

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expositional Journey Through **1Peter** **1Peter 2:11-25**

24- How to Live as Aliens and Strangers- Part 6 Submission to Earthly Authority- Part 3

July 1, 2018

1 Peter 2:11-25

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,

14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

16 *Act* as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God.

17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

19 For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

To the Glory of God

Now we are continuing in this mini-series to examine how we are to live as "Aliens and Strangers" in the earth. And so, we are *narrowly* examining what the Apostle Peter meant when he said:

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,

14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

16 *Act* as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God.

17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

And so far, we have found out that, as God's people, we are *obligated* to obey all Laws, Rules, and Commands that come forth from all "Human Institutions", *unless and until* those Laws, Rules, and Commands *require* us to *disobey* the clear Commands of God as recorded in Scripture. The Bible teaches that all Human Institutions have some "limited authority" over believers for the purpose of creating and maintaining Order in a society. And this Order is a manifestation of the "Common Grace and Love" that God displays to all of Mankind, even those He will not save.

But when that Government commands *disobedience* to God and His Word, Scripture gives us license to publicly, knowingly, and

blatantly *disobey* the Laws, Rules, and Commands of the Human Institution. And the reason for this is because, unlike the various Human Institutions, God's Authority is *absolute*.

You see, all Human Institutions are flawed and tainted with sin, whereas God is perfect and pure. And that means that the authority that God has given to the different Human Institutions is a "*limited authority*". Therefore, the submission or the subjection that believers have to that Human Institution should always carry with it a caveat, an exception. And so, our subjection to the Government is never absolute, it is always limited.

Yet, even in our refusal to obey, we should disobey *in such a way so as not to undermine the overall authority that God has given to that Human Institution, and the overall Command that we have to submit to it*. And, because God knew full well that believers would have to periodically disobey Human Institutions, He included some very specific examples in the *body* of Scripture so we would be able to determine what that disobedience looks like. And so, today, I want to continue this mini-series by looking carefully at those examples.

1. Disobedience Over Food

The first example of how believers may disobey Human Institutions comes from the Old Testament in the account of four men: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, while they were living underneath the pagan Government of the Babylonian Empire as recorded by the Prophet in **Daniel 1**. There we find the true account of how, toward the end of the 6th Century B.C., Nebuchadnezzar had invaded Israel and taken many of the Jews captive.

Now *this* Nebuchadnezzar was actually Nebuchadnezzar II, and was the son of an Assyrian official, *not* the son of Nebuchadnezzar I. And *this* Nebuchadnezzar rebelled and established himself as the "king of Babylon" in 620 BC, and ruled the Babylonian Empire until 539 BC, when Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonian Empire and established the Persian Empire.

God raised this wicked Ruler up to bring Divine Judgment on His Own people. And in 587 BC, the armies of Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and took the Jews captive into Babylon to fulfill the Prophecy of Jeremiah. Among those taken was a young boy named

"Daniel", and three other Jews named "Hananiah", "Mishael", and "Azariah".

Now the Babylonian religion was very dark and cruel, and involved very elaborate ceremonies. It involved both animal and child sacrifices, and promoted tattoos, body piercings, and abortion. It had evolved from the "Originator" of all false religions, a man named "Nimrod", who, back in **Genesis 10:9**, was called by Moses a **"mighty hunter before [against] the Lord."** It was Nimrod, who rebelled against God and incited the people to rebel by building the Tower of Babel. Nimrod is the first human to take the "doctrine of devils" and *formalize* and *codify* it into a religion that could be both taught and learned and passed down from one generation to the next. All of the major religions of the world today, which have been codified and formalized, come from Nimrod. And by the time that Daniel and the Jews were carried into captivity, the collection of false teachings was called "The Babylonian Mystery Religions".

When Daniel and the other three men (who evidently were somewhat older than Daniel), were taken captive, the Babylonian officials began a program to *indoctrinate* the young Jews into the customs and religion of the pagans. And part of their three-year training period was that, every day they were to learn:

Daniel 1:4b

... the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

... and then verse 5 says:

Daniel 1:5

The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and *appointed* that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service.

... it was at this time that the Commander of the Government Officials renamed these four Jews after Chaldean names:

Daniel- Belteshazzar
Hananiah- Shadrach
Mishael- Meshach

Azariah- Abed-nego

Now, curiously, up to this point, these four Jews are completely *compliant* and have *not* rebelled against the Officials of the Babylonian Empire. But now we will see the one issue that compelled these young people to “draw a line in the sand” and rebel, risking punishment, imprisonment, and even death. And, of all things, it was over the issue of food.

