

## Resistance to Tyranny Is Obedience to God

Daniel 3:8-18; Psalm 16:11

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It is not easy to obey the Lord when there are severe consequences that will follow for doing so. When there hangs over our head the dread warning that obedience to Christ will bring swift judgment, we are forced to consider at what cost we will follow Jesus and His truth in loving obedience. What are we willing to sacrifice in order to be faithful to Him?

Christians around the world (more than in the United States) daily suffer the harshest of consequences because they will not bow the knee to the unlawful commands of rulers, but rather have covenanted with the Lord Jesus to follow His Word regardless of the consequences. No ruler (whether in the family, work, school, church, or state) has the right to command us to disobey the law of our King, Jesus Christ. And we have no right to disobey our King even when we face the most severe consequences. We must follow the example of the apostles of old who said, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

The true and inspired account that is before us today details for us what three young men were willing to sacrifice in order to honor, love, and obey their Lord: their lives. Our main points are: (1) An Envious Accusation (Daniel 3:8-12); (2) A Second Chance (Daniel 3:13-15); (3) A Godly Resistance (Daniel 3:16-18).

### I. An Envious Accusation (Daniel 3:8-12).

A. Daniel and his three young friends (Shadrach—Hananiah, Meshach—Mishael, and Abednego—Azariah) had revealed their commitment to follow the Lord over the king in refusing the king’s food that had been offered to idols (Daniel 1). They had revealed their trust in the Lord when their lives were threatened with death by praying that God would reveal to them the dream of the king—which He did (Daniel 2). Now these three faithful believers in the one, true, living God are brought face-to-face with their greatest test of loyalty to Christ (Daniel 3).

1. Nebuchadnezzar had built an enormous, golden image (either of himself or of his god), and commanded the rulers/officers from all over his empire to convene in Babylon and to bow down to his image as an act of allegiance to him and loyalty to the Babylonian Empire, and as a token of “unity” among the many kingdoms within the empire.

2. The king threatened that anyone who refused to do so would be cast into “the midst of a burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:6). The music played, and we read what happened next in Daniel 3:7. “All people”—all, that is except three faithful young men, who refused to follow the multitude to do evil.

3. We are not told where Daniel was, but we can safely assume that if he was in Babylon at this time, he would have been standing with his dear brethren in the faith. He was likely away on some urgent business (as he was one of the chief rulers in Babylon).

B. Certain “Chaldeans” approached the king and accused the three young men of refusing to bow before the golden image (Daniel 3:8—“accused” is a polite word—the Aramaic word is very strong and means they “devoured” the Jews). They remind the king of his decree (Daniel 3:9-11), and then they proceed to specifically identify who it was that refused to bow down to the golden image (Daniel 3:12).

1. This accusation follows the exaltation of Daniel and his three friends (Daniel 2:48-49). Envy over the exaltation of these faithful young men certainly would account for the very strong idea of “devouring” these Jews that had been promoted to places of honor.

2. We are warned against envy (Proverbs 27:4). **Jealousy** is possessive and selfishly does not want to share what it has with others. **Covetousness** sinfully desires what belongs to others and will not be

content until it has it. But **envy** not only desires what belongs to others, but goes beyond that to wish, to speak, or to act to destroy others in order to obtain what it wants (Mark 15:10). **Charity** (*agape*—the love of Christ) “envieth not” (1 Corinthians 13:4). Daniel had pled for their lives when Nebuchadnezzar intended to cut them all to pieces (Daniel 2:24). That is what envy does—it renders evil for the good done to it.

3. We are warned in the New Testament about devouring one another (becoming cannibals in consuming and destroying one another with our thoughts, words, and actions, Galatians 5:14-15). If eating the flesh of another person is repugnant to us, we ought to be likewise repelled by consuming another brother/sister with our words. If we are not seeking counsel from the pastor (or a trusted counselor), what is our motive in telling others? Is it to edify or is it to devour?

C. Note the substance of the Chaldean’s accusation.

1. “These men, O king, have not regarded thee.” They have not shown respect and appreciation for the care and exaltation they have received from you, though being lowly captives. “You have given them all this; and this is how they reward you. They publicly embarrass you!”

2. “They serve not thy gods.” They cannot be trusted because they serve not the gods of Babylon, but one God alone. They accept not the religion of Babylon, but scorn it. Though Nebuchadnezzar had previously honored Jehovah (Daniel 2:47), now worshipping that very God alone becomes a reason to destroy the young Jewish men.

3. “Nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” They are traitors and have turned against the king and against Babylon. Remember the image was a token of allegiance to the king and loyalty to the empire, and a symbol of unity within the empire.

## II. A Second Chance (Daniel 3:13-15).

A. Nebuchadnezzar goes into another fit of rage (Daniel 2:13) and demands that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be immediately brought before him to answer the accusations brought against them (Daniel 3:13). He was an angry man because he was a very proud man.

1. A person full of pride (as was Nebuchadnezzar) will also be a person that is given to anger (Psalm 73:6). When we are filled with anger, it is usually because we have not gotten our way. Plans have not turned out the way we wanted, or people have not pleased us in the way we think they should have. So we express our displeasure by our anger.

