change. The older we get the more resistant to change we become.

There is a lack of loyalty and commitment today.

There is a resistance to faithful church attendance today. We are growing a generation of cafeteria Christians rather than Christians with a balanced diet.

Church Sindoll suggests three reasons why this inflexibility has such a tyrannical affect on the church:

1. It is seldom prompted by love.

Love is patient, kind, does not act unbecomingly, doesn't seek its own, but inflexibility seeks its own.

2. Rigidity restrains creativity.

“Threatened by risk and the possibility of failure, it clips the future's wings – then later criticizes it for not flying.” (Chuck Sindoll, *The Quest for Character*, pp. 94-95).

We must be creative, but we must not compromise!

3. Rigidity is the trademark of legalism, the archenemy of any church on the move.

“Let legalism have enough rope and there will be a lynching of all new ideas, fresh thinking, and innovative programs.”

At home

Inflexibility with our children.

Be flexible with preferences.

Be rigid with convictions.

Flexibility is the capability of being bent, turned or twisted without breaking. Flexibility is the willingness to change my plans or directions according to the direction of my authorities.

How can we be flexible without being stubborn on the one hand and wishy-washy on the other>

VI. The Cure for Inflexibility - Abiding in Christ – 1 John 2:18-3:3

A. Confidence – 1 John 2:28

(1 John 2:28 NIV) And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

B. Rejection from the World – 1 John 3:1

(1 John 3:1 NIV) How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

C. Identity with Christ – 1 John 3:2

(1 John 3:2 NIV) Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

D. Purity – 1 John 3:3

(1 John 3:3 NIV) Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

The Test:

This past week were you...

...able to keep your temper when plans changed?

...able to respect the decisions of the authorities over you?

...able to reject the tendency to be stubborn?

...able to look for the good in change?

...able to keep from compromising what is right and good?

This past week did your decisions make a difference in your life?

Steps of Application for Flexibility

I will commitment

I will not get upset when plans change.

I will respect the decision of my authorities.

I will not be stubborn.

I will look for good in changes.

I will not compromise what is right.

Make a choice to become more flexible everyday you live.

Am I a Soldier of the Cross?

Am I a soldier of the cross - a follower of the Lamb?

And shall I fear to own His cause or blush to speak His name?

Must I be carried to the skies On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign - increase my courage, Lord!
I'll bear the toil; endure the pain, supported by Thy Word.

Are YOU a soldier of the cross?