Daniel 1:8

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.

Now Daniel's refusal to eat, even the choice food of the King, had *nothing* to do with any health considerations. Rebellion against eating what the King of Babylon had set before him was probably the single most *unhealthy* thing Daniel could do. So, *why* did Daniel risk *everything* over what to put in his mouth? Daniel had not read the latest report of the Babylonian Department of Health about the heart benefits of a low fat, high fiber diet. He wasn't counting calories, he could care less about his cholesterol levels, and he had never read where Dr. Kellogg had recommended “three square meals a day”. So, why draw the line here?

Well, about 1,000 years earlier, God the Holy Spirit had “moved along” Moses to pen down what became known as the “Dietary Law” of the Old Covenant. And adherence to the Dietary Law, along with the “Ceremonial Law” (animal sacrifices, the Levitical Priesthood, and Temple worship in Jerusalem), combined with the “Moral Law” (basically the Ten Commandments) made up the bulk of what “Holiness” looked like under the Original or Old Covenant.

Breaking any part of either of these Laws was “Sin”, and called for severe punishment, up to and including death. Now it is true that there were some very *practical* reasons for both the Dietary and Ceremonial Laws, but “practicality” was the *not* the main purpose. Obeying these Laws was very clumsy and was not convenient at all. It required much from people, and forced them to radically alter the way they lived their lives.

You see, from the very beginning, God called His people to be “holy”, or “set apart” and “distinct”, from all the other peoples of the world so that they could demonstrate for all the world to see how Good and how Glorious the one, true, and living God was. And this is what “Biblical Holiness” is all about, *visually* and *tangibly* demonstrating the Majesty of God by the way God’s people live their lives.

But, as we have studied, the Old Covenant was never designed to save a single soul or to be permanent. From the very beginning, Prophecy after Prophecy looked forward to a time when another infinitely *better* Covenant would be ushered in, at which time the Old Covenant would be abolished forever.

Now the Moral Law of the Old Covenant is *permanent*, and transferred over into the New Covenant precisely because it is based on the Personal Character and Nature of God Himself, Who is eternal. So, it is in full force to day. But both the Dietary and Ceremonial parts of the Old Covenant became *obsolete* as soon as Jesus rose from the dead. And, in spite of the clear and repeated Teaching of the New Testament about this subject, there are several groups today (who claim to be saved and who say they are Christians) who teach that adherence to the Dietary Law is *mandatory* for Salvation. Dear friends, we need to know that any Teaching like that is false and is heresy. And there is wide-spread interest in the Dietary Law, both in and out of the Church today, due to health concerns as well.

But Daniel lived every day of his life under the Old Covenant. And so, his objection to eating food, even the choice food of the King of Babylon, centered around the fact that Daniel was saved and was pursuing Holiness on purpose, by submitting to the Dietary Law portion of the Old Covenant. Now Daniel was certainly not trying to *earn* Salvation or even favor with God by doing this; his delight was simply in displaying the Goodness of God in that pagan land by adhering to all of the Word of God that he had. And evidently, pursuing Holiness was so important to Daniel that he was willing to suffer and even die over it. But, notice that before Daniel did this, something else had happened first:

Daniel 1:9

Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials,

... and that “**favor and compassion**” was the result of Daniel's ongoing submission to the Human Institutions of the Babylonian Empire, even though they were pagan in nature. And the result of Daniel submitting to the Human Institutions of the Babylonians was that the Commander had such high regard for Daniel that he was fearful for him:

Daniel 1:10

and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."

So, by humbling himself to the “law of the land” *day in and day out*, Daniel received both “favor and compassion” in the sight of the “governing authorities”, which would help him later on and allowed him to actually *negotiate* with the pagans:

Daniel 1:11-14

11 But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,

12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink.

13 "Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see."

14 So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days.

... and what was the result of Daniel rebelling against the Law and even refusing to eat food the King had sent?

