

**DANIEL - LESSONS ON HOW TO ABIDE IN CHRIST FROM AN OLD TESTAMENT SAINT - Studies in Daniel 1, 3, and 6 - Part four**

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**TAKING A STAND AGAINST FALSE RELIGION - Daniel chapter 3**

**Daniel 3:1-30** - “King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. [2] Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. [3] Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. [4] And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, [5] that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. [6] And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” [7] Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. [8] Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. [9] They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! [10] You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. [11] And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. [12] There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” [13] Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. [14] Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? [15] Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” [16] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. [17] If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. [18] But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” [19] Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. [20] And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. [21] Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. [22] Because the king’s order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. [23] And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. [24] Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” [25] He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” [26] “Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared,

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. [27] And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. [28] Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. [29] Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” [30] Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”

Because Daniel is such a classic study of Christian character - and example of strength against temptation and opposition - it is easy to miss, just slightly, the actual situation he faced - the *kind* of pressure and the *kind* of temptation he withstood. And that’s sad because the exact situation in which Daniel had to stand his ground is the very one you and I are in the greatest danger of facing in our own lives as we follow our Lord.

Daniel wasn’t being lured into sexual promiscuity. He wasn’t asked to indulge in drinking, drugs or pornography. True, all of the characteristics of his character we’ve studied in this series so far have valid application to the Christian and his or her stand against the life-style of the world. And certainly, not many are so asleep anymore, that they could possibly deny the need for a fresh call to purity of life and mind in the Christian church.

But still, we need to also stop and look at the *nature of the pressure* that was being applied to Daniel and his friends. And what I want to say today is important because *even Christians don’t like hearing it anymore*. But the issue for Daniel (and in this text, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego) wasn’t a test of moral purity. These men were under *religious pressure*.

1) **THESE MEN ARE TRYING TO EMBRACE ONE RELIGION WHILE THEIR SOCIETY IS TRYING TO ENCOURAGE ANOTHER**

**Daniel 3:1-5** - “King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. [2] Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. [3] Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. [4] And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, [5] that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.”

The issue for these men was a *religious issue*. The issue, as Daniel records the account, was the issue of *Who* they worshiped, and *how* they worshiped. They were trying to remain true to the God of their youth, the God who was their creator. And the pressure was on them to embrace foreign religions, new religions.

This is going to become the new battle in our own land. You can believe in God, you can go to your church, but increasingly, you know the pressure - *the religious pressure* - of the day. You know

how you are made to feel like you're somehow intolerant, or narrow-minded, or, heaven forbid, a bit of a **fundamentalist** if you don't strive to see the good in all faiths and somehow admit that each in his or her own way is on the same quest for God.

That's exactly where Daniel's friends were at. The tone of the day was all against what they believed about their God and how He was to be obeyed. Their view, however noble it looks in Sunday School stories, was strongly hated by the people around them. Theirs were not the religious convictions the society around them was willing to accept.

So, whatever else you forget or remember about Daniel, never forget that what landed him in the lion's den wasn't his political convictions, or his sexual deviations, or his mishandling of the king's money. **He's in that den because of his religious beliefs.** Or, more specifically, **he's in that den because of his refusal to modify his beliefs by adapting them when his culture found them unacceptable.**

I can't tell you how important I think this is now, and how important I think it will be for the church in the next ten years. Increasingly, the Christian faith is looked at as a **personal therapy** rather than a **divinely revealed body of objective truth**.

And so, the important matter becomes **what your religion does for you**, rather than **is what you believe true**. If this religion **works for you**, then fine. I'm happy for you. This is the one that **works for me**. Religion becomes each person's psychology - his own individual world view.

And gradually the collective understanding of the church gets worn down until it's actually viewed as a sign of spirituality when people say, **"We don't quibble over doctrine, Pastor Don. We just believe in love and unity and wholeness."**

And it breaks my heart that many people don't even see that, in God's eyes, that kind of thinking is so **utterly wicked and sinful**. The Apostles contended for the faith once delivered. What's with us? Every single New Testament author, except one, **died for the content of that faith**. How could we ever think that indifference to the content of the gospel could be honoring to God?

Right from the beginning, conversion to Christ - genuine conversion - always carried with it the following proof, or experience:

**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 - "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."**

The proof of anyone truly encountering Jesus Christ, the proof that anyone was on the way in living relationship with Him, was found in the **turning away from idols**. You were welcome to follow Jesus, but you couldn't bring your old religion with you.

Now, we use that text to tell people to turn away from all sorts of **idols in their hearts** - money, houses, jobs, cars, relationships, etc. And that's true. Jesus Himself taught that truth so clearly in other passages of Scripture. But those aren't the idols Paul was writing about. He was talking about actual **idols** - the **gods** - involved in the people's worship - the gods they **bowed down to** - **offered sacrifices to** - **said their prayers to** with hopes of pleasing him and getting forgiveness and blessing - the gods their parents taught them to worship - the gods everybody else worshiped - **those gods, says Paul (and the Holy Spirit) have to be left totally behind if you want to become a convert to, and follower of Jesus Christ!**

***Until you destroy all the idols, you aren't following the Lord.*** Nebuchadnezzar is a classic example. At several points in the book of Daniel, you'd think he was finally transformed by the Spirit of God:

**Daniel 2:46-47** - "Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. [47] The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

Then again, in this third chapter: **Daniel 3:28-30** - "Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. [29] Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." [30] Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon."

