

She is the most listened to radio host in America. Every day more than 20 million listeners (that's more than listen to Rush Limbaugh) tune in to hear Dr. Laura dispense advice to callers.

In 1998 something happened that would radically change Laura Schlessinger's life and world view. She converted to Orthodox Judaism. Dr. Laura began to read the Bible and take it's teachings seriously. In an August 1998 radio broadcast she confessed, "I've always told people who opposed homosexuality that they were homophobic, bigoted, and idiotic. I was wrong. Homosexuality is destructive."

Since then, Dr. Laura has publicly maintained that homosexuals do not deserve special rights, that gay sexual behavior is deviant, and that homosexuals inability to relate to members of the opposite sex is the result of a "biological error."

This fall Paramount plans to put Dr. Laura on TV. This has groups like the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation in an uproar. They are doing all they can to pressure Paramount to drop the show. Other more radical activists have threatened her life causing her to cancel speaking engagements including her annual birthday bash which raised \$60,000 last year for abused children.

Once again our culture is feeling the pressure of those who say, "We can tolerate anything except what we deem to be intolerance."

The watch word of the day is "pluralism."

Joel Belz, wrote in World Magazine: "Pluralism, my dictionary says, is "the theory that reality is composed of a multiplicity of ultimate beings, principles, or substances."

Which, on the face of it, is both absurd and repulsive-not only for any thoughtful Christian, but for anybody at all who engages in rigorous, logical thinking. To talk about holding to a "multiplicity of ultimate beings [or] principles" is to argue that  $2 + 2 = 4$  and that at the very same time  $2 + 2$  does not equal four. It is to argue that a light switch is on and off at the very same time, that a budget is both balanced and out of balance at the same time. The essence of pluralism is that

contradictories are possible. And who can deny that such is near the core of the society we live in today?"

And what's our response to all of this? We're supposed to welcome it. You've all heard of it. It's described by words like "tolerance," "broadmindedness," "openmindedness," and "multiculturalism."

The idea seems appealing on the surface. We must be tolerant of others and their belief systems. After all, anything less is bigotry and who wants to be a bigot?

The Bible does teach us to be tolerant of others. Jesus said, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them."

It also indicates we should be open to learning new truth. "Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger..."

Obviously blindness brought on by arrogance and a closed mind can prevent us from seeing God's truth. But this new "tolerance" and "openmindedness" goes beyond that.

Please listen to this statement. It not only demands that we be tolerant of the rights of others to believe what they want, it teaches that the ways of each culture and belief system must be recognized as equally valid and right.

No culture or lifestyle is better than any other, no matter what strange, stupid, or destructive ideas it holds. If you say anything different, you're a bigot.

Of course, the highway doesn't go both ways. There's no room for tolerance of Dr. Laura. Even some homosexuals are alarmed. Bill Dobbs, a lawyer with the homosexual rights organization Queer Watch, said the assault on Dr. Laura flies in the face of the first amendment. He said, "I honestly don't know how we can call this progress."

In a message entitled "Pluralism vs. Fundamentalism" a Unitarian pastor writes, "One of the myths heard around the coffee pot after a service in a Unitarian Universalist Congregation, often in response to a newcomer asking 'Just what do you believe, is the old saw, 'Why, you can believe anything you want and be a Unitarian Universalist!'"

Today I say to you that this statement is not true. You cannot believe anything you want and be a Unitarian Universalist. And to prove this to you, I will speak today about a religious view one could not hold and find any support within our congregations. This view is the antithesis of very thing Unitarian Universalism stands for. This view is religious fundamentalism."

In our postmodern society we'll tolerate anyone as long as they don't say they are right and others are wrong.

In first century Rome, people were allowed to believe and worship whatever they chose, much the same as we are today, as long as they first burned a pinch of incense in the name of Caesar and pronounced the words, "Caesar is Lord."

When the early Christians faced this issue, their belief in one God made them realize they couldn't bow down to Caesar or say that all other religions were equally right. This put them on a collision course with their government.

If the "god" of multiculturalism continues to be held up for admiration and worship until it is so socially acceptable that nothing else is tolerated, will Christians bow down and concede that every religion and lifestyle is true and their faith in one God who calls some behavior "sin" is the only remaining falsehood?