Daniel 1:15&16

15 At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food.

16 So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.

Now keep in mind that Daniel and the other three Jews were *basically* in compliance with many of the laws, rules and customs of

Babylon, even though they had been *unfairly* and *forcefully* dragged there in bondage. They were also fully aware that the Authorities were trying to *indoctrinate* them in the ways and religion of the Babylonian pagans. And it was precisely the fact that they weren't simply "troublemakers" who rebelled against *everything* that gave them some favor with the unbelievers. Daniel and the others "picked their fights carefully", and rebelled and refused to obey only on the more *serious* issues.

2. Disobedience Over Worship

The next instance of Disobedience to Human Institutions is found in **Daniel 3**, so let's read that account:

Daniel 3:1-7

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which *was* sixty cubits *and* its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent *word* to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

3 Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and *men of every* language,

5 that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.

6 "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."

7 Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language fell down *and* worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Now most believers would find this to be a much clearer Example of when we are to disobey Human Institutions, because this one deals directly with the issue of Government *commanding* believers to worship idols instead of the one, true, and living God. Way before Daniel and the others were ever born, God had established Worship when He led Moses to write:

Exodus 20:2-6

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

5 "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

.. so believers are not to fashion idols, bow down to them, or, in some other way, worship and serve a false god, or participate in the tenets and ceremonies of a false religion. That is crystal clear and has *always* been crystal clear. So, what happened after the King of Babylon did this?

Daniel 3:8-12

8 For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews.

9 They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: "O king, live forever!

10 "You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image.

11 "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.

12 "There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, *namely* Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These

men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."

Now from the way this is written in ancient Aramaic, we know that the Authorities already knew how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego worshipped the one, true, and living God, and refused to worship an idol or participate in false religion. So, it isn't that they refused just once and was seen rebelling, but rather that their refusal to bow down to any idol was common knowledge. *Everyone* who knew these men knew that they loved God and would not bow before an idol.

So, the motivation of the Authorities as to why they reported the refusal of the three Jews to obey to the King was *not* out of their concern to maintain the purity of the Babylonian Mystery Religions, but rather it was political jealousy. And we see a hint of this in what Daniel wrote in verse 12:

There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, *namely* Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up

These "governing authorities" couldn't care less about any god or religion. They are simply trying to turn the King against the Jews because the King is the one who had set these Jews over the Province of Babylon. And they probably wanted the Jews removed so they could have their positions themselves. Now look at the response of the King:

Daniel 3:13-15

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?

15 "Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"

So here is the "moment of truth". This is where the "rubber meets the road". These Jews are being threatened with death, unless they sin against God and worship an idol. So, how do the Jews respond?

Daniel 3:16-18

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter.

17 "If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

18 "But *even if He does* not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Not the slightest bit of hesitation. They very calmly explain to this pagan King that his "*limited* authority" over them that commands them to comply with man-made laws and rules and regulations of Human Institutions *ends* with the "*Absolute* Authority" of God. So, what was the King's response?

Daniel 3:19-23

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

20 He commanded certain valiant warriors who *were* in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast *them* into the furnace of blazing fire.

21 Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their *other* clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire.

22 For this reason, because the king's command *was* urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.

23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire *still* tied up.

Now in the first instance where believers disobeyed Government over food, there was no violence. God gave Daniel and the others "favor

and compassion" with the pagan authorities, and they were able to negotiate and prove that God would bless them by remaining faithful to the Dietary portion of the Old Covenant. So, the faithfulness of the believers to the Law of God brought peace and victory.

But here, the very *same* level of obedience to God, and the very *same* level of disobedience to the Human Institutions of Babylon resulted in the believers being threatened and severely punished. So, in *one* instance, believers are delivered, and in another instance, they are punished. So, what should we conclude from this? Five things:

1. Through Faith, God can and He absolutely does work powerful "Miracles" and "Acts of Providence" to bring practical earthly help and deliverance to His people.
2. God does *not* always work Miracles and Acts of Providence for our deliverance from suffering; and sometimes, by this very *same* Faith God sustains his people *through* their sufferings.
3. "Having faith" or "not having faith" is *not* the ultimate determining factor in whether you suffer or you are delivered. God's Sovereign Will always takes precedent over our faith.
4. The common feature of the Faith that *escapes* suffering, and the Faith that *endures* suffering, is this: both of them involve believing that God Himself is *better* than what life can give to you *now*, and *better* than what death can take from you *later*.
5. Those who love God more than life and who suffer willingly, awaiting something *better* than what this earth can offer, are not "embarrassments" or "failures", they are God's great gifts to the world.

