

DANIEL 3

Daniel's friends stand firm. They contend for the faith in a foreign culture. It would have cost them their lives, but they get a grand assist from God! And so they continue their astounding journey of influence.

We know that our ability to live life well depends on WHAT we know. It also depends on WHO we know. We need the TRUTH of God, but we need God HIMSELF as well. We must know the King of kings. We know He saves/rescues. But we need to know Him well enough to trust Him, AND dare to live by our convictions graciously and humbly.

God humbles Nebuchadnezzar through this event. God is well equipped to humble the arrogant. We are often able to sense the arrogance of people. But rather than trying to humble them, we must ask for God's help to bring about receptive hearts in them. Our own pride can incite us to words and actions that humiliate them. That generally confirms them in their arrogance. Remember, arrogance is often a reaction to past hurts and threats, both real and perceived. God knows hearts and deals with arrogance best.

The question we want to always be asking as we read the Bible is this; "Why is this that I am reading included in the Bible?" The questions below will lead you to understand why this one is important for you. Then you'll understand why God has you processing it!

1. Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance was that he let himself set aside what he had learned 20 years earlier about God. What do you think are some of the early signs of this kind of arrogance in your life?

2. If you had faced this trial that "the three" faced, what rationales might you have used to just bow down to the image, make it look like you were obeying the command? What would have been lost if Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had done this?

3. What is one thing you see in the lives of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that you would like to be true of you? How can you develop it?

4. Nebuchadnezzar actually blesses God for the three having set aside his command (verse 4). Given this result, what are some things we must ponder carefully about their actions?

5. Read the king's decree in verse 29. What good things happen among Christians when such a decree is made? What things that aren't so good come about in them?

HIGH-YIELDING FOLLOWUP

You will likely not have to make a decision that could result in you being thrown alive into a furnace. But in practicing your faith you will have to make painful choices. Read and think about Romans 12:1-2. Think about what kind of sacrifices God might be calling you to make.

Pastor Bob's commentary on Romans 12:1-2 is below. It will help you understand and apply these verses better.

12:1—I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

From a discussion of ethnic Israelites, and based on the hard lessons illustrated by their experience, Paul gives this urgent word of exhortation to his spiritual brothers in the body of Christ. He is also giving these words based on what he has just stated, that God's purposes are the designed end of all that He allows to be. Paul's "therefore" also reaches back and captures the entire message and tone of his letter that he summarizes here as "the mercies of God." Those mercies have been great, but they are not for all time and the opportunity presented by them is to be seized. There is only one logical personal response for all people.

The action Paul is urging his readers to take involves their bodies. In terms of the philosophies that were looming on the horizon of his time, our physical body's value and importance to God would be greatly minimized. It often is. Ours is a faith that focuses on the inner being. But it is also one which is not complete until it is worked out in thought and deed manifested by our tongues, our eyes, our hands and our feet. God's desire is to capture our hearts, but to do with our bodies what He does with all He has created, bring about actions of Him, dedicated to Him (11:36).

There is a sense in which God's work of grace in us begins with the recognition of the nature of the deeds we are doing with our bodies. There is then a work of His Spirit in our inner being of repentance through which our minds are changed about those deeds. It leads us to reflect on what is present within us that prompts such deeds. The gospel can then work to transform us beginning with our inner being. Transformation is always with a view toward this, that God be glorified by that which our bodies begin to outwardly reveal and demonstrate of his Spirit working inside us.

Paul has just spoken in detail of a people with a lengthy tradition of ritual sacrifice. There had been no shortage of ceremonial sacrifice in Israel. But something had been missing in it all, a point which God had made abundantly clear in prophetic declarations (Psalm 50:8-15, Isaiah 1:11-16; Hosea 6:6). God longed for his people to demonstrate by deeds done with their mind, souls and bodies their allegiance to Him and to His Law. Paul wants his readers to do the thing most Israelites had failed to do, to be themselves living sacrifices.

This is a wonderfully descriptive term of what God desires to produce in us. He wants people to be fully alive while fully dead. Through His Spirit we can be fully alive to God, aware of His desire for us in each moment of the day. Through that same Spirit we can deny all that our own desires might seek to lead us into. This is the state that Paul is wanting us to journey into, described in some detail in Chapter 6-8, and described perfectly by this metaphor of a living sacrifice. In this state, we have made a very intentional decision about the instinctive, fleshly way of living. We have died to it and are putting all that remains of it to death. In its place we are searching for God's mind and leading.

This pursuit is our spiritual service of worship. The term "spiritual" is NASB rendering of the Greek word *logikos*. It would be more naturally rendered logical or rational within the Christian framework of what logical thought is. The Greek word by its etymology is formed by making an adjective out of the word *logos*, which means "word." It sounds like our word "logical" which comes from this Greek word for speech or reason and the Latin word *logica*. In Greek thought the *logos* was the kind of spiritual/mystic entity that lay behind reality. In Christian thought that *logos* is the mind of God, recorded in Scripture and embodied in Christ. Our presentation of our complete being to God is what we could call a logical response, the only rational thing to do in view of what God has made plain about Himself, us, and life in this evil world.

Now it IS a spiritual act. It happens through the work of the Holy Spirit stirring the powers of reason within us so that we respond positively to the truth. We must not minimize the importance of the Holy Spirit in all things pertaining to God. At the same time, we must not discard the importance of us using our own minds and applying thoughtful analysis to behavior decisions. We must think through rationally even AS we are guided by the Holy Spirit. Given the history of Israel and all that we can learn from it, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God is the only logical decision to make and the Spirit will help us see the particulars of this. As always He will help us apply the Scriptures to matters of real life.

12:2—and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

In this verse Paul speaks to the more practical activity entailed in presenting our bodies. It is not an act that is done once in the church service. It may be one that has such a beginning. But this must be followed by a lifetime in which thought patterns are individually scrutinized and transformed. Because it is a process, it is not because of this any less of a transformation.

Transformation is a command in this verse. That affirms to us that it is a divinely inspired work that we must intentionally engage ourselves with. Transformation does not overwhelm our own mental and emotional faculties, but instead fully utilizes them. It is in this sense both rational and spiritual. There is a presenting of ourselves that the Holy Spirit orchestrates within us that we must not resist.

When in response to His leading we present ourselves to Him, He leads us in thought that results in the renewal of our mind. It might be thought spurred on by the ministry of others to us, thought flowing out of time spent praying, or thoughts stimulated by the Scripture. But it will be thought that is new and different from that which is routine for us. This thought then begins to transform our actions. Our actions begin to be shaped not by our instincts but by the hand of God. By such actions our lives begin to incarnate, or document what the will of God is. We become a pattern for all who would desire their own lives to be shaped by His powerful hand. We become a documentary for all to watch of what such a life lived in fellowship with God looks like.

Paul uses three words to describe God's will. Some have suggested that within God's will there are three zones. We can do what is good, we can do what is even better—that which is acceptable, or we can do what is perfect. To interpret this verse in this way is a mistake on at least two counts.

First, this verse is making a statement about the overall direction one's life takes as they are beginning to be transformed. It is not dealing with individual instances in which one needs to discover God's particular mind and heart. As our minds are transformed and we present our bodies for service to God, we work by our actions His will. There comes to be a dominant tone in our lives of goodness and completeness.

Second, grammatically all three of these adjectives describe God's unfolding plan. His will is singular and the three adjectives are all singular. They are to be taken together as describing God's will. This too indicates that Paul is making a generic statement about the overall nature of God's will as it will prove to be in our lives, our lifetimes, and in the universe when all events have run their course. It will all prove to be good, and acceptable and perfect.