I can't see the future. I believe, though, that we must be ready for it. We must clearly understand that we can't bow down to the God of heaven and the god of multiculturalism, too.

Said another way, in a country that has freedom of religion, all religions and lifestyles may have the right to exist, but all religions and lifestyles are not equally right.

We need to understand that and be prepared to do whatever is necessary to resist bowing down, either knowingly or unknowingly.

So how does a Christian stand in the face of a world that is lining up against absolute truth? How does he resist being overrun?

There are answers in the third chapter of Daniel that I want to consider with you this morning. There we find three very brave young men who worshiped the God of heaven. Their names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

## Turn to Page 858

The first thing we're going to see this morning is: *If We Are Committed To Truth That Commitment Will Be Challenged* Count on it!

### Read vs 1-7

We're now in the kingdom of Babylon in the beginning of the 7th century BC. Nebuchadnezzar is the ruler of the world's super power.

Daniel 3 suggests that the king determined to solidify his dominion by unifying the many races and nations under his rule with a common religion and object of worship. This posed a serious threat to the Jews. Other nations, who believed in more than one god, simply added this idol to their list of deities to be worshipped. The Jews, however, worshipped God alone. They could not be faithful to their God and worship anyone or anything else.

Humanly speaking, if the king's command stood, it could mean the end of the Jewish faith.

The first time the image is to be worshipped appears to be at its dedication ceremony, described in Daniel 3. This initial ceremony is important in determining how successful the king's plan for unifying his empire will be. I believe this occasion is carefully designed and orchestrated to lead a unified worship of the image by those of every nation and language.

The dedication ceremony is to lead to a climactic act of worship. There is an "orchestra" which appears to include instruments from around the world. The orchestra itself is symbolic of the unity the king seeks to produce and protect. The orchestra gives the cue for all to fall down in worship in a carefully prescribed way.

Archaeologists tell us that nearly everything in Babylon was made of kiln-fired bricks in those days. There was a natural scarcity of wood and stone, so Nebuchadnezzar built his entire kingdom out of mud bricks, dried in the sun and fired and glazed with beautiful colors in brick kilns (furnaces) which were located everywhere there were building projects going on. These furnaces were

usually dome-shaped with a window and door at the bottom and a hole (or opening) in the top to let heat and smoke out. Many had steps that one could walk up to reach the opening at the top. This is apparently the kind of furnace that awaited anyone who refused to bow down.

### **Read vs 8-12**

Several years before this Nebuchadnezzar had invaded Jerusalem and carried away captives. Among them were these 3 Hebrew young men. Nebuchadnezzar had trained them and educated them so that they could serve in his court. He had done everything to try and reorient them away from Judaism. He even went so far as to change their names. What he couldn't do though was change their commitment to truth.

There was a time when you had to make a lot of noise to be heard for God. But today, just the fact that you don't go along with the prevailing cultural opinions will cause you to stick out like a sore thumb.

The Babylonians quickly pointed out that the three Jews didn't bow down. That means somebody peeked! Someone was looking around to see who they could criticize.

Their criticism was actually aimed at Nebuchadnezzar himself. Notice they said, "certain Jews you set over the affairs of the province."

Why didn't they just bow? Why didn't they go along with the king's order? The issue for these men was a religious issue. The issue, as we're going to see, was the issue of Who they worshiped, and how they worshiped. They were trying to remain true to the God of heaven and earth, the God who was their creator. And the pressure was on them to embrace foreign religions, new religions.

This is going to become the new battle in our own land.

You can believe in God, you can go to your church, but increasingly, you know the pressure - the religious pressure - of the day. You know how you are made to feel like you're somehow intolerant, or narrow-minded, or, heaven forbid, a bit of a fundamentalist if you don't strive to see the good in all faiths and somehow admit that each in his or her own way is on the same quest for God.

That's exactly where Daniel's friends were at. The tone of the day was all against what they believed about God and how He was to be obeyed. Their view was strongly hated by the people around them. Theirs were not the religious convictions the society around them was willing to accept.

Never forget that what lands them in the furnace wasn't their political convictions, or their sexual deviations, or their mishandling of the King's money. They end up there because of their religious beliefs. Or, more specifically, their refusal to modify their beliefs by adapting them to the will of the society around them.