So, the three believers *obeyed* God's Law that *forbade* them to worship idols by *disobeying* the law of Man that *commanded* idolatry. And, in this case, they were punished. But what happened as they were being punished?

Daniel 3:24-27

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king."

25 He said, "Look! I see four men loosed *and* walking *about* in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of *the* gods!"

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire.

27 The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around *and* saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire *even* come upon them.

Now even though these three faithful believers were punished, God chose to supernaturally and miraculously *sustain* them *in* that punishment. So, in the *first* instance, God chose to *providentially* deliver His people. And as they faithfully obeyed God and disobeyed the Government, they did not suffer.

But, in the *second* instance, it was God's Will to allow His people to suffer. So, as they faithfully obeyed God and *disobeyed* the Government, God chose to *passively* "step aside" and allow evil men to hurt His Own people. And the question always comes up:

"Why would a Good and Sovereign God allow evil people to hurt His followers?"

... and two huge spiritual Issues are at stake with that question:

1. If God is "Good", then He would never want Evil to befall His people.
2. If God is "Sovereign", then He has the Power to stop evil men from hurting His people.

... and yet godly and faithful people suffer all the time. Some believers experience miracles and sovereign "Acts of Providence" that either keeps them out of trouble in the first place, or else heals and delivers them if they are punished, while many others seem to suffer with no end in sight. And there are "seasons" when it really does look like Evil triumphs, and where the "will" and the "actions" of wicked men seem to *overwhelm* both God's Sovereignty and God's Goodness. So, how should we understand this? *"Has God forgotten who belongs to Him? Has God lost His Power? Didn't God see that His people were being faithful to*

Him? Why would God tell His people to be faithful, and then allow them to be punished when they are?" What is going on here?

Many unsaved people, out in the world, have come to three possibilities:

1. God is *not* Sovereign
2. God is *not* Good
3. God is *not*

... but many *inside* the Church, who say they believe that God exists affirm that the God of the Bible is "Good" and (at least, *somewhat*) "Sovereign" have come up with a few *different* possibilities as to *why* *some* of God's people seem to experience "healings" and "rescuings" and "deliverances", while *others* do *not*:

1. Either a "lack of faith", "unforgiveness", or "unconfessed sin" stops God from delivering or healing or rescuing His people.
2. Human Free Will.

Now both groups freely acknowledge:

- ✓ Not everybody who is sick receives Healing
- ✓ Not everybody who needs Help gets it
- ✓ Not everybody who suffers is delivered
- ✓ Not everybody who is persecuted is rescued

... they simply disagree with "*why*". The Agnostic says that God is either *not* "Good" and doesn't care, or He is *not* "Sovereign" and doesn't have the power or the ability to stop Evil. While the Atheist simply says that the reason nobody (or very few) seem to experience the "Healing" or the Deliverance they ask for and need is because "God doesn't exist" and we are on our own.

Now, to be fair, *most* people who lay claim to be saved disagree *completely* with both the Agnostic and the Atheist. But then they turn around and *manufacture* other possibilities that aren't any more biblical than those who don't believe at all.

So, to begin answering these very important questions, let's look at what happened as the three believers were faithful to God and

obeyed the Word of God by *disobeying* the Human Government and were punished, but were supernaturally and miraculously “kept” while they were *in* that punishment:

Daniel 3:28-30

28 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.

29 "Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

30 Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

... so God brought Himself Glory as the believers remained faithful, even as they were punished. And, from that, we may rightly conclude that being faithful to God *always, always, always* brings Glory to God. It is *always* right and correct to remain faithful to God. It is *never* wrong to obey God. And God is *always* glorified when His people are faithful to Him, especially when we are punished, because we are *proving* to the world that God is *better* than *anything* that this life can give to us now, and He is *better* than *anything* that death can take away from us later.

But notice that, in *this* case, we see that *in addition* to God receiving the Glory, it was *also* God's Will to bring a *natural* and a *temporal* “prosperity” to the believers, who had remained faithful, even as they were punished. So, it seems that they were *rewarded* for their faithfulness. And the three-step logic that our natural mind develops from that goes something like this:

1. Find out what God says.
2. Obey it, no matter how hard, even if it means *disobeying* the Government, and even if it means being punished.
3. Receive the Reward.

... and I suggest to you that *this* is the logic that is *dominant* in the modern church as it pertains to the issues of "Suffering" and "Obeying God by *disobeying* the Government". That if we would simply obey, even if we are punished, God will absolutely deliver us and we will be blessed afterward.

