



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

February 28, 2021

Jump Start #2785

Daniel 3:18 *“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.”*

There has been so many wonderful lessons that have come from the story of the fiery furnace in Babylon. The three Jewish young men were put on the spot. Bow down or die. Away from home, having no one, other than themselves, to encourage each other, they remained absolute in their decision. Our verse expresses their words, “we are not going to serve your gods.” We refer to that as conviction.

Conviction is something that is at one’s core. This is what I believe. And, based upon that belief I make the choices in life. Conviction ought to be solid like steel. It ought to remain the same in sunny days and stormy nights. It ought to be the same whether I’m in a crowd or by myself. Conviction doesn’t follow the crowd. Conviction doesn’t change day after day. For us, we stand upon the word of God. That is the rock that the wise man built his house upon. That is hope, assurance and confidence that we have.

All of this sounds good, especially on a Sunday morning while sitting in the church house. But these days, convictions are under assault. Pressure from those who do not agree attack that very core of conviction. They say that our core conviction is wrong. Our core belief is harmful to them and injurious to society. You must change your core belief or else you will be exiled, labeled, mocked and abused.

The most recent victim was the author Max Lucado. Max, light years ago, preached among the churches of Christ. He’s moved beyond that and his international status as a writer has led him to evolving his views on many points. But recently, Max was verbally attacked for his views against same-sex marriage. A petition was formed to ban him from attending a national prayer service. A decades old sermon surfaced where Max defended the Biblical view of marriage. The fireworks started. The LBGTQ community claimed they were offended, wounded and hurt by the views of Max. Pressure mounted. Max caved in. I expect behind the scenes the publishing houses were ready to dump his contracts and burn his books. So, Max bowed down. He wrote a letter of apology. The powerful LBGTQ movement claimed another victory. Another voice silenced. Given enough pressure, they all seem to back down and bow down.

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And, for us, this is everything. Powerful pressure and fear can move convictions. This is why we need to consider our verse today.

First, refusing to bow to the king's idol insulted and offended the king. That it did. Convictions tend to do that to those who have different views. Yet, with that, the Jewish three stood. Brought before the king and offered a second chance, the three refused. With the threat of death, they refused. They would rather die, being right with the Lord, than live having sold out to the devil.

If you have Biblical convictions, you will upset some in your family and in your place of work. Some will push you to test your faith. Some will look for you to slip up. Some will try you. And, as the Jewish three found out, there are consequences that come with convictions. You may not be included, invited or welcome any more. You may be pressured out of your job. You may be ridiculed and eventually forced off of social media. You may be on the outs with your family. Peter sat in a prison cell. Paul was dragged out of town and stoned. Fear and pressure will try to chip away your convictions. Faith will help you remain loyal and true.

Second, we do not find the Jewish three being obnoxious about their convictions. Some invite persecution because of the 'in-your-face' attitude they manifest. Jesus was never like that. His words offended those who didn't agree, but you don't find Jesus picking a fight. Kindness, gentleness are not the opposites of boldness and firmness. They go together. One doesn't have to be mean to be confident.

Third, the world would rather change the Bible than change it's ways. That's always been true. The world is in love with sin more than it is in love with the Lord. The shocking news about Max Lucado is that at the front of his opposition was a group of "religious" leaders. Their twisted theology had left the Bible so long ago that they do not even realize who they are following. We'd like to think honest talk would change some. It won't. We'd like to think putting the evidence out on the table will help others to see. It won't. This isn't a search for truth. Some have redefined the truth in such a way that they are not interested in anything but their current agenda. And, if anyone stands in their way, they will be knocked down.

Fourth, our world is getting darker and darker. I saw a report that claimed there are 63 gender choices. I don't understand that. I thought there was male and female and God made that choice for us. The "in-crowd" is refusing to use the expression "baby." The word today is "weebee." Parents are going to let their child determine their gender. Will they let the child determine whether he goes to school? How about what language to speak? Better yet, maybe that child will choose new parents, and get a better set next time. Nothing is wrong these days except religious conviction. Everything is in, except the Bible. Don't offend. Don't hurt my feelings. Don't make me feel bad. It doesn't matter that you offend God, hurt His feelings, and make Him feel bad. Those weak in faith, will be casualties. They will cave in to social pressure. Those with convictions will be mocked and pressured. But, the truth goes on. It must go on.

If the Bible is indeed right, then we must stand upon that with all of our heart. Man is to follow the Bible, not the Bible follow man. We will not bow down! Defiant. Sure. Absolute. Convicted. True to God.

Let's hope and pray that we can have some genuine convictions.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)