

Application 1 – We are to be Subject to God ... AND to Civil Authorities

At the heart of the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego lies the unmistakable choice the young Jews were forced to make in disobeying the very authority that God had placed over their lives; namely, king Nebuchadnezzar. Why do you suppose Daniel's friends disobeyed the king's command to worship the golden image? First, they knew what the Mosaic Law taught! Second, they were committed to obeying that Law. One of the first major applications we find in Daniel 3 is actually a call for us. How can we as 21st century believers in Christ know when the government (doesn't matter what country) goes too far in its decrees? We must know the Bible and be intimately familiar with its commands and expectations or we cannot discern when the government goes too far. This is probably the most important point in chapter 3, though it is somewhat veiled.

When are we to disobey civil leaders? Here we must be careful to separate those actions that the state may take, but not require, that we like it or participate in it. For example, a small minority of people support the idea that taxes should not be paid to the federal government because they use the funds to promote or enact evil things. However, if the state is not commanding that we personally follow suit, then we merely chose to not participate in what they have deemed acceptable. For example, the government supports abortion but does not command that we participate in it personally. That is a right we have; to not personally participate in abortion; even though some of our tax money is surely used to pay for someone else's abortion. Certainly the advent of Covid-19 has tested the limits of the relationship between the church and the state. With all the many decrees the government tried to force on us, there were never laws passed by Congress to force those things on us. It was political pressure brought to bear on people, most likely for the purpose of control. In any event, if the state asks us to forfeit a freedom that we may consider a God-given right, we could have a difficult choice ahead of us. However, there are very few things the government has asked us to do that violate the word of God ... so far. I fully expect this to change in the future.

I have found that it is indeed best to think through potential situations that may occur, before they occur, in order that we can go into those circumstances with a clear mind. For example, suppose the government passed a law forbidding a pastor to preach on sin. Would we be willing to stop preaching on sin? How far would we go in accommodating the government in this case? I suspect that will bring to light the true church of Jesus Christ in a hurry.

Application 2 – God Can Accomplish His Purpose through Persecution

In Daniel chapter 1–3, it is clear that God had a purpose in exiling the nation of Israel into Babylon. He would expel them from the Promised Land for a time to teach them the ramifications of idolatry. Eventually, our fallen natures will move us into idolatry. The nation of Israel fell into idolatry by intermingling with the Canaanites, engaging in worship of false gods, and forsaking their devotion to the Lord God. God brought upon them judgment in the form of expulsion from the Land and He allowed that to persist for seventy years. It should be noted that, to the nations credit, the Jews have not had many issues with idolatry since that exile; even to this day. God used the exile to bring the nation “back to their senses.”

Why does God allow persecution? While we can only go by the examples given in scripture, we can list a few purposes in persecution. One, God will use persecution to display the power of the Christian faith. The early church endured horrific tortures at the hands of unbelievers. Boiling to death, dismembered by animals, etc. etc. Did any of these persecutions eradicate the Christian faith? No, it has existed for two thousand plus years and counting. If the faith of every believer could falter, the unbelievers would have wiped out Christianity long ago. Likewise, Daniel's friends demonstrated that their own persecution by Nebuchadnezzar was not going to change their minds concerning obedience to the Lord.

Second, the example in Acts 8 demonstrates that corporate persecution of the church is often responsible for the spread of the gospel. Notice it was not the apostles who were scattered because of the persecution, it was the laymen. The apostles instructed the members of the church in evangelism and God used persecution to scatter those trained laymen “throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.” How did God use the persecution of Daniel's friends to further the gospel? Well, for one, He caused the events of this story to be written down in the OT. That certainly furthers the gospel. All the officials in the kingdom were witnesses to the miracle God did on account of the persecution. The king himself was witness to these events.

Application 3 – Situational Ethics is a Bankrupt Approach to Difficult Problems

One of the main aspects of Daniel's friends in chapter 3 is that they were in no way pragmatic; they lived according to the solid principles of the Bible.

It is not our responsibility to evaluate moral trade-offs to choose the lesser of several evils in an attempt to control the results of a difficult situation. Imagine how this chapter might have turned out if the three Jewish men applied situational ethics? "If these three young Hebrews were living today and were facing the same test, if they sought the advice of the religious leaders of our day, they would be advised to 'go along' with the king, bow to the image, 'coexist' with the idolaters, and, by so doing, perhaps lead the king into a better life." Situational ethics opens the door to temptation, compromise, and our powerful ability to rationalize. "Wouldn't it better [for the Jews] to just quickly bow down . . . and be able to continue being an influence for God in this pagan kingdom? Why throw away their God-given positions when a second or two of necessary compromise would allow them to continue serving God in the kingdom?"