And, even though this logic makes sense on several levels, and even though it is what most people teach and believe, it is a *manufactured* logic that is not taught in the Bible. It is a "man-made doctrine" and is false. But it is actually *worse* than simply being wrong, because of two reasons:

1. It doesn't work.
2. It robs God of the Glory of His Grace.

... and it is actually *destructive* to those who believe it.

"Yes", we should find out what God has said in His Word about every issue of both Life and Godliness. And, "Yes", we should strive, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, to be faithful to the Command of God, even if we suffer, because of that obedience, *especially* if we suffer. And that includes *disobeying* Human Government when the laws, rules, and ordinances of Human Government compel us to *disobey* God and His Word.

But, "No", we have not *earned* God's Favor by being faithful. And, "No", God is not then *obligated* to heal, rescue, or deliver us from our Suffering. We must understand, dear friends, that *everything* we get in this life from the Hand of God is given through His Mercy and Kindness. *Nothing* is earned, *nothing* is owed, and *nothing* is deserved. There is no "formula" for us to follow that "*if we do this, then God will do that*". That is not the way God works. *All* of our Blessings and *all* of our Healings and *all* of our Deliverances are given to us in the very *same* way, and for the very *same* reason, that we were saved in the first place. Everything we receive from God is given to us:

1. "By" God's Grace
2. "Through" the gift of Faith
3. "To" or "for" the Glory of God
4. "To" the ultimate fullness of Joy for His elect

... *nothing* we receive is earned, *nothing* is deserved, and God is never *obligated* to "do" or "give" *anything*. God has said:

Romans 9:15b

I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

... so every Good Gift that we receive from God's Hand, whether Healing or Blessing or Deliverance or even Salvation itself, is given because God *chose* to give it, *not* because we did something to "earn" it. And this is *why* the Apostle Paul said:

Romans 9:16

So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

And the "it" here is not merely Salvation, but *everything* that we receive from God's Hand. We must understand, dear friends, that human beings do not *initiate* their own Healing any more than they *initiate* their own Salvation. We do not *originate* our Deliverance any more than we *originate* our New Birth. We do not "do something" first, and then God *responds* to what we "do" by moving in our favor any more than we "do something" first, and then God responds to what we do by creating the Heavens and the earth.

No. God always moves *first*. God is the One Who always *initiates* everything that is done. God originates. Always, always, always. And we are the ones who always *respond*. So, the natural and temporal "prosperity" of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego was *not* an example of God *responding* to their faithfulness by blessing them. No, way before these men were born and before God ever created the Universe, He determined in His Own Counsel that He would magnify the Glory of His Grace by sovereignly and actively creating Man, and then sovereignly and actively raising up three Jews in which God would then sovereignly and actively insert the desire and ability to be faithful to His Commands, even when that obedience meant disobeying the governing Authorities. And then God determined to "get Himself Glory" by *sovereignly* and *passively* "stepping aside" and *allowing* evil men to do what was *already* in their hearts to do, by first *threatening*, and then *punishing* His children.

And, in this *particular* case, it was God's Good Pleasure to sovereignly and actively *suspend* the normal operation of the laws of physics so that a raging fiery furnace would not destroy the bodies of His people. But, as we will see next week, there have been many examples in the Bible where God's people remained just as faithful to God, and yet, it was *not* God's Will to deliver them or to perform a miracle to keep them, and the faithful servants of God died at the hands of evil men. So, what do we say about that? I would say five things:

1. Through Faith, God can and He absolutely does work powerful "Miracles" and "Acts of Providence" to bring practical earthly help and deliverance to His people.
2. God does *not* always work Miracles and Acts of Providence for our deliverance from suffering, and sometimes, by this very *same* Faith, God sustains his people *through* their sufferings.
3. "Having faith" or "not having faith" is *not* the ultimate determining factor in whether you suffer or you are delivered. God's Sovereign Will always takes precedent over our faith.
4. The common feature of the Faith that *escapes* suffering, and the Faith that *endures* suffering, is this: both of them involve believing that God Himself is *better* than what life can give to you *now*, and *better* than what death can take from you *later*.
5. Those who love God more than life and who suffer willingly, awaiting something *better* than what this earth can offer, are not "embarrassments" or "failures", they are God's great gifts to the world.

Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.