I can't tell you how important I think this is now, and how important I think it will be for the church in the next twenty-five years. Increasingly, the Christian faith is looked at as a personal therapy rather than a Divinely revealed body of objective truth.

And so, the important matter becomes what your religion does for you, rather than is what you believe true. If this religion works for you, then fine. I'm happy for you. This is the one that works for me. Religion becomes each person's psychology - his own individual world view.

And gradually, the collective understanding of the church gets worn down, until it's actually viewed as a sign of spirituality when people say, "We don't fight over doctrine. We just believe in love and unity and wholeness."

in God's eyes, that kind of thinking is so utterly wicked and sinful. The Apostles contented for the faith once delivered. What's with us? Every single New Testament author, except one, died for the content of that faith. How could we ever think that indifference to the content of the gospel could be honoring to God?

*I. If We Are Committed To Truth That Commitment Will Be Challenged*

*II. If We Are Committed To Truth That Commitment Will Be Tested*

### **Read vs 13-15**

There's a test for you. Nebuchadnezzar, who had appointed these men to their high positions, probably valued their service. Plus, his reputation was at stake. So, he gave them a second chance in front of everyone. He would instruct the

orchestra to play once more, and if they bowed down, the matter would be forgotten.

but what the king said next proves to be the most significant statement to come from his lips: “And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” (verse 15).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were tested. But their response has to be one of the greatest statements of faith anywhere.

**Read vs 16-18**

The king had raised the issue—who was able to deliver these three? They responded that they didn’t need to give Nebuchadnezzar any answer because he was not their deliverer. They didn’t need to make their defense to him. He couldn’t deliver them and this is why they couldn’t bow down to his golden image. God was their Deliverer. He had proven that in the Exodus, and afterward He commanded His people not to bow down to any image.

The God of the Jews was their Deliverer. He was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace. They did not presume that He was going to do it. He could if in His sovereignty, He chose to do it.

Whatever happens to them personally, God has promised to deliver and restore His people. Their hope is in God, their Deliverer. One thing is non-negotiable: they won’t bow down to this image.

Think about the irony here. The Jewish captives of Babylon are in bondage because of Jewish idolatry. Israel was commanded not to make or worship idols, on penalty of death. Until their Babylonian captivity, they persisted in their idolatry. Idolatry was one of the reasons for their being in Babylon.

Now, with the making of this golden image and the dedication ceremony, Daniel’s three friends find themselves commanded to worship an idol, or die.

God said, “Worship idols and die,” while Nebuchadnezzar said, “If you don’t worship this idol you’ll die.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were determined to flee from idolatry, even if it meant death; Nebuchadnezzar commanded them to practice idolatry, or they would surely die.

These three remained faithful to God and to His law, even when threatened with the fiery furnace. In contrast, Israel persisted in her idolatry, even when warned not to do so. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego are godly Israelites, who obey God's law even when it is life-threatening. They would rather face the wrath of men than the wrath of God.

These three (I believe Daniel was away on the king's business at this time or he would have stood with them) these three not only knew God and knew the Bible but were willing to stand.

It's possible to believe in God and know from Scripture what God requires and yet fail to do the right thing because you are unwilling to pay the price.

How many times have I heard Christians say, "I know that God's Word says I should handle things this way, but..." And then they give their reasons why in their case it's OK to disobey.

Isn't it disconcerting how pluralism has so infected our way of thinking. Even Christians seem to have the idea that something could be wrong for most people but OK for them.

We need to know what we believe and why we believe it. And not only that, we need to know with razor sharp clarity what are the absolutes and what are not.

Have you noticed that in today's political-religious climate, people who see anything clearly as an issue of black and white (I'm not referring to race here) are ridiculed and looked upon as backward?

"There are no absolutes," we are told. "Everything is relative. We live in a gray world. Everything is fuzzy and unclear. It doesn't matter who is right, because there really isn't a right and wrong. That's the trouble with you Christians. You see everything as black and white."

Oh that believers would call themselves out of the confusion and get back to the standard of God's Word! Society won't do it, but at least the Christians should!