Look at Nebuchadnezzar and you will see a phenomena that is repeated over and over again in today's church. You see a man who was overwhelmed with something he saw God do. You see a man who was taken up with demonstrations of God's might and power - who became emotionally charged at the displays of God's glory and might - who praised God for those things - ***but who never did tear down that idol on the plain of Dura.***

Look at Nebuchadnezzar and you will see a man who saw God work, who loved to be moved emotionally by what went on around him, ***but who never was transformed, who never fully repented, who constantly reverted back to his old life.***

So, by all means, remember Daniel in the lions den, or these three men in the furnace. But never forget ***why they're there.*** Nebuchadnezzar shoves his finger deep into Daniel's chest and says, "Daniel, your religion is ***unacceptable. Do it our way!***"

That's where Daniel refused to budge.

## 2) **IF YOU'RE GOING TO REMAIN TRUE TO CHRIST, YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE TO RESIST THE PRESSURE OF THE CROWD**

**Daniel 3:6-7** - " And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." [7] Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up."

In the first chapter of Daniel we see Daniel under the private pressure to bend his convictions. Not many knew of that struggle, but Daniel stayed true to the Lord. In this third chapter we see Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego under a different type of pressure.

In the first chapter we see the test of ***private devotion.*** In this third chapter we see the test of ***public declaration.*** The whole test is ***designed to be intensely public.*** Historians estimate that there could well have been up to half a million people assembled on the plain of Dura. Imagine the tenseness in the air as the instruments begin to play. ***Everyone knows what is expected of them at the sound of that musical signal.*** Suddenly, this sea of people bow before the idol. ***Nobody remains standing - except three young men.***

What do you do? Do you pretend to tie your shoelace? Do you hide behind someone really big in the front row? Do you play the tolerance card and say, "I'm never going to **reach** these people if I offend their religious cultural traditions." Or do you stand true and take your lumps?

Nothing makes cowards of us like the pressure of the crowd. It's the hardest place to stand out. What if we aren't accepted? What if we're persecuted? Young people probably feel this pressure the most.

The Bible says the "**The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.**" (**Proverbs 29:25**). Ever see an animal caught in a snare? He's in there because he didn't see the danger coming. Everything seemed fine. But now he's in a situation he can't get out of. He can't escape. He's lost the one thing he needs most - his freedom.

That's what the fear of man - the pull of the crowd - will do to you. Make no mistake. Usually, the plan of the enemy isn't just to have everybody bow. His plan is to insure success by making certain everyone **sees everyone else bow**. Because when everyone's doing it, you are far more likely to fall in line.

So there comes the immense pressure of that very public moment. Will these men do what everyone else expects them to do? Will they bow with the rest, or are they big enough inside to stand on their own?

3) **IF YOU WANT TO STAND AGAINST THE CROWD YOU MUST MAKE A FIRM RESOLVE, AND YOU MUST MAKE IT QUICKLY**

**Daniel 3:15-18** - "Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" [16] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. [17] If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. [18] But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

**Verse 16** is the interesting verse. Different translations put it a little differently: **The New Jerusalem Bible** - "Your question hardly requires an answer..." **The Revised Standard Version** - "We have no need to even answer you in this matter..."

The bottom line is the same. They're saying "**There's nothing to talk about here. Our minds are made up. Talk isn't going to accomplish anything.**" There is such wisdom here. These young men - these **teen-agers** - weren't being cocky or arrogant. They knew this was a serious situation. We know from the text that they already knew this refusal to bow could cost them their lives. They aren't fooling around here. What they **are** doing is planning for strength. **They know that the best resistance to the pressure of the crowd is a fast response.** They know they won't gain by **discussing different options**. So many things could be rationalized. There is always another point of view. **Sin can always be made to look reasonable.** If you're going to enter into a debate every time you're tempted you will lose more than you will win.

**Proverbs 1:10** - "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent."

I have an old commentary on Proverbs that I treasure. It was written by **William Arnot** in 1839. Here's what he said about that little verse from the first chapter of Proverbs:

**“It is not by debate and polite excuses that you can successfully repel enticements to sin. This is an adversary with whom you are not obliged to keep terms. Gather from this Scripture the attitude you should assume and the language you should hold - ‘Get thee behind me Satan!’ Always remember that *much depends on the round, sudden, blunt refusal - the unfaltering, undeluted, dignified ‘NO’ of one who fears God more than the sneer of fools.* Alas, many stumble merely from neglect of this simple principle. They *intend to refuse.* They do not want to go all the way into sin, but they *try to resist politely and gently.* They may escape for a time, but some day their foot will be taken in that snare, and they will fall and stumble.”**

Even when talking with the king - even under this pressure - these young men had their answer ready. There was nothing further to discuss. They had their response ready on the spot. They said it quickly. They gave their hearts no time to second guess.

4) **PRAY FOR THE BEST. STAND FIRM IN THE WORST.**

**Daniel 3:17-18** - “If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. [18] But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

What wonderful words of faith. Never put limits on God’s power or love. Bring all situations to Him with faith and expectation. And make sure, like these men, that the God you are asking of is the same God you are serving - **“The God *whom we serve* is able to deliver us....Even if He does not...we are not going to serve your gods...”**

**John Calvin** comments on those words and says that their strength came from their conviction that **“God’s glory was of greater worth than a thousand lives.”**