

Of COURSE you're feeling the "heat"! – Part 1

Daniel 3:1-15



[In a town meeting in a province of Russia, during the heyday of Joseph Stalin's rule, the mention of Stalin's name triggered both a standing ovation AND a standing dilemma. All the people were standing and no one dared sit down unless they were told to! There was an elderly man in the audience who, unable to stand any longer, took his seat. The officials took down the elderly man's name and arrested him the next day. The PROBLEM?

The man refused to worship the idol long enough!]

[Another man, Paul Schneider, was a prisoner in a German Concentration Camp. On April 20, 1938, on Hitler's birthday, all the prisoners were required to remove their berets and bow their heads before the image of a Nazi swastika flag. Everybody but one man whipped off their headgear and bowed their heads - except Paul Schneider. The prison guards beat PS - 25 lashes with an ox hide whip. Because PS refused to worship the idol.]

Hope those 2 stories (& the stories could be multiplied) demonstrate that the statement "Religion & politics don't mix" is a statement born in the womb of ignorance. Fact is, because we are image-bearers of God, religious by nature, designed to relate (some way) to God, Religion & Politics are, have always been, & always will be interconnected [Muslims, the Constitution, & Sharia Law].

There IS most certainly a relationship, & the relationship of religion & politics has always been a curious relationship. Just ask Daniel. In this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar, a powerful politician, sets up an image (probably of himself), embodies his régime in that image, & commands homage to his regime by bowing before (worshipping) the image he's constructed. It

happens all the time in the "Babylon" in which we live. There WILL come a time when the commands of people (and government IS made up of people) WILL call on you to DISOBEY a command(s) of God. When the commands of men, even nations & governments, conflict with GOD'S Commands, the response / choice GOD wants you to obvious. The way for us is both clear AND costly!

**** I will BELIEVE and OBEY the FIRST COMMANDMENT, even if it KILLS me! ****

Please allow me to read an updated version of Daniel 3, from Trevan Wax...

3 themes weave their way into the fabric of this story from Daniel 3, & *all 3 themes tie into the idea of taking a stand AGAINST Idolatry*. This lesson we consider the *1st theme*.

**** The 1st THEME has to do with The POWERFUL PRESSURE believers feel, Vv 1-15 ****

The INTENTION of the image . . . The image is INTENDED to DOMINATE, a 90 feet high X 9 feet wide humongous monstrosity! It's an "opportunity" for all the government workers to pledge their loyalty to the State by bowing before the image.

Notice here (& does THIS ever sound familiar!), no one is asking these government workers to give up their chosen religion. "If you WANT your religion, you can keep your religion!" Sound familiar? Like "If you want your insurance, you can keep your insurance"?!? Yet behind that image stands the power of the king and the state. So it's difficult to see this homage as being anything less than the establishment of a state religion. Daniel & his band of brothers in the Lord are feeling the pressure to COMPROMISE by DISOBEYING both the 1st & 2nd Commandments.

The tie-in between idolatry & compromise . . . By the way, most anytime you're being commanded or tempted to compromise, the

temptation always runs back to the 1st or 2nd commandment. To *steal*? What OBJECT is more important to you @ that time than the GOD who tells you NOT to steal is? To *lie*? Is it more important to protect yourself or to represent a GOD Who always speaks the Truth? If a teenage boy keeps telling his girlfriend, "If you love me, you will," and Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my Commandment - which is no sex outside of marriage, which "God" is the young lady going to obey? The "god" trying to manipulate her into doing his will, or the GOD who commands a "marriage ONLY" context for enjoying His gift to men & women? Behind each COMPROMISE on our part is a DISOBEYING the 1st & 2nd Commandments!

**** We accept the fact we WILL feel pressure (often) to COMPROMISE our Christian Convictions, AND we need to ANALYZE the pressure. ****

1. Consider the SOURCES of the pressure we feel to compromise.

Where does the PRESSURE to compromise come from? **4 sources.**

A. Pressure sometimes comes from AUTHORITY, from those OVER you, or those you have ALLOWED to have it in your life. Vv 1-7, "Nebby the King" 6 X. "Your BOSS would like for you to . . . Your SUPERVISOR would like for you to . . . This COMPANY expects you to . . ." & yes, you DO feel PRESSURE from those in Authority. Do you not?

B. Pressure sometimes comes from CONFORMITY. The folks gathered (together, Vv 2-3), told (Vv 4-5), & threatened (Vs 6) did what? Well, Vs 7 says everybody gets their backsides in the AIR, their noses in the SAND, & enjoys job security! "Look, I HAD to do it, or look like the odd one out!" "I had to do it, or be disloyal to the 'team'." It's called "peer pressure", & "peer pressure" is to say the very least, POTENT! Ask your

teenager, or just take a walk down memory lane, yourself - & you may not have to remember any further back than earlier this week or EVEN TODAY!



C. Pressure sometimes comes from those who RESENT you. Vs 12 seems to indicate, the ENVY of the Chaldeans was looking for some way to "get back" at these men by casting the actions of the 3 Jewish men as an act of DEFIANCE of the King & the state.

