

# God or Man?

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Whom will you serve? God or man? This is the issue that faces the child of God every day of his earthly pilgrimage. It was also the issue which faced the three friends of Daniel when they were commanded to bow before the golden image set up by Nebuchadnezzar.

It was the purpose of Nebuchadnezzar to glorify his own name by gathering all the leaders of the provinces together and have them bow down in allegiance before the image he had made. And to make sure that no one would shirk his duty, the fiery furnace was promised to all who refused. By this display of pride and arrogance, he was going to let all know, including those he had conquered, that he, Nebuchadnezzar, had built great Babylon. And what better way than having all people worship him as lord. As far as he was concerned, there was no other lord; had not all other nations with their gods been destroyed by his arm of might!

This is always the purpose of man in the Babylon of this world. Man wants to be served as the lord of this Babylon which he arrogantly asserts he has built. Nebuchadnezzar is but the picture of all men everywhere as they would put God out of His creation and substitute haughty men with his ingenuity as the moving force in creation. The images we are told to bow before are those of science, medicine, along with the man-glorifying religion of humanitarianism. Further, we are encouraged to worship the heroes of the sports world - our super athletes who help take our minds off the sorry state of affairs. Man has built these gods for his self-indulgence and self-gratification as he seeks to numb himself against the horrible consequences of sin. All we have to do is bow down and serve the beast, accept his mark and everything will be all right. Woe be to the man who dares to challenge the great deceit of man in this great Babylon!

The three friends of Daniel had resolved in their heart not to participate in this ungodly celebration they had been forced to attend. There was no doubt many good reasons which could have been given to bow down in homage to man and his conquests. Nebuchadnezzar was the God-ordained authority which must be obeyed; besides what about the good position which they would lose; just once will not make a difference; everyone else was doing it; and one could go on. But they could not bow (not even in pretense) because by doing so they would be denying the one only true God, their Creator, Sustainer and Preserver, and that would be a violation of the first commandment. Rather than deny God, they would rather deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Christ. They knew full well that by refusing to bow, they would lose their earthly life. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matthew 16:24-25). When given a second chance, they were bold to answer the king. There was not a moment's hesitation, not the slightest doubt in their minds as to the rightness of their decision. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-ne-go answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:16-18). They continued to treat God's glory as greater than their own lives. They trusted in the only One who was able to deliver the soul; the One whom their very names suggested would deliver them - Hananiah (Jehovah is gracious), Azariah (Jehovah help) and Mishael (who is comparable to the Almighty One?) They trusted in the incomparable, Almighty, faithful God who in His grace helps His own.

Where do we stand when the ruler (Satan) of the Babylon of our day requires that we bow down before his images and receive his mark? The question may not be quite so bluntly stated as with Nebuchadnezzar, but the issue is always the same. Whom will you serve? What do we say when we are asked to yoke ourselves to Babylon by joining in its worldly organizations? Do we excuse our movie attendance, our dancing and our drinking because everyone else is doing it; just once isn't going to hurt? Would we rather have the identifying mark of Babylon (our WLAV wings, our rock group belt buckles and gaudy T-shirts, our lockers plastered with the pictures and saying of the idols of our society) than we would the identifying marks of the followers of Christ (a meek and quiet spirit, speaking to one another in hymns and psalms and spiritual songs, etc.)? Do we have a greater trust in the gods of science and medicine to solve the ills of man and society than we do in the providence and will of God? Would we rather receive the humanitarian aid of the philanthropic societies of this world with their emphasis on the universal brotherhood of societies of this world with their emphasis on the universal brotherhood of man, than go to receive the mercies of Christ from the Church? God forbid!

Our help is in the Lord alone who made heaven and earth. God in Christ was the deliverance of Daniel's three friends so he is ours also. As he gave the three friends the spiritual strength to deny themselves in the face of certain death in the fiery furnace, so too He will give us the strength to deny ourselves as we face the fury of the Babylon of our day. When we are faced with the question, whom will you serve? God or man? We will be able to say, "We will serve our God and Him only will we serve. We are not careful to answer thee, O World, Babylon, beast, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us. We 'fear not them which are able to kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul' (Matthew 10:28). Our God will deliver us physically, and if not physically, then certainly spiritually in the eternal glory of heaven."

In conclusion, the confession of Daniel's three friends is one which comes only from a true and living faith which is constantly being exercised. It is evident that these young men knew God from the covenant instruction they had received from godly parents, through prayer (three times a day toward Jerusalem) and they knew from God's Word and believed the promises that God is powerful to save. We, too, must exercise our faith through prayer and the diligent study of God's Word. Also, we must heed the exhortation of the Lord that we not despise His chastening because it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. This activity of our faith will bear its fruit in the bold confession we make in this world. May it be said of us, as it was of the heroes of faith of old, "And these all died having obtained a good report through faith..." (Hebrews 11:39).

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