At times we as fallen humans succumb to the temptation to find a compromise in our obedience to Christ. It is then that we should recognize the greater sin of not trusting that God is in sovereign control over the affairs of men. We are to walk according to His precepts and let the results be up to Him. Why is this so hard? Simple, I want to spare myself the conflict or scorn of unbelieving men I may be subject to in some fashion. Does it not glorify God more to take the godly stance and have to explain to unbelievers why?

Application 4 – The Christian Worldview is Exclusive

One of the most evident aspects of non-believers is their ability to assimilate other views into their belief system. How many of you have seen the bumper stickers "COEXIST?" "Can't we all just get along?" You know the phrases. What is apparent in each of these supposed appeals to tolerance is the rejection of objective truth. Each of these religions in the symbols that make up the COEXIST symbol contradict each other in their approach to God Himself. You must reject the concept of objective truth and reality in order to co-exist. It is ironic that those same folks who espouse that we "COEXIST" find it impossible to coexist with the church of Jesus Christ! It is because the Christian faith is the embodiment of objective truth and objective reality. If we agree to coexist with, say, Islam; then we de-facto deny that the Christian faith is exclusive. Daniel's friends believed that the Jewish faith was exclusive, there was no other God but Yahweh, and that all other "gods" were false and worshipping them amounted to idolatry. What we expect in the future is that the governments of the world, as they gradually advocate one world government, will tolerate any form of idolatry and religion as long as it recognizes the "religion" established by the government. This is why we expect a one-world religion as time progresses.

Application 5 – Fallen Man Typically Responds Incorrectly to Divine Revelation

As we look back on Daniel chapter 1 and 2, it is clear from chapter 3 that Nebuchadnezzar responded to God's revelation given to him concerning the future incorrectly. Rather than pay homage to the true God of the universe, he puffed himself up with pride and created the gold image and commanded its worship. Should we be surprised by Nebuchadnezzar's lack of understanding? No, without the Holy Spirit illuminating his understanding it was inevitable that Nebuchadnezzar would eventually fail to worship the One true God and begin to pursue his own paths. The natural man will never grasp what God is doing in the world. He will never understand the scriptures which have been provided to give him understanding. Nebuchadnezzar is an OT example of what Paul taught in 1 Cor. 2:

⁶ Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷ but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; ⁹ but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." ¹⁰ For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. ¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Application 6 – God Will Preserve Israel

It has been demonstrated throughout history that all attempts to eradicate the Jewish people have failed. Recall, one of the main promises of the Abrahamic Covenant is the perpetual existence of the Jewish people. The prophecy of Daniel 2 makes it evident that the Jews will exist into the end times, for the Jews remain prominent in the eschatological future. A remnant will survive the Tribulation period, will go into the Millennium, and live throughout that reign of Christ before the final end of human history. (Actually, Revelation 21:4 calls all these “the first things”). God continues to preserve the Jewish nation despite the rise of racial hatred and persecution against them. Even during the horrific events of the Second World War, where millions of Jews were killed, the Jewish peoples have survived and flourished by the hand of God. Israel is God’s covenant nation and they will be miraculously delivered in the Tribulation and will be exalted among all the nation of the earth in the Millennium.

Application 7 – There are Times When We Must Stand on Our Own

One of the important details of chapter 3 is that Daniel is absent and it was only Daniel’s friends that had to endure the king’s wrath. It highlights that fact that there will be times when the leaders we look to for guidance and support will not be there for encouragement or council. Daniel was clearly the leader of the Jews in Babylon during the exile. His three friends had to navigate the situation on their own.

Application 8 – Our Purpose in Life is to Glorify God

At the heart of the Westminster Confession is the following statement: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. While we would certainly agree that the glory of God is our ultimate goal in life, the benefit of that is we enjoy Him forever; though we may not interpret what that means as Piper would, espousing Christian Hedonism. (And yes, he occasionally gets a bad rap for the term, even though only the connotation is negative).