When you refuse to go along, those who ENVY you & your Christian convictions WILL always put your actions in the worst possible light! [cf Ben Carson w/the Muslims . . . Carley Fiona w/Planned Parenthood . . . Tim Tebow Vs Kaitlin Jenner...]

C. Pressure sometimes comes (& mounts) from INTIMIDATION. (Vv 13-15) You ever stood before someone intimidating, a coach, a boss, an authority figure, a person with the power to do something bad to you, if they so choose? Or how about someone intimidating you with their words, "If you do this, but if you don't . . . if you don't . . ." 3 words that would intimidate even the bravest of us, ". . . *the firey furnace* . . ." For those who want to avoid pain (us), intimidation brings pressure.

Having ANALYZED the pressure,

2. Let's consider HOW we NEUTRALIZE the pressure.

If you go back over these Vv, the narrative actually speaks of the whole incident in a **MOCKING** manner - the narrator seems to dip his pen in the well of sarcasm (in computer language, on his

word processor, the writer seems to have found the "sarcasm" font!)

A. Consider the *ABSURDITY* of the pressure to compromise our convictions. Vs 15 . . . made . . . People are asking you to compromise before a "god" THEY have made! The "god" is dependent, it had to be made with human hands, yet the king is demanding this "god" be worshipped! How asinine!

Remember: Behind every LAW & RULE & COMMAND is a LAW-GIVER! And ultimately, there's only ONE legit Law-giver! The rest are poser "gods" who demand you obey their commands. When you hear a command to do something that contradicts or opposes GOD'S Law, ask, "Who does he think he is? God?" The answer is, "Yes"!

In the case of this particular command to bow before the image, it's a "set up" job, asking the faithful to worship something that's no more divine than your knee replacement is! We worship & obey GOD, not someTHING *people* have made / set up & then told us to worship - be it an image, an ideology, or just whatever random commands THEY MADE UP! "Who sez? Well, I do!" Such language betrays people who think THEY are God!

B. Consider the *POMPOUSITY* of the pressure to compromise our convictions. The "brass" attending & the "orchestra" . . . Clearly, this is an effort to IMPRESS! *But we must NOT mistake POMPOUSITY for GRAVITAS.* Gravitas means something is weighty / has substance; Pomposity is all about the "show". [5 star football player . . . 2 colleges; 1 really talks to him about the "fit" of the college for his aspirations; the other just tries to impress . . .] Just B/C someone or some occasion tries to IMPRESS you to predispose you to COMPROMISE,

that doesn't make what they're asking you to do any more
RIDICULOUS!

[Just to be clear, I got nothing @ all against "fund raisers", OK? But if someone is holding a "fund raiser" to raise legal funds to fight all those "Neanderthals & woman-haters" who oppose abortion or to raise funds to fight all the legal battles on behalf of those who SUPPORT same sex marriage so they can "silence" the free speech of all those "homophobes" (in jail, most likely), we shouldn't care if the "who's who" list for said fund raiser includes your favorite celebrities & sports stars & if the event itself is an all-you-can-eat dinner being held @ Mama Hamils! (Hamil wouldn't host that kind of thing, BTW!)] Counter the PRESSURE by considering the POMPOUSITY of what you're being asked to do! How RIDUCULOUS it is for a mere PERSON to try to IMPRESS you & then try to PRESSURE you into going *against* what GOD commands you to do!

C. Consider that great POWER and great EMPTINESS often exist side by side. Empty people construct empty idols & then want you to bow down before them. The problem is, even YOUR obedience to their pressure will not solve their problem of emptiness. It will never be enough. NOTHING is enough to fill their emptiness!

Throughout the Bible, God Exposes The Emptiness Of Idolatry (Cf *Isaiah 44:9*): We become like what we worship! Worshipping something less than the true God only brings more emptiness into your life. Eg: If you worship winning, when you do win, you don't enjoy winning because you need to win again tomorrow to feed your need to be a "winner". The victor's cup always comes with a hole in the bottom!

Whatever the "idol" is people are trying to get you to worship & serve (they are Siamese twins, you know); that Idol is the "god"

THEY are counting on to fill their empty lives. Problem is, God has placed *eternity* in their hearts (*Ecc:11*) . . . and only the living & true GOD Himself can fill the infinite space within their hearts and satisfy them.

Or a finite Idol can try . . . AND fail to fill that inner space all folks have. The king has great power, no doubt. Power is, in fact, his Idol; and if people don't bow & worship that Idol of power, what then? Failure to worship the king's idol points out just how EMPTY & INSECURE & ultimately WEAK the king is!

The King can't even get 3 young Jewish men to worship his Idol & obey his command. The King's insecurity even erupts in anger against the Lord's band of brothers! Remember, the person pressuring you is EMPTY, b/c Christ isn't @ home in his heart! Consider what an empty farce idolatry is next time you feel pressure to compromise. And don't be intimidated!

Of course, PRESSURE forces us to make a CHOICE. What about the CHOICE we make to obey the 1st 2 commandments? What about the RISKS involved? The answer of the band of believing brothers will surprise & challenge you. And the help these believers receive will encourage you, in a unique way. Next week.