Abraham Lincoln loved wit and wisdom. One of his favorite brain-teasers used to make a point with his constituents was to ask, "How many legs would a sheep



have if you called his tail a leg?" Naturally, they would respond, "Five." "Wrong!" Lincoln would reply. "The sheep would still have just four legs. Calling something a leg doesn't make it so."

We need to know what we believe, why we believe it, and then we need to be willing to pay whatever price is necessary when what we believe is put to the test.

I. *If We Are Committed To Truth That Commitment Will Be Challenged*

II. *If We Are Committed To Truth That Commitment Will Be Tested*

III. *If We Are Committed To Truth That Commitment Will Be Rewarded*

### **Read vs 19-23**

When those three fellows responded to the king, he blew up. His pride was wounded, his will had been crossed, and he was so mad he exploded.

David Jeremiah writes, "King Nebuchadnezzar is an interesting study. He was a man of superlatives: the biggest image, the most expensive gold, the most lavish party. He could put on a real show. When he pronounced judgment, it had to be the worst he could think of, and that was being burned alive in the furnace. But if that weren't enough, he said, "Throw in the coal! Make it seven times hotter! Turn on the heat!" Then he picked the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up the Hebrews so they couldn't move. The king was so furious that he was out of control."

This furnace, or brick kiln, would be stoked from the bottom, but the prisoners would be dropped in from the top. When the soldiers drug the three men to the top they were overcome by the tremendous heat as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell in.

If that wasn't enough to shock everyone what happened next was a real eye popper.

### **Read vs 24-25**

Nebuchadnezzar jumped up. He knew something supernatural was taking place. Not only were the three men unharmed, but there was a fourth man in the fire with them.

NKJV has Nebuchadnezzar saying, "the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Obviously he wouldn't have known anything about Jesus, the Son of God. his statement could also be translated "the fourth is like a son of the Gods."

Unknown to Nebuchadnezzar was that he was viewing an Old Testament manifestation of the one and only Son of God. This was an OT manifestation of Jesus Christ.

### **Read vs 28-30**

*If We Are Committed To Truth That Commitment Will Be Rewarded*

The three were delivered unharmed and even promoted to places of prominence. That's exciting! But it doesn't always work that way, does it?

### **Turn to Hebrews 11, beginning in vs 32 pg 1156**

### **Read vs 32-35a**

Sometimes we get that great job. Sometimes we experience physical healing. Sometimes we go through the car crash unhurt. But not always.

### **Read vs 35b-38**

We may come through the fire unscathed, but every Christian has to face up to the alternative possibility, that "even if he does not deliver us" we will still do his will. To serve Christ for loss, to serve Christ for loneliness, to serve Christ for death. We don't have to be rich; we don't have to marry; we don't have to become parents; we don't have to live; but we have to obey.

There is no way that we can worship a golden idol, come what may. What we are promised is that all grace will always abound, that God will supply all our need, and that the Son of God will never leave us. Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we will fear no evil for he will be with us.

If we are placed in the furnace he'll be there too. Even these three faithful Hebrews ended up in the flames. God didn't keep them out of the fiery furnace

even though they had lived faithfully before Him! God doesn't promise to keep us out of fiery furnaces, but He does promise to be with us in them!

The God who, "demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, gave Christ to die for us." The God who, "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." That's the God we serve.

Today God is calling us to be committed to His truth. When you need to draw a line then don't rub it out and draw another line. Think about it, where was true joy and lasting pleasure to be found on that day in Babylon?

Was joy found among those whose noses were in the dirt lying before a statue? Or was it found in those walking with the Son of God in the furnace? Every Christian knows the answer. The life lived under the cross of Christ is a life of joy. Don't let appearances fool you.

*If We Are Committed To Truth That Commitment Will Be Challenged*  
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Let me challenge you with a pledge made by an anonymous believer in Jesus Christ. It is called "The Fellowship of the Unashamed." Is this your testimony today?.

"I am part of the "Fellowship of the Unashamed." I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I've stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals! I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by presence, learn by faith, love by patience, live by prayer, and labor by power.

"My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear.

I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, shut up, let go, or slow up until I've preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Christ.

"I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops. And when He comes to get His own, He'll have no problems recognizing me. My colors will be clear."