The primary way we glorify God is by dedicating our lives to His service. In other words, we yield our lives for His purposes, whatever they might be. If we allow our love for this world to eclipse our service of God, then we effectively remove ourselves from the altar and no longer behave as willing sacrifices (Rom. 12:1).

Daniel’s friends were not only willing to live by God’s Word, they were willing to die by it. If our entire life is composed of pursuing earthly riches, pleasures, even those things in this life that are good ... we have effectively “gained the whole world, but lost our soul.”

If we lose sight of that object in life for which we are living (God) for the sake of life itself, by desiring to live entirely to the world, we lose the very purpose for living.

Application 9 – God is Sovereign

That God is sovereign over the affairs of men is evident in Daniel chapter 3. He allowed Nebuchadnezzar to inflict an enormous burden on Daniel’s friends, but the young Jews proved faithful even to the point of death to remain faithful to the One True God. Was God always in control of the situation? Yes. What was His purpose in letting Daniel’s friends go through that trial? He may have had multiple purposes for which we, as mere creatures, may not be privy to! Could one of His purposes have been to re-reveal Himself to Nebuchadnezzar? Sure. As a testimony to all the rulers and administrators of the kingdom who were there to witness those events? Yes. Can we ascertain other purposes of God in those events? Perhaps. But even if we cannot, the 50,000-foot lesson here is that God is fully in control and He will bring all things into alignment with His will ... and will work out all things in order to demonstrate that He alone is the sovereign Lord of the universe! Amen!

Application 10 – When Dealing with the World; Take Great Care Which Hill You are Willing to Die On

This last one is strictly my own. This should be self-explanatory, but several words are in order. Focus on the main things. In our personal lives, we are to grow in the knowledge of Christ, we are to pursue personal holiness, and love the Lord God in all our relationships.

In our corporate lives, focus on the mission of the church. We are to “make disciples.” We are commanded to “make disciples ... and teach them ...” Any other endeavor that we undertake in this life, whether family, hobbies, **ministries**, etc. can become a distraction away from the most important things.

I encourage you to read the little pamphlet “Tyranny of the Urgent” ... whose main point is that we not elevate some things in our lives to a state of urgency and thereby neglect the truly important things.

Finally ... a few thoughts concerning ...

Suffering in Our Lives

One of the most difficult aspects for the Christian life is the role of suffering in our lives. When we face trials and tribulations, we often find it difficult to see God’s hand in these events, even though we know (ultimately) that He is in them. But in the middle of going through them it is sometimes difficult to understand His purpose in it. Here are some questions and thoughts that may be helpful ...

- Is God all-powerful? Yes, He is.
- Since He is all-powerful, is He able to deliver the believer from all trials, tribulations, and suffering? Yes, He is.
- DOES God ... deliver the believer from all trials, tribulations, and suffering? No, He does not.
- Why? God must have a purpose in it. If we believe in the perfect efficiency of God, namely, that He doesn’t do anything without a purpose ... then He surely has a purpose in it. What could that purpose be?
- God allows trials to come into the lives of believers for a number of reasons (Romans 5).

³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

- The purpose for our trials may not always be known to us, even though we want to know what the purpose is while we are going through it. “Lord God, why is this happening?” It is His prerogative as the divine sovereign of the universe to go silent in answering this question. We must recognize that our responsibility to Him is to trust Him ... even if that is not easy at the time!
- The will of God has an individualistic aspect to it. What He does in the life of one believer He may not do in the life of another. That difference is not because of some disparity in the love He has for each of us, nor does it mean there is a greater godliness in one believer over another. Remember, we all deserve hell. We are all redeemed by the blood of Christ equally, totally. We all have been imparted with the perfect righteousness of Christ. But that does not mean he will deliver us all in the same way from earthy sorrows and trials. Recall in Acts 12, God let James die but He saved Peter. Why did God allow John to live a ripe old life but Peter was martyred? We do not know why He chooses to heal one and not the other. But He does want us to trust that He alone is in control of everything.

Daniel’s friends were saved from the fiery furnace. But other saints of God were burned at the stake. When you face trials, and some of us *have* or *are* facing incredible sorrows and hardships, remember that He is in control ... and if the situation does not turn out the way you think it should ... there is a purpose of God in it ... and you may be frustrated in not knowing that purpose. You may discover that purpose at a later time ... you may not. But in it all, worship Him as Lord knowing that nothing can happen to us that He is not sovereign over.