2. The source of that anger is pride—we didn’t get what we wanted, or he/she failed us. Life and people didn’t bow to our desires, plans, or demands. That’s pride. Let us confess our sinful anger, but especially let us confess the source of our anger—pride.

3. On the other hand, humility submits itself to the providence of God, and is able by God’s grace to subdue anger and experience God’s peace (even when all of our plans fall apart and even when people fail/betray us). Christ has purchased for us the fruit of humility and peace. It’s our inheritance in Christ. No one can make us angry; we choose to become angry. We may be provoked to anger (the provocation is that person’s sin). But the sinful anger is still our sin.

B. Nebuchadnezzar then asks these faithful young men, “Is it true” (Daniel 3:14)? Are these accusations true?

1. Did you intentionally refuse to bow before the golden image? Or did you misunderstand what was commanded? The king gives Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego an opportunity to defend themselves.

2. Nebuchadnezzar could have unilaterally (without a second opinion or without an appeal) cast them into the fiery furnace. Why did he hesitate? Perhaps from his perspective it was for the sake of Daniel, or for the sake of the interpretation of his dream, or for some affection he had for them. But from

God's perspective, Nebuchadnezzar hesitated in order that they might bear a faithful testimony before the king and us all.

C. Nebuchadnezzar actually gave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego a second chance (Daniel 3:15).

1. The king was willing to go through the whole process once again, if they would but bow before his image. He promised they would escape the fiery furnace. This indicates his affection/respect for them.

2. But then Nebuchadnezzar issues a foolish and bitter challenge to God Himself. This demonstrates that he was yet a pagan king, who still worshipped his pantheon of gods. God took up the challenge as we shall see (just as God took up the challenge in Psalm 78:19; Matthew 27:39-42—Jesus accepted the challenge and did that which was even greater; He raised Himself from the dead, and they still would not believe in Him). Let us not challenge God in unbelief.

### III. A Godly Resistance (Daniel 3:16-18).

A. "We are not careful to answer thee" (Daniel 3:16).

1. What they are saying is that they do not need to answer the king; it was not necessary to answer him. Why?

2. Nebuchadnezzar knew in his heart that their God was the one, true God to be worshipped (Daniel 2:47). He knew the truth and was suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). He was turning against the light he had received from the Lord. Thus, he would not be given further light by way of some lengthy defense. When we reject God's light, truth, and righteousness, God leaves us in our ignorance and rebellion. Don't reject the light!!!

B. "If it be so" (Daniel 3:17-18) i.e., if it be so that we are cast into the burning fiery furnace—no matter what you do to us, whatever the consequence, whatever the sacrifice we must make, WE WILL NOT WORSHIP YOUR GOLDEN IMAGE. Do to us whatever you will—no amount of second chances is going to change our mind. "Herein I stand, I can do no other" (Luther at Council of Worms).

1. They confess that God is able to deliver them safely from any harm in the burning, fiery furnace (Daniel 3:17). They acknowledge their faith in the absolute omnipotence of Almighty God.

2. They further confess that God will certainly deliver them out of the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:17)—one way or another. Either by protecting their body within the furnace or by consuming them in the furnace and taking their soul immediately to heaven.

3. "But if not" (Daniel 3:18). Regardless of what God purposes to do with them, they plainly confess that they will not bow down to his image. They did not know what God was going to do with them, but they knew they could not deny Him. Will we love Him, serve Him, and follow Him into the fiery furnace (Job 13:15)? It's the "But if not" situations that test our faith (when we don't know what we may have to suffer).

C. "Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God" (John Knox).

1. These faithful young men would not bow the knee even under the most extreme pressure to do so—the threat of being burned alive. No one can force us to sin against God (even if they threaten a burning fiery furnace). As God's children, we can always desire, will, and do what God commands us to do. We can't use the excuse that we were forced to disobey God. If what is required of us is contrary to the commandments of God, we can (like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) still follow Christ regardless of the consequences (Matthew 10:39).

2. Is Jesus and His truth only precious to us when there are no threats of punishment, no

cost, and no sacrifice, but not precious to us when we must suffer for loving and obeying Him regardless of the cost (whether mean the loss of family/friends, the loss of a job, the loss of possessions, or the loss of life)? If we will not follow Christ in the smaller sacrifices now, what assurance do we have that we will do so when greater sacrifices are required of us?

3. But our hearts cry out, "I am afraid" (Psalm 56:3). We all need courage because we are all afraid. Courage is not the absence of fear. It is doing by God's grace and strength what God commands even in the face of fear. It is not bowing to the fear, but bowing to the Lord Jesus Christ over the fear. That holy boldness comes from Jesus as we spend time daily/weekly in the presence of Christ and His Word, as we growing in understanding His greatness and faithfulness, and as we grow in trusting Him.

4. We do not follow Jesus because it is easy to do so or because many do so. We follow the Lord because He is worthy (He created us, has provided for us, and has redeemed us). We deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus because He loved us to the end (even when we were His enemies) and laid down His life for us that we might have everlasting life (Psalm 16:11). This was the comfort of the Lord Jesus as He faced the suffering that no man has ever suffered. It is also the comfort of us all who trust Jesus alone, deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him.

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